

Policies

Westerly Public Schools Prevention of Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence

No. 7300

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PURPOSE:

This policy is established by the Westerly Public Schools in keeping with State Regulation and is to serve the purpose of defining Westerly Public Schools expectations in regard to the matter of harassment, teen dating violence, sexual violence, intimidation or bullying of students at school.

PHILOSOPHY:

Westerly Public Schools fully endorses the intent and specifics of the Law requiring the establishment of this policy, and is committed to the concept that bullying, teen dating violence, sexual violence, teasing and harassment is a pervasive but unfortunately a growing issue in our society and that it should neither be tolerated nor condoned. Further, that it should not be addressed by merely removing or excluding students from school. To this end, Westerly Public Schools commits its staff to the implementation of a comprehensive and preventive approach that addresses the underlying reasons for this behavior and helps to create a better school community that supports learning and teaching for students and adults.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Harassment, teen dating violence, sexual violence, intimidation and bullying is prohibited in the public schools of Westerly, RI and the prevention of any such behavior shall be part of the Westerly Public Schools strategic plan and school safety plan. [R.I.G.L. 16-21-26]; [R.I.G.L.16-7.1-2(e)]; [R.I.G.L. 16-21-24]; [R.I.G.L. 16-21-30].

DEFINITION:

Bullying, Teen Dating Violence, Sexual Violence

Bullying, teen dating violence, sexual violence occurs when a student intentionally assaults, batters, threatens, harasses, stalks, menaces, intimidates, extorts, humiliates or taunts another person. Bullying also occurs through "electronic" communications including any verbal, textual or graphic communication of any kind effected, created or transmitted by the use of any electronic device, including, but not limited to, a computer, telephone, cellular telephone, text-messaging device and/or personal data assistance device.

Bullying also occurs when a student or a group of students organize a campaign of shunning against another person or when a student or a group of students maliciously spread rumors about another person. In most circumstances bullying does not include a mutual fight between two students of roughly equal strength who are angry with each other. Such fights are subject to discipline as a violation of school rules prohibiting fighting.

At school

At school shall include, but may not be necessarily restricted to the following places and situations:

- In a classroom
- Elsewhere in the school
- On school property
- Immediately adjacent to school property
- On a school bus or other school vehicle
- At any school-sponsored activity or event, whether or not held on school premises.

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Dating Violence: A pattern of behavior where one person uses threats of, or actually uses, physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse to control his or her dating partner.

Sexual Violence includes behaviors that are attempted or perpetrated against a victim's will or when a victim cannot consent because of age, disability or the influence of alcohol or drugs. Sexual assault may involve actual or threatened physical force, use of weapons, coercion, intimidation or pressure and may include:

- intentional touching of someone in ways that are unwanted,
- voyeurism,
- exposure to exhibitionism,
- undesired exposure to pornography or
- public display of images that were taken in a private context or when the victim was unaware.

DEALING WITH ALLEGED BULLYING, TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE::

1. Reporting Responsibilities: The principal of each school in Westerly Public Schools shall establish and prominently publicize to students, staff, volunteers and parents, how a report of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence may be filed and how this report will be acted upon. The victim of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence, anyone who witnessed the bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence and anyone who has credible information that an act of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence has taken place shall file a report of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence.
2. Investigation of Bullying, Teen Dating Violence or Sexual Violence: The principal, or his or her designee, shall investigate all allegations of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence. If the allegation is found to be credible, appropriate disciplinary sanctions, subject to any appropriate due process procedures, will be imposed. Whenever bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence involved conduct that violates criminal law, the police shall be notified.
3. Disciplinary Sanctions for Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence: Disciplinary sanctions for bullying, dating violence or sexual violence may include but are not limited to:
 - Admonitions, warnings and counseling.
 - Loss of the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities.
 - Loss of the opportunity to participate in school social activities.
 - Loss of the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises.
 - Loss of school bus transportation.
 - Transfer to another school.
 - Assignment of additional homework or community service.
 - In house suspension.
 - Short term school suspension (10 or fewer days of suspension) or long term school expulsion (suspension for more than 10 days).
4. Help for the Victim(s) of Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence: The district is committed to creating a campus environment that promotes timely and fair adjudication of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence cases. Principals shall establish guidelines to protect the rights and privacy of the victim as well as the due process rights of the alleged perpetrator.
5. Responsibility of Staff: School staff shall take all reasonable measures to prevent bullying, teen dating violence and sexual violence and shall report all acts of bullying, teen dating violence or

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sexual violence that come to their attention. In this context the staff includes volunteers working in the school.

