

Series 5000 – Students

1. Elementary and Secondary

C. Activities

(1) Conduct

(s) Bullying

The following sets forth the procedures to implement the Board policy concerning the prohibition against bullying. Bullying behavior is strictly prohibited, and students who are determined to have engaged in such behavior are subject to disciplinary action, which may include suspension or expulsion from school, in accordance with the Board’s Student Discipline policy. The district’s commitment to addressing bullying behavior, however, involves a multi-faceted approach, which includes education and the promotion of a school atmosphere in which bullying will not be tolerated by students or staff.

It is imperative that bullying be identified only when the specific elements of the definition are met, because the designation of conduct as bullying carries with it special statutory obligations. Any misconduct by one student against another student, whether or not appropriately defined as bullying, however, will subject the perpetrator to disciplinary action in accordance with the Board’s policies on student discipline, suspension and expulsion.

I. Definition:

In accordance with Board policy, “bullying” means any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on or off school grounds, at school-sponsored activity, or on a school bus, which acts are repeated against the same student over time. Such overt acts, which occur off-campus (and not at a school-sponsored activity) may also constitute bullying if it is determined that they have a direct and negative impact on a student’s academic performance or safety in school.

In accordance with this definition, the following factors should be considered before identifying conduct by a student or group of students as bullying in violation of Board policy. The determination that conduct does not constitute bullying under state law and Board policy, however, does not restrict the right of the administration and of the Board of Education to impose appropriate disciplinary consequences for student misconduct.

- Location – Bullying behavior in violation of Board policy may occur on or off school grounds, at a school-sponsored activity, or on a school bus. Conduct which occurs off-campus (e.g., harassment over the Internet, physical intimidation in the community) is considered bullying under the Board’s policy and this regulation.

- Repeated misconduct – Bullying behavior in violation of Board policy must be “repeated against the same student over time.” An isolated incident, however egregious, is not “bullying” under state law and Board policy. Similarly, numerous acts of misconduct against different students do not constitute “bullying” under state law and Board policy. Conversely, where there are repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual, the responsible administrator shall develop a case-specific intervention to address such repeated incidents of bullying, which may include both counseling and discipline.
- Ridicule, harassment, humiliation, and/or intimidation. Bullying behavior is more than misconduct. Such behavior is marked by the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the victim. In evaluating whether conduct constitutes bullying, special attention should be paid to the words chosen or actions taken, whether such conduct occurred in front of others or was communicated to others, how the perpetrator interacted with the victim, and the motivation of the perpetrator.
- Types of conduct. Bullying can take many forms and can include many different behaviors having the overt intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate another student. Examples of conduct that could constitute bullying include:
 1. Physical violence and/or attacks;
 2. Verbal taunts, name-calling and put-downs, including taunts based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or other protected and/or individual characteristics;
 3. Threats and intimidation (through words and/or gestures)
 4. Extortion or stealing of money and/or possessions.

II. Complaint Processes

A. Publication of the prohibition against bullying and related procedures

The prohibition against bullying shall be publicized by including the following statement in the student handbook of each of the district schools:

“Bullying behavior by any student in the Suffield Public Schools is strictly prohibited, and such conduct may result in disciplinary action, including suspension and/or expulsion from school. “Bullying” means any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on or off school grounds, at school-sponsored activity, or on a school bus, which acts are repeated against the same student over time. Such acts, which occur off-campus (and not at a school-sponsored activity), may also constitute bullying if it is determined that they have a direct and negative impact on a student’s academic performance or safety in school. Students may file verbal or written complaints concerning suspected bullying behavior, and students shall be permitted anonymously

report acts of bullying to teachers and school administrators. In addition, parents may also file written complaints concerning suspected bullying behavior. Any report of suspected bullying behavior will be promptly reviewed. If acts of bullying are verified, prompt disciplinary action may be taken against the perpetrator, consistent with his/her rights of due process. Board policy 5144 (Student Discipline) set forth this prohibition and the related procedures in detail, and are available to students and their parents/guardians upon request.”

B. Annual notification of the complaint process

The process by which students may make formal, informal, and anonymous complaints as set forth below shall be publicized annually in the student handbook of each of the district schools.

C. Formal/written complaints

Students and/or their parents or guardians may file written reports of conduct that they consider to be bullying. Such written reports shall be reasonably specific as to the actions giving rise to the suspicion of bullying, including time and place of the conduct alleged, the number of such incidents, the target of such suspected bullying, and the names of any potential student or staff witnesses. Such reports may be filed with any teacher or administrator, and they shall be promptly forwarded to the building principal to review and take action in accordance with Section III below.

