Series 5000 - Students

1. Elementary and Secondary

C. Activities

(1) <u>Conduct</u>

(s) <u>School Climate Policy</u>

Policy Statement

All schools must support and promote teaching and learning environments where all students thrive academically and socially, have a strong and meaningful voice, and are prepared for lifelong success.

Implementation of the following set of guiding principles and systemic strategies will promote a positive school climate, which is essential to achieving these goals.

This policy sets forth the framework for an effective and informed school climate improvement process, which includes a continuous cycle of (i) planning and preparation, (ii) evaluation, (iii) action planning, and (iv) implementation, and serves to actualize the Connecticut School Climate Standards, as detailed herein.

The Suffield Board of Education (the "Board") recognizes that improving school climate is contextual. Each school needs to consider its history, strengths, needs, and goals. Furthermore, this policy will support and promote the development of restorative action plans that will create and sustain safe and equitable learning environments.

Definitions

1. **"School climate"** means the quality and character of the school life, with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community, and which is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and that reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, leadership practices and organizational structures within the school community.

2. **"Positive Sustained School Climate"** is the foundation for learning and positive youth development and includes:

    a. Norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, culturally, racially, intellectually, and physically safe.
    b. People who treat one another with dignity and are engaged, respected and solve problems restoratively.
    c. A school community that works collaboratively together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision.

d. Adults who model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning; and
e. A school community that contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.

3. **"Social and emotional learning"** means the process through which children and adults achieve emotional intelligence through the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

4. **"Emotional intelligence"** means the ability to (A) perceive, recognize, and understand emotions in oneself or others, (B) use emotions to facilitate cognitive activities, including, but not limited to, reasoning, problem solving and interpersonal communication, (C) understand and identify emotions, and (D) manage emotions in oneself and others.

5. **"Bullying"** means unwanted and aggressive behavior among children in grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.

6. **"School environment"** means a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program, whether on or off school grounds, including at a school bus stop or on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education, and may include other activities, functions or programs that occur outside of a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program if bullying at or during such other activities, functions or programs negatively impacts the school environment.

7. **"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 other electronic communication.

8. **"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.

9. **"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.

10. **"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.

11. **"School climate improvement plan"** means a building-specific plan developed by the school climate committee, in collaboration with the school climate specialist, using school climate survey data and any other relevant information, through a process that engages all members of the school community and involves such members in a series of overlapping systemic improvements, school-wide instructional practices and relational practices that prevent, identify and respond to challenging behavior, including, but not limited to alleged bullying and harassment in the school environment.

12. **“Restorative practices”** means evidence and research-based system-level practices that focus on (A) building high-quality, constructive relationships among the school community, (B) holding each student accountable for any challenging behavior, and (C) ensuring each such student has a role in repairing relationships and reintegrating into the school community.

13. **“School climate survey”** means a research-based, validated and developmentally appropriate survey administered to students, school employees and families of students, in the predominant languages of the members of the school community, that measures and identifies school climate needs and tracks progress through a school climate improvement plan.

14. **“Connecticut school climate policy”** means the school climate policy developed, updated and approved by an association in the state that represents boards of education and adopted by the Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative, established pursuant to section 10-222q of the general statutes, as amended by this act, that provides a framework for an effective and democratically informed school climate improvement process that serves to implement Connecticut school climate standards, and includes a continuous cycle of (A) planning and preparation, (B) evaluation, (C) action planning, and (D) implementation.

15. **“School employee”** means (A) a teacher, substitute teacher, administrator, school superintendent, school counselor, school psychologist, social worker, school nurse, physician, paraeducator or coach employed by a local or regional board of education, 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 school, pursuant to a contract with a local or regional board of education.

16. **“School community”** means any individuals, groups, businesses, public institutions and nonprofit organizations that are invested in the welfare and vitality of a public school system and the community in which it is located, including, but not limited to, students and their families, members of the local or regional board of education, volunteers at a school and school employees.

17. **“Challenging behavior”** means behavior that negatively impacts school climate or interferes, or is at risk of interfering, with the learning or safety of a student or the safety of a school employee.

18. **“Evidence Based Practices”** in education refers to instructional and school-wide improvement practices that systematic empirical research has provided evidence of statistically significant effectiveness.

19. **“Challenging Behavior Reporting Form”** means the form that accompanies the Connecticut School Climate Policy and is intended for students, parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school, and school employees to report alleged challenging behavior and/or alleged bullying incidents. Such form must be included on the Board’s web site and referenced in each of the Board’s student handbooks, and the School Climate Committee must annually provide notice of such form to the school community.

