

Sayville Public Schools



Board of Education Special Session
October 18, 2023

Tuesday, 10/10/23

District became aware of hazing from a snapchat post.

- Video showed a Sophomore student getting on knees in a parking lot off campus.
- Senior student standing over that student, hitting younger student on the back of the head and neck.
- Several other students in the video were heard laughing.
- Comments on team snapchat from students included, "he got what he deserved" and "It was for being late to practice"
- Discipline administered to identified student and team was spoken to by the coach prior to their game.



Tuesday, 10/10/23

Building Administration Interviewed 4 students and discovered the following:

- This was a practice passed down from the previous year's teams.
- A senior was appointed as "Supreme Leader" each year.
- Supreme leader in charge of enforcing "whaps" to players who had infractions – late to practice, etc.
- Video was recorded during first week of practice
- Events took place after practice, in a parking lot off school grounds



Wednesday, 10/11/23

To ensure that players on the team understood what Hazing was and why it was not acceptable practice, our Athletic Director held a meeting with the JV team and the Varsity Team after school.

The athletic director prepared a lesson based on Hazing practices and the importance of building a strong, positive team culture. The following is the presentation that was shared with students.

At this point, there was no decision to cancel the soccer season.





What is hazing?

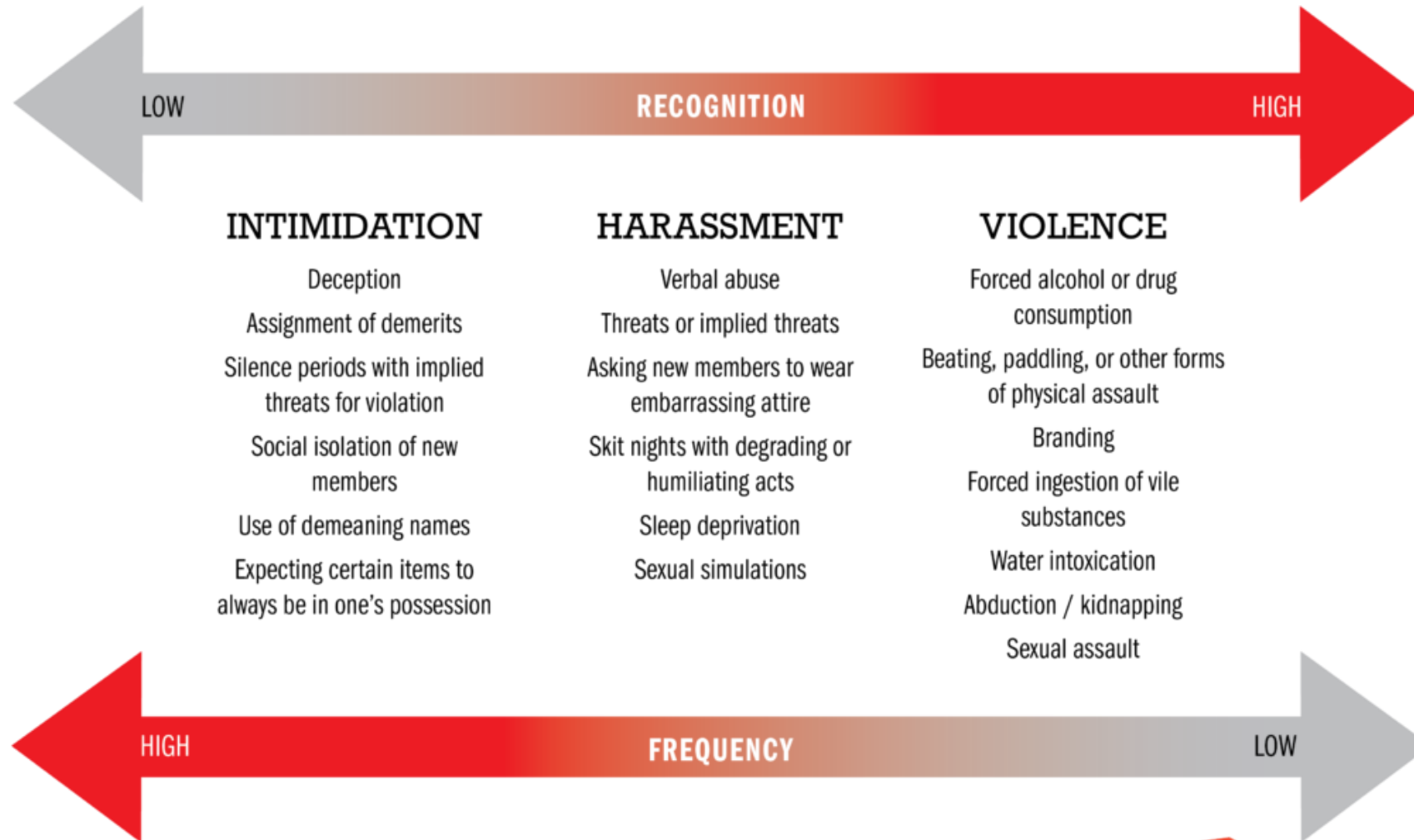


Hazing is any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them, regardless of a person's willingness to participate.

There are three components that define hazing:

- It occurs in a group context
 - Humiliating, degrading, or endangering behavior
 - Happens regardless of an individual's willingness to participate
- (www.stophazing.org)

THE SPECTRUM OF HAZING™



ALLAN, 2005; ALLAN & KERSCHNER, 2020; ADAPTED FROM BRINGING IN THE BYSTANDER®



TYPES OF HAZING

- Physical Punishment
- Branding
- Sleep Deprivation
- Kidnapping
- Tattooing or Piercing
- Head-Shaving

(NFHS Learns)

Can you think of others?

Hazing and Bullying (from Student Handbook)

The Board of Education recognizes that hazing is abusive behavior that harms victims and negatively impacts the school culture by creating an environment of fear, distrust, intimidation and intolerance. The Board further recognizes that preventing hazing in schools is essential to ensure a healthy, nondiscriminatory environment in which students can learn.

