



BULLYING AND OTHER AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR TOWARD STUDENTS

po5517.01

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Highlighting **anti bullying**

5517.01 - BULLYING AND OTHER AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR TOWARD STUDENTS

It is the policy of the District to provide a safe and nurturing educational environment for all of its students.

The Board of Education recognizes that a school that is physically and emotionally safe and secure for all students and staff will be better able to promote good citizenship, increase attendance and engagement, and support academic achievement. The Board expects students and staff to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes positive relationships and school climate, with a proper regard for the rights and welfare of other students, school staff, volunteers, and contractors.

This policy protects all students from **bullying**/aggressive behavior regardless of the subject matter or motivation for such impermissible behavior.

Bullying or other aggressive behavior toward a student, whether by other students, staff, or third parties, including Board members, parents, guests, contractors, vendors, and volunteers, is strictly prohibited. This prohibition includes written, physical, verbal, and psychological abuse, including hazing, gestures, comments, threats, or actions, including electronically transmitted acts, to a student, which cause or threaten to cause bodily harm, reasonable fear for personal safety, or personal degradation.

Demonstration of appropriate behavior, treating others with civility and respect, and refusing to tolerate harassment or **bullying** is expected of administrators, faculty, staff, and volunteers to provide positive examples for student behavior.

This policy applies to all "at school" activities in the District, including activities on school property, in a school vehicle, or at any time or place where a child's imminent safety or over-all well-being may be at issue, and those occurring off school property, if the student or employee is at any school-sponsored, school-approved or school-related activity or function, such as field trips or athletic events where students are under the school's control, or where an employee is engaged in school business. Misconduct occurring outside of school may also be disciplined if it interferes with the school environment.

Notification

Notice of this policy will be annually circulated to and posted in conspicuous locations in all school buildings and departments within the District and discussed with students, as well as incorporated into the teacher, student, and parent/guardian handbooks. State and Federal rights posters on discrimination and

harassment shall also be posted at each building. All new hires will be required to review and sign off on this policy and the related complaint procedure.

Parents or legal guardians of the alleged victim(s), as well as of the alleged aggressor(s), shall be promptly notified of any complaint or investigation, as well as the results of the investigation, to the extent consistent with student confidentiality requirements. A record of the time and form of notice or attempts at notice shall be kept in the investigation file.

To the extent appropriate and/or legally permitted, confidentiality will be maintained during the investigation process. However, a proper investigation will, in some circumstances, require the disclosure of names and allegations. Further, the appropriate authorities may be notified, depending on the nature of the complaint and/or the results of the investigation.

Reporting

The District shall submit to the Department of Education a copy of this Policy.

The District shall report incidents of **bullying** to the Department of Education on an annual basis according to the form and procedures established by the Department of Education.

Should this Policy be amended or otherwise modified, the District shall submit a copy of the amended or modified Policy to the Department of Education no later than thirty (30) days after adopting the modification.

Implementation

The Superintendent is responsible to implement this policy, and may develop further guidelines not inconsistent with this policy. This policy is not intended to and should not be interpreted to interfere with the legitimate free speech rights of any individual. However, the District reserves the right and responsibility to maintain a safe environment for students, conducive to learning and other legitimate objectives of the school program.

Procedure

Any student who believes they have been or are the victim of **bullying**, hazing, or other aggressive behavior should immediately report the situation to the Principal or assistant principal. The student may also report concerns to a teacher or counselor who will be responsible for notifying the appropriate administrator or Board official. Complaints against the building principal should be filed with the Superintendent. Complaints against the Superintendent should be filed with the Board President.

A student may also submit a report or complaint to any of the above-designated individuals through email, voicemail, regular mail, or by leaving a sealed note addressed to the individual at that person's office or desk. The student may submit a report or complaint anonymously, but this may affect the ability to fully investigate the matter when the complaining student is not available to provide additional information during the course of the investigation.

The identity of a student who reports **bullying**, hazing, or aggressive behavior, as well as those students who provide information during an investigation, will remain confidential to the extent possible and to the extent allowable by law. Only school personnel directly involved in the investigation of the complaint or

responsible for remedying any violations will be provided access to the identity of the complaining student(s) and student witnesses, and then only to the extent necessary to effectively deal with the situation.

The identity of the student who files the report or complaint will not be voluntarily shared with the alleged perpetrator(s) or the witnesses unless the student (and the student's parent/guardian) gives written permission to do so. Any investigation report will likewise not be voluntarily produced with the names of the reporting student(s) or witnesses. However, under certain circumstances, the District may be required by law to disclose the report and/or the student(s) name(s). Also, under certain circumstances, the identity of the reporting student may become obvious even without disclosure by school personnel.

