

Students

Bullying

The Board promotes a secure and happy school climate, conducive to teaching and learning, that is free from threat, harassment and any type of bullying behavior. Such conduct is disruptive of the educational process. In accordance with state law and the Board's Safe School Climate Plan, the Board expressly prohibits any form of bullying behavior on school grounds; at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program, whether on or off school grounds; at a school bus stop; on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education; or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by Board of Education. The Board also prohibits any form of bullying behavior outside of the school setting if such bullying (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Discrimination and/or retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying is likewise prohibited.

"Bullying" means (A) the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district, or (B) a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district, that:

- (i) Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student's property, (ii) Places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property,
- (iii) Creates a hostile environment at school for such student,
- (iv) Infringes on the rights of such student at school, or
- (v) Substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Bullying shall include, but not be limited to, a written, oral or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics.

Bullying includes student conduct (A) on school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the local or regional board of education that meets the above criteria.

Bullying also includes student conduct (B) outside of the school setting if such bullying (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

I. Definitions

"Outside of the school setting" means at a location, activity or program that is not school related, or through the use of an electronic device or a mobile electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education.

"Hostile environment" means a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate.

"Cyberbullying" means any act of bullying through the use of the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, cellular mobile telephone or other mobile electronic devices or any electronic communications.

"Mobile electronic device" means any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more individuals, including, but not limited to, a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, a laptop computer, equipment that is capable of playing a video game or a digital video disk, or equipment on which digital images are taken or transmitted.

"Electronic communication" means any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photoelectronic or photo-optical system.

"School climate" means the quality and character of school life with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults.

"School employee" means - (A) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by a local or regional board of education or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; or (B) any other individual who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides services to or on behalf of students enrolled in a public elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with the local or regional board of education.

"Teen Dating Violence" means any act of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including stalking, harassing and threatening, that occurs between two students who are currently in or who have recently been in a dating relationship.

Examples of bullying include but are not limited to:

1. Physical violence and attacks; verbal taunts, name-calling and put-downs
2. Anything that may be ethnically-based, gender-based, religion-based or disability-based;
3. Threats and intimidation;
4. Extortion or stealing of money or possessions;
5. Exclusion from peer groups within the school.
6. Use of electronic media to promote or accomplish 1-5 above.

Students who engage in any act of bullying are subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including suspension, expulsion and/or referral to law enforcement officials.

A comprehensive safe school climate program, involving everyone in the schools and the community, to address bullying at all school levels is essential to reducing incidences of bullying. Such a program must involve interventions at all levels, school-wide, classroom and individual.

The District's Safe School Climate Plan

1. Permits anonymous reports of bullying by students to school employees and written reports of suspected bullying by parents/guardians;
2. Requires school employees to notify school administrators in writing of bullying acts they witness and students' reports they receive;
3. Requires school administrators to investigate parents'/guardians' written reports and review students' anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report;
4. Requires each school to maintain a publicly available list of the number of verified bullying acts that occurred there, and report such number to the State Department of Education annually and in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education;
5. Requires each school to have prevention and intervention strategy, as defined by statute, for school staff to deal with bullying, including language about bullying in student codes of conduct and in all student handbooks; requires each school to notify parents or guardians of all students involved in a verified act of bullying within 48 hours of the completion of the district's bullying investigation and to invite each to attend at least one meeting. The notice shall be simultaneously mailed to the parent or guardian with whom the student primarily resides and to the other parent or guardian if requested. The notice must describe the school's response and any consequences that may result from further acts of bullying; requires the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing reported incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline;
6. Requires students to be notified annually of the process by which they may make reports of bullying;
7. Requires the identification of appropriate school personnel, which may include but shall not be limited to pupil services personnel, responsible for taking a bullying report and investigating the complaint;
8. Require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student against whom such act was directed to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed and policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying;
9. Require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying to a meeting, separate and distinct from the meeting required in subdivision (8) above, to discuss specific interventions undertaken by the school to prevent further acts of bullying;

10. Establish a procedure for each school to document and maintain records relating to reports and investigations of bullying in such school and to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and annually report such number to the Department of Education and in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education;
11. Direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline;
12. Prohibit discrimination and retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying;
13. Direct the development of student safety support plans for students against whom an act of bullying was directed that address safety measures the school will take to protect such students against further acts of bullying;
14. Require, at the beginning of each school year, each school to provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district's safe school climate plan; and
15. Require that all school employees annually complete the training described in Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 10-220a or 10-222j.

Any information provided under this policy or accompanying Safe School Climate Plan shall be provided in accordance with the confidentiality restrictions imposed under the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act ("FERPA").

The Board expects prompt and reasonable investigations of alleged acts of bullying. The Principal of each school or designee is responsible for handling all complaints of alleged bullying.

In addition, the norms that are established by adults through consistent enforcement of all policies pertaining to conduct and modeling appropriate behavior at school and at home will reduce the damage of bullying. It is necessary for adults to promote the concept that caring for others is a valued quality, one that is accepted and encouraged.

Prevention and Intervention Strategy

The district shall implement a prevention and intervention strategy which may include but is not limited to:

1. Implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for safe school climate or for the prevention of bullying identified by the Department of Education;
2. School rules prohibiting bullying, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts;
3. Adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, cafeterias and other specific areas where bullying is likely to occur;

4. Individual interventions with the bully, parents/guardians and school staff and interventions with the bullied child, parents/guardians and school staff;
5. School-wide training related to safe school climate;
6. Promotion of parent/guardian involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, training and individual interventions.

The Superintendent or designee shall develop rules and procedures, which carry out the provisions of this policy. The Superintendent shall provide that students and parents/guardians of students are notified of this prohibition against bullying and the penalties for violating the prohibition by ensuring the posting of such information at each school and by ensuring inclusion of such information in student and parent handbooks.

This policy shall not be interpreted to prohibit a reasonable and civil exchange of opinions or debate that is protected by state or federal law.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

Conn. Gen. Stat. 10-222d

Conn. Gen. Stat. 10-222g

Conn. Gen. Stat. 10-222k

Conn. Gen. Stat. 10-222l

Conn. Gen. Stat. 10-233a through 10-233f

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WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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