The Board is committed to providing an educational environment that promotes respect, dignity and equality and that is free from all forms of hazing. To this end, the Board condemns and strictly prohibits all forms of hazing on school grounds, school buses and at all school-sponsored activities, programs and events, including those that take place at locations outside the district. Hazing, means committing an act against a student, or coercing a student into committing an act that creates a risk of emotional, physical or psychological harm to a person, in order for the student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student organization, or for any other purpose.

“Student organization” means a group, club, or organization having students as its primary members or participants. It includes grade levels, classes, clubs, teams, activities or particular school events. A student organization does not have to be an official school organization to come within the terms of this definition. The term hazing includes, but is not limited to:

1. Any humiliating, degrading or dangerous activity demanded of a student to join a group, regardless of the student’s willingness to participate (conduct has the potential to endanger the mental or physical health or safety of a student).
2. Any hurtful, aggressive, destructive or disruptive behavior such as striking, whipping, sleep deprivation, restraint or confinement, calisthenics or other activity that subjects the student to an unreasonable risk of harm or that adversely affects the mental or physical health or safety of the student.
3. Substance Abuse-use or abuse of tobacco, alcohol or illegal drugs.
4. Any activity that intimidates or threatens the student with ostracism, that subjects a student to emotional, physical or psychological stress, embarrassment, shame or humiliation that adversely affects the health or dignity of the students or discourages the student from remaining in school.
5. Any activity that causes or requires the students to perform a task or act that involves violation of state or federal law or school district policies or regulations.

In order for the Board to effectively enforce this policy and to take prompt corrective measures, it is essential that all victims of hazing, and persons with knowledge of hazing, report the harassment immediately. The district will promptly investigate all complaints of hazing, either formal or informal, verbal or written. To the extent possible, all complaints will be treated in a confidential manner. Limited disclosure may be necessary to complete a thorough investigation. If after appropriate investigation, the district finds that a student has violated this policy, prompt corrective action will be taken in accordance with the district’s Code of Conduct.

