

## STUDENT HARASSMENT AND BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

The Board of Trustees is committed to providing an educational and working environment that promotes respect, dignity, and equality. The Board recognizes that discrimination, such as harassment, hazing, and bullying, are detrimental to student learning and achievement. These behaviors interfere with the mission of the district, to educate its students, and disrupts the operation of the schools. Such behavior affects not only the students who are its targets but also those individuals who participate in and witness such acts.

To this end, the Board condemns and strictly prohibits all forms of discrimination, such as harassment, hazing and bullying on school grounds, school buses and at all school-sponsored activities, programs, events, and school trips.

Discrimination, harassment, hazing and/or bullying that takes place at locations outside of school grounds, including cyberbullying, which creates or can reasonably be expected to create a material and substantial interference with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school or impinge on the rights of other students are prohibited, and may be subject to disciplinary consequences.

### **Definitions**

#### **Bullying**

Bullying is understood to be a hostile activity which harms or induces fear through the threat of further aggression and/or creates terror. In order to facilitate implementation of this policy, provide meaningful guidance and prevent behaviors from rising to a violation of law, this policy will use the term bullying (which is usually included under the term "harassment") to describe a range of misbehaviors such as harassment, hazing, Cyberbullying, intimidation or discrimination. The accompanying regulation provides more guidance regarding the definition characteristics and examples of bullying.

#### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is described as harassment (see below) through any form of electronic communication, mode, or medium.

#### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is the act of denying rights, benefits, justice, equitable treatment or access to facilities available to all others, to an individual or group of people because of the group, class or category to which that person belongs (as enumerated in the *Definitions* section, under Harassment, below).

## **Hazing**

Hazing is an induction, initiation, or membership process by and between students involving harassment which likely creates a situation to produce public humiliation, physical or emotional discomfort, bodily injury, or public ridicule.

Hazing behaviors may include, but are not limited to, the following general categories:

- a) Humiliation: socially offensive, isolating or uncooperative behaviors.
- b) Substance abuse: abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and/or illegal or legal drugs.
- c) Dangerous activities: hurtful, aggressive, destructive, and disruptive behaviors.

## **Harassment**

Harassment has been defined in various ways in federal and state law and regulation. The Board recognizes that these definitions are important standards, but the Board's goal is to prevent misbehavior from escalating in order to promote a positive school environment and to limit liability. The Dignity for All Students Act (§§1 0-1 8 of Education Law) defines harassment as the creation of a hostile environment by conduct or by verbal threats, intimidation or abuse, including cyberbullying that a) has or would have the effect of unreasonably and substantially interfering with a student's educational performance, opportunities or benefits, or mental, emotional, or physical well-being; or conduct, verbal threats, intimidation or abuse including cyberbullying that b) reasonably causes or would reasonably be expected to cause a student to fear for their physical safety; c) reasonably causes or would be expected to cause physical injury or emotional harm, occurs off school property and creates a risk of substantial disruption within the school environment, where it is foreseeable that the conduct, threats, intimidation or abuse might reach school property.

For the purposes of this definition the term “threats, intimidation, or abuse” shall include verbal and non-verbal actions.

The harassing behavior may be based on any characteristic, including but not limited to a person's actual or perceived:

- Race (including traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles such as but not limited to braids, locks, and twists),
- color,
- weight,
- national origin,
- ethnic group,
- religion,
- religious practice,

- disability,
- sex,
- sexual orientation, or
- gender (including gender identity and expression).

For the purpose of this definition the term “threats, intimidation or abuse” includes verbal and non-verbal actions.

In some instances, bullying or harassment may constitute a violation of an individual's civil rights. The district is mindful of its responsibilities under the law and in accordance with district policy regarding civil rights protections.

### **Prevention**

The school setting provides an opportunity to teach children, and emphasize among staff, that cooperation with and respect for others is a key district value. A program geared to prevention is designed to not only decrease incidents of bullying but to help students build more supportive relationships with one another by integrating prevention programs into classroom instruction. Staff members and students will be sensitized, through district-wide professional development and instruction, to the warning signs of bullying, as well as to their responsibility to become actively involved in the prevention of bullying before overt acts occur.