Every student is encouraged, and every staff member is required, to report any situation that they believe to be aggressive behavior directed toward a student. Reports shall be made to those identified above. While reports may be made anonymously, formal disciplinary action may not be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report without other corroborating evidence.

The Principal (or other designated administrator) shall promptly investigate and document all complaints about **bullying**, aggressive, or other behavior that may violate this policy. The investigation must be completed as promptly as the circumstances permit and should be completed within ten (10) school days after a report or complaint is made.

If the investigation finds that an instance of **bullying** or aggressive behavior has occurred, it will result in prompt and appropriate remedial action. This may include up to expulsion for students, up to discharge for employees, exclusion for parents, guests, volunteers, and contractors, and removal from any official position and/or a request to resign for Board members. Individuals may also be referred to law enforcement or other appropriate officials.

If, during an investigation of a reported act of harassment, intimidation, and/or **bullying**/cyber **bullying**, the Principal or appropriate administrator believes that the reported misconduct may have created a hostile learning environment and may have constituted unlawful discriminatory harassment based on a Protected Class, the Principal will report the act of **bullying** and/or harassment to one (1) of the **Anti**-Harassment Compliance Officers so that it may be investigated in accordance with the procedures set forth in Policy 5517 - **Anti**-Harassment.

The individual responsible for conducting the investigation shall document all reported incidents and report all verified incidents of **bullying**, aggressive, or other prohibited behavior, as well as any remedial action taken, including disciplinary actions and referrals, to the Superintendent. The Superintendent shall submit a compiled report to the Board on an annual basis.

Non-Retaliation/False Reports

Retaliation or false allegations against any person who reports, is thought to have reported, files a complaint, participates in an investigation or inquiry concerning allegations of **bullying** or aggressive behavior (as a witness or otherwise), or is the target of the **bullying** or aggressive behavior being investigated, is prohibited and will not be tolerated. Such retaliation shall be considered a serious violation of Board policy, independent of whether a complaint of **bullying** is substantiated. Suspected retaliation should be reported in the same manner as **bullying**/aggressive behavior.

Making intentionally false reports about **bullying**/aggressive behavior for the purpose of getting someone in trouble is similarly prohibited and will not be tolerated. Retaliation and intentionally false reports may result in disciplinary action as indicated above.

Prevention/Training

The District shall provide a minimum of annual training for school employees and volunteers who have significant contact with students on school policies and procedures regarding **bullying** and harassment to help promote a positive school climate. Training will provide school employees with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the necessary skills to fulfill them. (Examples of appropriate trainings include, but are not limited to, age-appropriate strategies to prevent **bullying**; age-appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop incidents; internet safety issues as they relate to cyber **bullying**; and fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference).

The best discipline for aggressive behavior is designed to (1) support students in taking responsibility for their actions, (2) develop empathy, and (3) teach alternative ways to achieve the goals and solve problems that motivated the aggressive behavior. Staff members and volunteers who interact with students shall role model respectful behavior and apply best practices designed to prevent discipline problems and encourage students' abilities to develop self-discipline and make better choices in the future. School employees will also be held accountable for **bullying** or harassing behavior that is directed toward school employees, volunteers, parents, or students in accordance with law and local collective bargaining agreements.

Consequences and appropriate remedial actions for a student or staff member who engages in one (1) or more acts of **bullying** or harassment may range from positive behavioral interventions, up to and including suspension or expulsion, in the case of a student, or suspension or termination in the case of an employee, as set forth in the Board's approved Code of Student Conduct or Employee Handbook. School employees will also be held accountable for **bullying** or harassing behavior directed toward school employees, volunteers, parents, or students.

Consequences for a student who commits an act of **bullying** and harassment shall 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 performance, and must be consistent with the Board's approved Code of Student Conduct. Remedial measures shall be designed to:

- A. correct the problem behavior;
- B. prevent another occurrence of the behavior; and
- C. protect the victim of the act.

Effective discipline should employ a school-wide approach to adopt a rubric of **bullying** offenses and the associated consequences.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided for guidance only. If a student or other individual believes there has been **bullying**, hazing, harassment, or other aggressive behavior, regardless of whether it fits a particular

definition, the student or other individual should report it immediately and allow the administration to determine the appropriate course of action.