20. **"Effective School Climate Improvement"** is a restorative process that engages all

stakeholders in the following six essential practices:

A. Promoting decision-making that is collaborative and actively involves all stakeholders (e.g., school personnel, students, families, community members) with varied and meaningful roles and perspectives where all voices are heard;
B. Utilizing quantitative (e.g., school climate survey, discipline data) and qualitative (e.g., interviews, focus groups) data to drive action planning, preventive and intervention practices and implementation strategies that continuously improve all dimensions of school climate, including regularly collecting data to evaluate progress and inform the improvement process;
C. Tailoring improvement goals to the unique needs of the students, educators, and broader school community. These goals shall be integrated into overall school improvement efforts thereby leveraging school strengths to address evidence-based areas of need, while sustaining the improvement process over time;
D. Fostering adult learning in teams and/or professional learning communities to build capacity building among school personnel and develop common staff skills to educate the whole child;
E. Basing curriculum, instruction, student supports, and interventions on scientific research and grounding in cognitive, social-emotional, and psychological theories of youth development.
F. Strengthening policies and procedures related to:
   a. climate and restorative informed teaching and learning environments;
   b. infrastructure to facilitate data collection, analysis, and effective planning;
   c. implementation of school climate improvement plans with the goal of becoming restorative;
   d. evaluation of the school climate improvement process; and
   e. sustainability of school climate and restorative improvement efforts.

School Climate Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities

For the school year commencing July 1, 2025, and each school year thereafter, the superintendent of schools for each school district, or an administrator appointed by the superintendent, shall serve as the school climate coordinator for the school district.

The school climate coordinator shall be responsible for:

1. providing district-level leadership and support for the implementation of the school climate improvement plan for each school;

2. collaborating with the school climate specialist, for each school to (A) develop a continuum of strategies to prevent, identify and respond to challenging behavior, including, but not limited to, alleged bullying and harassment in the school environment, and (B) communicate such strategies to the school community, including, but not limited to, through publication in the student handbook and on school websites; and

3. collecting and maintaining data regarding school climate improvement, such as but not limited to, school discipline records, school climate assessments, attendance rates, academic growth data, types and numbers of alleged and verified bullying complaints submitted by members of the school co=unity, types; and
4. meeting with the school climate specialist for each school at least twice during the school

year to (A) identify strategies to improve school climate, including, but not limited to, by responding to challenging behavior and implementing evidence and research-based interventions, such as restorative practices, and (B) propose recommendations for revisions to the school climate improvement plan.

School Climate Specialist
For the school year commencing July 1, 2025, and each school year thereafter, the principal of each school, or a school employee who holds professional certification pursuant to section 10- 145 of the general statutes, is trained in school climate improvement or restorative practices and is designated as the school climate specialist by the school principal, shall serve as the school climate specialist for the school.

The school climate specialist shall be responsible for:

1. leading in the prevention, identification, and response to challenging behavior, including, but not limited to, reports of alleged bullying and harassment;

2. implementing evidence and research-based interventions, including, but not limited to, restorative practices;

3. scheduling meetings for and leading the school climate committee; and

4. leading the implementation of the school climate improvement plan.

School Climate Committee
For the school year commencing July 1, 2025, and each school year thereafter, each school climate specialist shall appoint members to the school climate committee who are representative of the school community.

The school climate committee shall consist of:

1. the school climate specialist;

2. a teacher selected by the exclusive bargaining representative for certified employees chosen pursuant to section 10-153b of the general statutes;

3. a demographically representative group of students enrolled at the school, as developmentally appropriate;

4. families of students enrolled at the school; and

5. at least two members of the school community, as determined by the school climate specialist.

The school climate committee shall be responsible for:

1. assisting in the development, annual scheduling, and administration of the school climate survey, and reviewing of the school climate survey data.

2. using the school climate survey data to identify strengths and challenges to improve school climate, and to create or propose revisions to the school climate improvement plan.

3. assisting in the implementation of the school climate improvement plan and recommending any improvements or revisions to the plan.

4. advising on strategies to improve school climate and implementing evidence and research-based interventions, including, but not limited to, restorative practices, in the school community.

5. annually providing notice of the uniform challenging behavior and/or bullying complaint form, or similar complaint form used by the school, to the school community.

Reporting Challenging Behavior or Bullying
All school employees are required to report any alleged challenging behavior or bullying incident that results in student discipline, such as removal from the classroom, suspension, or expulsion. Students, parents, guardians, and staff may also report such incidents using the Challenging Behavior Reporting Form, available electronically or in hard copy. Reports should include details such as the date, location, a description of the incident, and any known witnesses. The School Climate Specialist will confirm receipt of the form within a reasonable amount of time and will assist individuals in completing the form if needed. Reports may also be submitted anonymously, although no disciplinary action will be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Assessing Challenging Behavior and Bullying
Upon receiving a report, the School Climate Specialist or designee will assess the facts, severity, and intent of the behavior. This includes reviewing the report, consulting relevant individuals, examining supporting materials, and determining whether the conduct violates other policies related to discrimination or harassment. Throughout the process, confidentiality will be maintained as much as possible in accordance with applicable laws. Once the assessment is complete, the School Climate Specialist will determine whether further action is warranted and will follow up with the original reporter upon completing the assessment.