Curricular material that raises awareness and sensitivity to discrimination or harassment and civility in the relationships of people of different races, weights, national origins, ethnic groups, religions, religious practices, mental or physical abilities, sexual orientations, sexes or gender expression or identities will be included in the instructional program K-6.

In order to implement this program, the Board will designate a Dignity Act Coordinator at its annual organizational meeting. The role of the Dignity Act Coordinator is to coordinate and enforce this policy.

In addition, the Superintendent will establish a district-wide Bullying Committee which will include representation from staff, administration, and parents. The Bullying Prevention Committee will assist the administration in developing and implementing specific prevention initiatives, including early identification of bullying and other strategies. In addition, the program will include reporting, investigating, remedying and tracking allegations of bullying. The accompanying regulation provides more detail on the specific programs and strategies implemented by the district.

### **Intervention**

Intervention by adults and bystanders is an important step in preventing escalation and resolving issues at the earliest stages. Intervention will emphasize education and skill-building.

Successful intervention may involve remediation. Remedial responses to bullying and harassment include measures designed to correct the problem behavior, prevent another occurrence of the behavior, and to protect and empower the target. Remediation may be targeted to the individual(s) involved in the bullying behavior or environmental approaches which are targeted to the school or district as a whole.

In addition, intervention will focus upon the safety of the target. Staff is expected, when aware of bullying, to either refer the student to designated resources for assistance, or to intervene in accordance with this policy and regulation.

### **Provisions for students who do not feel safe at school**

The Board acknowledges that, notwithstanding actions taken by district staff, intervention may require a specific coordinated approach if the child does not feel safe at school. Students who do not feel safe at school are limited in their capacity to learn and reach their academic potential. Staff, when aware of bullying, should determine if accommodations are needed in order to help ensure the safety of the student and bring this to the attention of the school superintendent. The school superintendent, other appropriate staff, the student and the student's parent will work together to define and implement any needed accommodations.

The district recognizes that there is a need to balance accommodations which enhance student safety against the potential to further stigmatize the targeted student. Therefore, each case will be handled individually. The student, parent/guardian, and school administration will collaborate to establish safety provisions that best meet the needs of the targeted student. Follow-up discussion and/or meetings will be scheduled in a timely manner, as needed, to ensure that safety concerns have been adequately addressed and to determine when and if accommodations need to be changed or discontinued.

### **Training**

The Board recognizes that in order to implement an effective bullying prevention and intervention program, professional development is needed. The Superintendent and the Bullying Prevention Committee will incorporate training to support this program in new teacher orientation and professional development as needed. Training opportunities will be provided for all staff, including but not limited to bus drivers, cafeteria and hall monitors and all staff who have contact with students. The BPC will be trained in accordance with state requirements and will continue their professional development so as to successfully support this policy and program.

### **Reporting and Investigation**

Although it can be difficult to step forward, the district can't effectively address bullying if incidents are not reported. Students who have been

bullied/harassed, parents whose children have been bullied/harassed or other students or staff who observe bullying/harassment behavior are encouraged and expected to make a verbal and/or written complaint to any school personnel, in accordance with the training and guidelines provided. At all times, complaints will be documented, tracked and handled in accordance with the regulations and procedures accompanying this policy, or, if applicable, [0100, Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination, or 0110, Sexual Harassment] the district's Code of Conduct. Staff who are unsure of the reporting procedure are expected to ask their supervisors how to proceed. Incidents will be included in the Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting (VADIR) system when applicable.

There shall be a duty for all school personnel to report any incidents of student-to-student and staff-to-student bullying that they observe to their school superintendent or Dignity Act Coordinator (DAC) in the time frames set forth under the law. In addition, there shall be a further duty for all school personnel to report any incidents of student-to-student and staff-to-student bullying of which they are made aware to their school superintendent or DAC. Supervisors will refer the information to appropriate district staff for investigation as designated in regulation. A district employee may be deemed to have permitted unlawful discrimination or harassment if he/she fails to report an observed incident, whether or not the target complains.