"Aggressive behavior" is defined as inappropriate conduct that is repeated enough, or serious enough, to negatively impact a student's educational, physical, or emotional well-being. Such behavior includes, for example, **bullying**, hazing, stalking, intimidation, menacing, coercion, name-calling, taunting, making threats, and hitting/pushing/shoving.

"At School" is defined as in a classroom, elsewhere on school premises, on a school bus or other school-related vehicle, or at a school-sponsored activity or event, whether or not it is held on school premises. It also includes conduct using a telecommunications access device or telecommunications service provider that occurs off school premises if either owned by or under the control of the District.

"Bullying" is defined as any written, verbal, or physical acts, including cyber**bullying** (i.e. any electronic communication including, but not limited to, electronically transmitted acts, such as internet, telephone or cell phone, computer, or wireless handheld device, currently in use or later developed and used by students) that is perceived as being dehumanizing, intimidating, hostile, humiliating, threatening, or otherwise likely to evoke fear of physical harm or emotional distress and may be motivated either by bias or prejudice based upon any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression; or a mental, physical, or sensory disability or impairment; or by any other distinguishing characteristic, or is based upon association with another person who has or is perceived to have any distinguishing characteristic. **Bullying** or harassment also includes forms of retaliation against individuals who report or cooperate in an investigation under this policy.

Bullying is conduct that meets all of the following criteria:

- A. is perceived as being dehumanizing, intimidating, hostile, humiliating, threatening, or otherwise likely to evoke fear of physical harm or emotional distress;
- B. is directed at one (1) or more students;
- C. is conveyed through physical, verbal, technological, or emotional means;
- D. subst**anti**ally interferes with educational opportunities, benefits, or programs of one (1) or more students;
- E. adversely affects the ability of a student to participate in or benefit from the School District's educational programs or activities by placing the student in reasonable fear of physical harm or by causing subst**anti**al emotional distress;
- F. is based on a student's actual or perceived distinguishing characteristic (see above) or is based on an association with another person who has or is perceived to have any of these characteristics.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, psychological, or a combination of all three (3). Some examples of **bullying** are:

- A. Physical – hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, pulling, taking, and/or damaging personal belongings or extorting money, blocking or impeding student movement, unwelcome physical contact.
- B. Verbal – taunting, malicious teasing, insulting, name-calling, making threats.
- C. Psychological – spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, coercion, or engaging in social exclusion/shunning, extortion, or intimidation. This may occur in a number of different ways, including, but not limited to, notes, emails, social media postings, and graffiti.

"Harassment" is conduct that meets all of the following criteria:

- A. repeated or continuing unwanted contact perceived as being dehumanizing, intimidating, hostile, humiliating, threatening, or otherwise likely to evoke fear of physical harm or emotional distress;
- B. is directed at one (1) or more students or staff;
- C. is conveyed through physical, verbal, technological, or emotional means;
- D. subst^{anti}ally interferes with educational opportunities, benefits, or programs of one (1) or more students or staff;
- E. adversely affects the ability of a student to participate in or benefit from the School District's or public school's educational programs or activities because the conduct, as perceived by the student, is so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive as to have this effect; and
- F. is based on a student's or staff's actual or perceived distinguishing characteristic (see above) or is based on an association with another person who has or is perceived to have any of these characteristics.

"Intimidation/Menacing" includes, but is not limited to, any threat or act intended to: place a person in fear of physical injury or offensive physical contact; to subst^{anti}ally damage or interfere with a person's property; or to intentionally interfere with or block a person's movement without good reason.

"Staff" includes all school employees and Board members.

"Third parties" include, but are not limited to, coaches, school volunteers, parents, school visitors, service contractors, vendors, or others engaged in District business, and others not directly subject to school control at inter-district or intra-district athletic competitions or other school events.

The scope of this policy includes the prohibition of every form of **bullying**, harassment, and cyber **bullying**/harassment, whether in the classroom, on school premises, immediately adjacent to school premises, when a student is traveling to or from school (portal to portal), or at a school-sponsored event, whether or not held on school premises. **Bullying** or harassment, including cyber **bullying**/harassment, that is not initiated at a location defined above, is covered by this policy if the incident results in a potentially material or subst^{anti}al disruption of the school learning environment for one (1) or more students or staff and/or the orderly day-to-day operations of any school or school program.

For further definition and instances that could possibly be construed as:

Harassment, see Policy 5517.

Hazing, see Policy 5516.

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Legal

M.C.L. 380.1310b (Matt's Safe School Law, PA 241 of 2011), PA 478 of 2014

Policies on **Bullying**, Michigan State Board of Education

Model **Anti - Bullying** Policy, Michigan State Board of Education