“... The intention was to have a fun night of team bonding, not to humiliate or embarrass anyone. ... We realize it didn’t benefit us or improve our skills. It didn’t make us close as a team, and in fact, just the opposite occurred! Our fall season was canceled, as was our spring break, and our team is on probation. Playing is a privilege not afforded to everybody, and with that privilege comes a responsibility to our team, our school and ourselves.”

Team captain’s quote after her team was involved in, and sanctioned for, hazing¹.

(www.ncaa.org)

WHAT IS CULTURE?



What ways can you build positive culture on your team/program?



Culture is a measure of the observable behaviors your team and organization promotes and accepts.

Ultimately, culture is best defined simply as 'the way we do things around here' or 'the way we behave around here'. Culture is not what you think, or want to do, it is what you do.

(www.athletesassessment.com)

According to NFHS Learns:

- Movie Nights
- Group Lunch/Dinner
- Group weight training
- Bowling
- Outdoor education experience – Team Building
- Community service events

LEGACY

- Leave the program better than when you found it



PRIVELEGE NOT A RIGHT



Wednesday, 10/11/23



Following the presentation, the Athletic Director and Assistant Principal reported current findings to the Superintendent and Board of Education during an evening executive session.

With the consent of the BOE, Superintendent directed building admin to interview all students on the soccer team to ensure that nothing was being overlooked. At this point in time, the season would not be cancelled unless new information presented itself during student interviews.

Thursday, 10/12/23

- The Principal, Assistant Principal, and Athletic Director interviewed as many members of the JV and Varsity team as possible by dividing the team into thirds.
- All students were asked the same 5 questions
- All students were asked to hand in cell phones during the interview. This is standard practice at the high school.



Thursday, 10/12/23

Findings from these interviews revealed the following:

- Other members of the team were being hit throughout the season in the same manner.
- Additional members of the team were doing the hitting throughout the season, not just the "Supreme Leader".
- More than one of these incidents were video recorded.
- Reasons for getting hit included being late for practice but also for other reasons such as drinking from the wrong water bottle during practice.
- Some students came to school wearing t-shirts to protest the suspended player.

Thursday, 10/12/23

The District Took the following actions Thursday Afternoon:

- Administration met with the soccer team to inform them that the season was cancelled due to hazing.
- Administration sent an email to soccer parents explaining that students were interviewed, and the remaining two games of the season would be cancelled.
- District sent out notification to the community, explaining that the season was being cancelled due to hazing. It also pointed out a separate concern about a past situation from prior years related to racism and antisemitism.

Thursday, 10/12/23

Several Parents met with Dr. Ferris Thursday evening to convey concerns:

- The largest issue presented was that parents were upset that the district letter mentioned past incidents of Racism & Anti-Semitism, they felt that we stated that the students were racists and Newsday picked up that story online.
- Dr. Ferris acknowledged that the intent of his email to the community was NOT to portray students as racist or antisemitic but to point out that there were two different situations that occurred, and neither was acceptable. He advised the parents he would work to correct misinformation in the local media.

Thursday, 10/12/23

Based on the parent meeting, Dr. Ferris took the following immediate actions:

- Called Newsday to make sure they corrected their online story about hazing. This article posted at 6pm was corrected by 8:37pm.
- Spoke to multiple news outlets to make sure they did not report students as antisemitic or racist.
- Sent out additional email to community to ensure that it was clear that soccer season was cancelled due to hazing and not antisemitism or racism.

Letter to the Community

Questions raised as to why the letter included current season and past seasons.

- Earlier this year, the district further investigated a claim of antisemitic bullying and harassment
- Findings from that investigation were reported to the BOE in September 2023 and found that antisemitic bullying did take place on a previous soccer team.
- On October 5, the BOE President read the following statement to the community and posted it on our website.

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