D. Informal/verbal complaints by students

Students may make informal/verbal complaints of conduct that they consider to be bullying by verbally reporting to a teacher, administrator, or other professional employee such as a school counselor, school psychologist, nurse, social worker or therapist. Such informal/verbal complaints shall be reasonably specific as to the actions giving rise to the suspicion of bullying, including time and place of the conduct alleged, the number of such incidents, the target of such suspected bullying, and the names of any potential student or staff witnesses. A teacher, other professional employee, or administrator who receives an informal/verbal complaint shall promptly reduce the complaint to writing, including the information provided. Such written report by the teacher, other professional employee and/or administrator shall be promptly forwarded to the building principal (or other responsible program administrator) for review and action in accordance with Section III below.

E. Anonymous complaints

Students who make an information complaint as set forth above may request that their name be maintained in confidence by the teacher(s) or administrator(s) who receives the complaint. Should anonymity be requested, the principal or his/her designee shall meet with the student to review the request for anonymity and the impact that maintaining anonymity of the complaint may have on the investigation of the

complaint and/or possible remedial action. At such meeting, the student shall be given the choice as to whether to maintain the anonymity of the complaint. Anonymous complaints shall be reviewed and reasonable action will be taken to address the situation, to the extent such action may be taken that (1) does not disclose the source of the complaint, and (2) is consistent with the due process rights of the student(s) alleged to have committed acts of bullying.

III. Staff responsibilities and intervention strategies

A. Teachers and other school staff

1. Teachers and other school staff who witness acts of bullying, as defined above, shall promptly notify the building principal and/or his/her designee of the events observed, and shall promptly file a written incident report concerning the events witnessed. Teachers and other school staff who receive student or parent reports of suspected bullying shall promptly notify the building principal and/or his designee of such report(s).

If the report is a formal, written complaint, such complaint shall be forwarded promptly (no later than the next school day) to the building principal or his/her designee. If the report is an informal/verbal complaint by a student that is received by a teacher, administrator or other professional employee, he or she shall prepare a succinct written report of the informal complaint, which shall be forwarded promptly (no later than the next school day) to the building principal or his/her designee. If the report is an informal complaint by a student that is received by other school staff, this employee shall verbally report the matter to the principal and/or his/her designee promptly (no later than the next school day).

2. In addition to addressing both informal and formal complaints, teachers and other professional employees are encouraged to address the issue of bullying in other interactions with students. Teachers and other professional employees may find opportunities to educate students about bullying and help eliminate bullying behavior through class discussions, counseling, and reinforcement of socially-appropriate behavior. Teachers and other professional employees should intervene promptly whenever they observe student conduct that has the purpose or effect of ridiculing, humiliating or intimidating another student, even if such conduct does not meet the formal definition of "bullying."

B. Administrator responsibilities

1. Investigation
 - a. The principal (or other responsible program administrator) shall be promptly notified of any formal or informal complaint of suspected bullying received by any building administrator, teacher or other professional employee. Under the direction of the building principal and his/her designee, all such complaints shall

be investigated promptly. In order to allow the district to adequately investigate all formal complaints, the parent of the student suspected of being bullied must complete a consent form that permits the district to release the student's name to those third parties who the district contacts as part of its investigation of that complaint. With regard to the investigation of the informal complaints, the parent of the student suspected of being bullied must complete the above-mentioned consent form so long as that student has not requested anonymity.

- b. A written report of the investigation shall be prepared when the investigation is complete. Such report shall include findings of fact, a determination of whether acts of bullying are verified, and, when acts of bullying are verified, a recommendation for intervention, including disciplinary action. Where appropriate, written witness statements shall be attached to the report.
 - c. Notwithstanding the foregoing, when a student making an informal complaint has requested anonymity, the investigation of such complaint shall be limited as is appropriate in view of the anonymity of the complainant. Such limitation of investigation may include restricting action to a simple review of the complaint (with or without discussing it with the alleged perpetrator), subject to receipt of further information and/or the withdrawal by the complaining student of the condition that his/her report be anonymous.
2. Remedial actions
- a. Verified acts of bullying shall result in intervention by the building principal (or other responsible program administrator) or his/her designee that is intended to address the acts of the perpetrator and the needs of the victim and to assure that the prohibition against bullying behavior is enforced with the goal that any such bullying behavior will end as a result.
 - b. Bullying behavior can take many forms and can vary dramatically in how serious it is, and what impact it has on the victim and other students. Accordingly, there is no one prescribed response to verified acts of bullying. While conduct that rises to the level of "bullying", as defined above, will generally warrant disciplinary action against the perpetrator of such bullying, whether and to what extent to impose disciplinary action (e.g., detention, in-school suspension, suspension or expulsion) is a matter for the professional direction of the building principal (or responsible program administrator or his/her designee). The following sets forth possible interventions for building principals (or other responsible program administrators) to enforce the Board's prohibition against bullying.
 - c. Addressing bullying behavior
 - i. Non-disciplinary interventions

When verified acts of bullying are identified early and/or when such verified acts of bullying do not reasonably require a disciplinary response, students may be counseled as to the definition of bullying, its prohibition, and their duty to avoid any conduct that could be considered bullying.