An equitable and thorough investigation will be carried out by Dignity Act Coordinator in accordance with the accompanying regulation. In addition, the results of the investigation will be reported back to both the target and the accused as specified in the accompanying regulation. If either of the parties disagrees with the results of the investigation, they can appeal the findings in accordance with the regulations that accompany this policy. Verified bullying incidents that meet the criteria established by the state will be included in the statewide reporting system when applicable, in accordance with law and regulation.

The results of the investigation shall be reported back to both the target and the accused in accordance with the accompanying regulation. If either of the parties disagrees with the results of the investigation, they can appeal the findings in accordance with the regulations that accompany this policy.

The Board will receive the annual VADIR report, as well as any other state-required report relevant to bullying and/or school climate, for each building and for the district as whole. Based on the review of the data, the Board may consider further action, including but not limited to modification of this policy and additional training.

### **Disciplinary Consequences/Remediation**

While the focus of this policy is on prevention, acts of harassment/bullying may still occur. In these cases, offenders will be given the clear message that their actions are wrong and the behavior must improve. Student offenders will receive in-school guidance in making positive choices in their relationships with others.

If appropriate, disciplinary action will be taken by the administration in accordance with the district's Code of Conduct, as applicable. If the behavior rises to the level of criminal activity, law enforcement will be contacted.

Consequences for a student who commits an act of harassment/bullying will be unique to the individual incident and will vary in method and severity according to the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of problem behaviors, and must be consistent with the district's Code of Conduct.

### **Non-Retaliation**

All complainants and those who participate in the investigation of a complaint in conformity with state law and district policies, who have acted reasonably and in good faith, have the right to be free from retaliation of any kind.

### **Dissemination, Monitoring, Review, and Reporting**

This policy, or a plain language summary, will be published in student registration materials, student, parent and employee handbooks, and posted on the district's website.

Each year, as part of the annual review of the Code of Conduct, this policy will be reviewed to assess its effectiveness and compliance with state and federal law. If changes are needed, revisions will be recommended to the Board for its consideration.

The Board will receive the annual VADIR report for the district with particular attention to the trends in the incidence of bullying. Based on the review of the data, the Board may consider further action, including but not limited to modification of this policy and additional training.

The district will ensure that reporting of information to the public will be in a manner that complies with student privacy rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Cross-ref:      0100, Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination  
                     0110, Sexual Harassment  
                     4321, Programs for Students with Disabilities  
                     5300, Code of Conduct  
                     5710, Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting  
                     9700, Staff Development

Ref:  
Dignity for All Students Act, Education Law, §10 – 18  
Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. §12101 *et seq.*  
Title VI, Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §2000d *et seq.*  
Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §2000e *et seq.*; 34 CFR §100 *et seq.*

Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §1681 *et seq.*  
§504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. §794  
Individuals with Disabilities Education Law, 20 U.S.C §§1400 *et seq.*  
Executive Law §290 *et seq.* (New York State Human Rights Law)  
Education Law §§313(3), 3201, 3201-a  
8 NYCRR 100.2(c), (l), (jj), (kk); 119.6  
*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School Dist.*, 393 US 503, (1969)  
*Doninger v. Niehoff*, 527 F.3d 41 (2d. Cir. 2008)  
*Pollnow v. Glennon*, 594 F.Sup. 220, 224 *aff'd* 757 F.2d. 496  
*Zeno v. Pine Plains* 702 F3rd 655 (2<sup>nd</sup> Cir. 2012)  
*Cuff v. Valley Central School District* F3rd 109 (2<sup>nd</sup> Cir 2012)  
*Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, 526 U.S. 629 (1999)  
*Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District*, 524 U.S. 274 (1998)  
*Faragher v. City of Boca Raton*, 524 U.S. 775 (1998)  
*Burlington Industries v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742 (1998)  
*Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services, Inc.*, 523 U.S. 75 (1998)  
*Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools*, 503 U.S. 60 (1992)  
*Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57 (1986)  
*Appeal of K.S.*, 43 Ed. Dept. Rep. 492  
*Appeal of Ravick*, 40 Ed. Dept. Rep. 262  
*Appeal of Orman*, 39 Ed. Dept. Rep. 811

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