Challenging Behavior or Bullying That Results in Student Discipline
When a report of challenging behavior or bullying leads to disciplinary action, the school will follow existing student discipline policies and codes of conduct. In cases involving students with disabilities,notice will be provided to the student's PPT or 504 team for consideration. The District prohibits any form of retaliation against individuals who report or assist in the investigation of such incidents.

Students with Disabilities
The school shall ensure that any supports, services, or interventions provided in accordance with these regulations to any student who receives special education or accommodation for a disability comply such student's individualized education program or Section 504 plan and applicable law.

School Climate Survey
For the school year commencing July 1, 2025, and biennially thereafter, the school climate committee, for each school, shall administer a school climate survey to students, school employees and families of students, provided the parent or guardian of each student shall receive prior written notice of the content and administration of such school climate survey and shall have a reasonable opportunity to opt such

student out of such school climate survey.

School Climate Improvement Plan
For the school year commencing July 1, 2025, and each school year thereafter, the school climate specialist, for each school, in collaboration with the school climate coordinator, shall develop, and update as necessary, a school climate improvement plan. Such plan shall be based on the results of the school climate survey, any recommendations from the school climate committee, including the protocols, supports, and any other data the school climate specialist and school climate coordinator deem relevant. Such plan shall be submitted to the school climate coordinator for review and approval on or before December thirty-first of each school year. Upon approval of such plan, a written or electronic copy of such plan shall be made available to members of the school community and such plan shall be used in the prevention of, identification of and response to all challenging behavior.

Training
For the school year commencing July 1, 2024, and each school year thereafter, each local and regional Board of Education shall provide resources and training to school employees regarding:

1. social and emotional learning;
2. school climate and culture and evidence and research-based interventions; and
3. restorative practices.

Such resources and training may be made available at each school under the jurisdiction of such board and include technical assistance in the implementation of a school climate improvement plan. Any school employee may participate in any such training offered by the board under this section. The school climate coordinator, shall select, and approve, the individuals or organizations that will provide such training.

Funding
The school district shall in its discretion allocate sufficient funding to satisfy the requirements of this policy for all schools in the district. Such funding shall be distributed accordingly, with Superintendent approval, for assessments and professional development, as well as for school community outreach, training, and technical assistance.

Accountability
The Board shall adopt and allocate adequate resources to support the Connecticut School Climate Policy and adhere to state regulations set forth in Public Act 23-167.

Connecticut School Climate Standards

1. The school district community[1] has a shared <u>vision and plan</u> for promoting and sustaining a positive school climate[2] that focuses on prevention, identification, and response to all challenging behavior[3].

2. The school district community adopts <u>policies</u> that promote:

    a. a sound school environment that develops and sustains academic, social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills; and

    b. a restorative school environment focused on overcoming barriers to teaching and learning by building and supporting meaningful school-wide relationships, and intentionally re-engaging any disengaged students, educators, and families of students

in the school community.

3. The school community's practices are identified, prioritized, and supported to:
   a. promote learning and the positive academic, social, emotional, ethical, and civic development of students;
   b. enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities;
   c. address barriers to teaching and learning; and
   d. develop and sustain a restorative infrastructure that builds capacity, accountability, and sustainability.
4. The school community creates a school environment[5] where *everyone* is safe, welcomed, supported, and included in all school-based activities.
5. The school community creates a restorative system that cultivates a sense of belonging through norms and activities that promote social and civic responsibility, and a dedication to cultural responsiveness, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

[1] School Community means any individuals, groups or businesses, public institutions and nonprofit organizations invested in the welfare and vitality of a public school system and the community in which it is located, including, but not limited to, students and their families, members of the local or regional board of education, volunteers at a school and school employees.

[2] School climate means the quality and character of the school life, with a particular focus on the quality of relationships within the school community, and which is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life, and that reflects the norms, goals, values and interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, leadership practices and organizational structures within the school community.

[3] Challenging behavior means behavior that negatively impacts school climate or interferes, or is at risk of interfering, with the learning or safety of a student or the safety of a school employee.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-222d Policy on bullying behavior as amended by PA 08-160, P.A. 11- 232, P.A. 14-172 and PA 18-15 and PA 19-166.

10-222g Prevention and intervention strategy re bullying and teen dating violence

10-222h Analysis of school districts' efforts re prevention of and response to bullying in schools. School climate assessment instruments

10-222i State-wide safe school climate resource network. *[Repealed, Effective 7/1/2025 State-wide safe school climate resource network]*

10-222k District safe school climate coordinator. Safe school climate specialist. Safe school climate committee (as amended by PA 21-95, Section 14)

10-222p Review of safe school climate plans by Department of Education. Approval or rejection.

PA 23-167 An Act Concerning Transparency in Education

Policy adopted: February 4, 2003

Policy revised: June 3, 2008, January 17, 2012

January 6, 2015, September 17, 2018

January 6, 2020, October 3, 2022

SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Suffield, Connecticut