If a complaint arises out of conflict between students or groups of students, peer mediation may be considered. Special care, however, is warranted in referring such cases to peer mediation. A power imbalance may make the process intimidating for the victim and, therefore, inappropriate. In such cases, the victim should be given additional support. Alternatively, peer mediation may be deemed inappropriate to address the concern.

ii. Disciplinary interventions

When acts of bullying are verified and a disciplinary response is warranted, students are subject to the full range of disciplinary consequences that apply to on-campus and off-campus conduct. Anonymous complaints that are not otherwise verified, however, shall not be the basis for disciplinary action.

In-school suspension and suspension may be imposed only after informing the accused perpetrator of the reasons for the proposed suspension and giving him/her an opportunity to explain the situation, in accordance with the Board's Student Discipline policy.

Expulsion may be imposed only after a hearing before the Board of Education, a committee of the Board or an impartial hearing officer designated by the Board of Education in accordance with the Board's Student Discipline policy. This consequence shall normally be reserved for serious incidents of bullying and/or when past interventions have not been successful in eliminating bullying behavior.

In those case where bullying behavior has occurred *off campus* (and outside of any school-sponsored activity), discipline for such conduct may be imposed if such conduct violates a publicized policy of the Board and is seriously disruptive of the educational process.

3. Interventions for bullied students

The building principal (or other responsible program administrator) or his/her designee shall intervene in order to address repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual. Intervention strategies for a bullied student may include the following:

- a. Counseling;
- b. Increased supervision and monitoring of students to observe and intervene in bullying situations;

- c. Encouragement of student to seek help when victimized or witnessing victimization;
- d. Peer mediation where appropriate.

4. General intervention strategies

In addition to the prompt investigation of complaints of bullying and direct intervention when acts of bullying are verified, other district actions may help to avoid potential problems with bullying in school or at school-sponsored activities. While no specific action is required, and school needs for such interventions may vary from time to time, the following list of potential intervention strategies shall serve as a resource for administrators, teachers, and other professional employees in each school:

- a. Respectful responses to bullying concerns raised by students, parents or staff;
- b. Planned professional development programs addressing bully/victim problems;
- c. Data collection to document bully/victim problems to determine the nature and scope of the problem;
- d. Use of peers to help avoid the plight of victims and include them in group activities;
- e. Avoidance of sex-role stereotyping;
- f. Awareness and involvement on the part of staff and parents with regards to bully-victim problems;
- g. A curriculum that promotes communication, friendship, assertiveness skills and character education;
- h. Modeling by teachers of positive, respectful, and supportive behavior toward students;
- i. Creating a school atmosphere of team spirit and collaboration that promotes appropriate social behavior by students in support of others;
- j. Employing classroom strategies that instruct students how to work together in a collaborative and supportive atmosphere.

IV. Reporting obligations

A. Report to the parent or guardian of the perpetrator

If, after investigation, acts of bullying by a specific student are verified, the building principal (or other responsible program administrator or his/her designee) shall notify the parent or guardian of the perpetrator in writing of that

finding. If disciplinary consequences are imposed against such student, a description of such discipline shall be included in such notification.

B. Reports to the victim and his/her parent or guardian

If after investigation, acts of bullying against a specific student are verified, the building principal (or other responsible program administrator or his/her designee) shall notify the parent or guardian of the victim of such finding. In providing such notification, care must be taken to respect the statutory privacy rights of the perpetrator of such bullying. The specific disciplinary consequences imposed on the perpetrator, as reflected in the student's educational records, shall not be disclosed to the parents or guardian of the victim, except as provided by law.

C. List of verified acts of bullying

The principal of each school shall maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in the school, and this list shall be available for public inspection upon request. Given that any determination of bullying involves repeated acts over time, each report prepared in accordance with Section III above that includes verified acts of bullying shall be tallied as one verified act of bullying unless the specific actions that are the subject of the report involve separate and distinct acts of bullying. The list shall be limited to the numbers of such verified acts of bullying in the school, and it shall not set out the particulars of each verified act, including but not limited to any personally identifiable student information, which is confidential information by law.

Legal References: Connecticut General Statute 10-222d
Connecticut General Statute 10-233a through 10-233f
Public Act No. 06-115

Regulation adopted: February 4, 2003
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SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Suffield, Connecticut

MODEL ANNUAL BULLYING NOTICE

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