6. Responsibility of Students: Students who observe an act of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence or who have reasonable grounds to believe that bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence is taking place are obligated to report the bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence to school authorities. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. The victim of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence shall, however, not be subject to discipline for failing to report the bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence.

PROTECTION AGAINST BULLYING, TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE::

1. Prohibition against False Reports of Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence: False reports concerning bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence will be subject to appropriate school discipline, including short or long term suspension from school.
2. Prohibition against Retaliation: Retaliation or threats of retaliation in any form designed to intimidate the victim of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence, those who are witnesses to bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence or those investigating an incident of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence shall not be tolerated. In most cases retaliation or a threat of retaliation will result in the imposition of a short or long term school suspension and, in appropriate cases, referral to the police. [R.I.G. 11-42-2. Extortion and blackmail] [R.I.G.L.-59-2. Stalking prohibited]
3. Individualized School Safety Plan: If a student is the victim of serious or persistent bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence, the principal of the school, with input from the parents of the student and staff members, will prepare a written school safety plan outlining what steps will be taken to provide the student with a safe educational environment.
4. School Atmosphere: School staff, at all times, will model correct and courteous behavior to each other, to students and to visitors to the school. Abusive or humiliating language or demeanor will not be accepted. An effort will be made to ensure that each student is well known by at least one certified teacher so that the student will have someone to turn to, at school if a bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence situation develops. To the extent possible, the influence of cliques and other exclusive student groupings will be diminished by the creation of a range of inclusive school activities in which students will be encouraged to participate [R.I.G.L. 16-38-4. Exclusive clubs].

PREVENTING BULLYING, TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

1. Instruction in the Prevention of Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence: Students and staff shall be given instruction in this district's Policy and Regulations against bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence. This instruction shall include methods of discouraging and preventing bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence, along with instruction in how to file a complaint against bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence, and the disciplinary action that may be taken against those who commit acts of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence.
2. Social Skills Training: The school health program and school counseling services will include appropriate social skills training to help students avoid isolation and to help them interact in a healthy manner.

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REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES:

1. Police Notification: When the bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence involves conduct that violates the criminal law the police shall be notified.
2. Reports to the Superintendent and to the School Committee: School principals will provide the Superintendent of Schools and the School Committee with a semi-annual report on incidents of bullying, teen dating violence and sexual violence which have taken place in the schools under their respective supervision. This report will include a statement describing what remedial action has been taken to address bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence.

ASSISTANCE/SUPPORT IN DEALING WITH ISSUES OF BULLYING, TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

1. Student Mediators: The principal of any school in the district may establish a Student Mediators Group to resolve complaints of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence in circumstances where appropriate, include students.
2. Voluntary Participation in Mediation: No student who is the victim of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence shall be required to participate in mediation or to accept any apology tendered by the bullying student. The decision of a victim of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence not to participate in mediation program shall not diminish the obligation of the school to impose discipline against the student who has committed an act of bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence.
3. Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force: The principal of each school in this district may establish a Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force. This Task Force may include members and, if age allows, students. The purpose of this Task Force will be to develop policies and programs to educate students and staff about the harm caused by bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence. The Task Force may also create programs to prevent or diminish bullying, teen dating violence or sexual violence. The Program recommendations of the Task Force shall be subject to review by the School Committee before the programs are implemented. The duties of the Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force may be assigned to the school's student intervention team [R.I.G.L. 16-7-21] or to the school's School Improvement Team [R.I.G.L. 16-53. 1-21].

Note: Repeated infractions of unacceptable school behavior may result, in extreme cases, in a recommendation for expulsion. Recommendations for over 10 days of out-of-school suspension must go to the Superintendent of Schools. All recommendations of suspensions will follow appropriate state laws. A hearing may be requested.

Students will be given the equivalent number of days suspended out of school once they return to school to make-up any missed work or assignments. Any assignment given prior to the suspension that was due during the suspension must be turned in the day the student returns.

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