

419.00 PROFESSIONAL AND RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

I. PURPOSE

Saint Paul Public Schools (“the District”) is committed to promoting and maintaining a workplace environment where every individual is treated with civility, dignity, and respect. To this end, it is the policy of the District to promote a workplace culture that is positive, professional, and grounded in mutual respect. This policy is designed to promote positive communication, respectful behavior, and a safe, harassment-free work and learning environment. It explicitly prohibits unprofessional, uncivil, or disrespectful conduct in any form.

The District recognizes the importance of creating a culture where all employees feel safe, valued, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives. Differences in culture, communication, and lived experience enrich our environment and must be honored in all interactions.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

All District personnel are responsible for helping to create and maintain a workplace that is civil, welcoming, and inclusive. A respectful and professional workplace is essential to recruiting and retaining dedicated employees and delivering high-quality services to students and families.

The District prohibits the use of language, idioms, or expressions that perpetuates stereotypes, reflect implicit or explicit bias, or marginalize individuals or communities based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, slurs, derogatory comments, and culturally insensitive jokes or phrases.

All staff are expected to:

- Demonstrate behavior that reflects equity, integrity, and professionalism.
- Refrain from language or actions—whether intentional or not—that perpetuate harm or undermine the dignity of others.
- Communicate using language that is inclusive, affirming, and free of bias or stereotypes.

The District does **not tolerate** unprofessional, disrespectful, or disruptive behavior. Violations of this policy may result in corrective or disciplinary

action, up to and including termination.

All employees, volunteers*, and contractors are expected to:

1. Conduct themselves in a civil and professional manner and treat each other and students with dignity and respect;
2. Exercise good judgement and resolve conflicts respectfully;
3. Recognize and respect cultural differences and lived experiences (race, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, linguistic, ability-based identities, etc.);
4. Use language that is inclusive and affirming. This includes using a person's correct name and pronouns, avoiding gendered or stereotypical terms in professional communications, and refraining from language that may perpetuate cultural assumptions or systemic inequities.
5. Work honestly, earnestly, collegially and collaboratively with employees and others;
6. Listen actively to others' perspectives, particularly when they differ from your own;
7. Use sound personal or professional judgment when navigating interactions that may present safety concerns and report such incidents according to this policy;
8. Participate in the complaint resolution in good faith; and
9. Report concerns and potential violations of this policy to a supervisor or Human Resources using the process outlined in the reporting procedures.

* Volunteers will be asked to sign a statement to indicate they understand and agree to follow this policy.

Managers and Supervisors Must Also:

1. Clearly communicate staff expectations under this policy;
2. Promptly assess concerns and refer them to Human Resources;

3. Be mindful of how identity, power and bias can intensify harm; and
4. Promote fair and consistent application of this policy.

Understanding Context, Intent and Impact:

While behavior must meet the definitions of “uncivil,” “unprofessional,” or “disrespectful” to be considered a violation, the following principles guide interpretation:

- **Intent matters**, but is not the only factor; **impact on others is critical**.
- **Context matters**, including the relationship between individuals, the cultural or linguistic background of the parties, and power dynamics.
- **Discomfort** alone is not a violation. Some disagreement, feedback, or conflict is normal in a healthy, functioning workplace.

When evaluating whether a behavior violates this policy, the **intent** behind the behavior, the **impact** on those involved, and the **context** in which the behavior occurred must all be considered.

- **Intent** refers to the purpose or motivation behind a person’s actions or words. While harmful intent is more likely to indicate a policy violation, even well-intended actions can still cause harm.
- **Impact** refers to how the behavior is experienced or perceived by others. A person’s words or actions may still be harmful or inappropriate, even if the harm was unintended.
- **Context** includes the situational factors, cultural norms, existing relationships, emotional climate, and any history of prior conflict. Context is essential in distinguishing between discomfort caused by difficult but respectful conversations versus truly unprofessional or disrespectful conduct.

When determining whether a violation has occurred, the District will:

1. Consider whether a reasonable person, with knowledge of the relevant cultural and workplace context, would perceive the behavior as disrespectful or uncivil;
2. Give careful weight to the **actual impact** on the affected person(s), particularly those from historically marginalized or underrepresented groups
3. Examine the **intent**, while recognizing that a lack of malicious intent does not absolve a person from accountability; and

4. Apply culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices throughout the resolution process.

Examples that do **not** typically violate this policy:

1. The normal exercise of supervisory or managerial responsibilities including, but not limited to, granting or denying requests of employees, responding to emails, work assignments and direction, appropriately administered counseling/coaching, disciplinary discussions or job performance evaluations, including constructive criticism, coaching and feedback regarding an employee's conduct or work performance;
2. Direct communication delivered professionally between supervisor/manager and employee(s);
3. Disagreements, misunderstandings, miscommunication or conflict situations where the behavior remains professional and respectful;
4. Legitimate responses to situations that require immediate action and may require a stern and frank dialogue;
5. Differences of opinion and conflicting viewpoints that may be offensive to some individuals, so long as:
 - A. The ideas are presented in a respectful manner and at a time and place that are appropriate; and
 - B. Such expression does not materially disrupt, and may not be reasonably anticipated to disrupt, the educational process or work environment.

Culturally Informed Communication Norms

The District recognizes that communication styles are shaped by a person's cultural background, upbringing, and lived experiences. What is considered "respectful," "assertive," or "professional" can vary across cultural groups and should not be narrowly defined by dominant or traditional norms. As such, communication should be interpreted within a culturally informed framework.

Examples of culturally informed communication styles include:

- **Directness or Indirectness:** Some cultures value direct, forthright communication, while others may prioritize indirectness and diplomacy to preserve harmony.

- **Tone and Volume:** Passionate or expressive speech—including raised voices, hand gestures, or animated facial expressions—may reflect cultural norms rather than anger or hostility.
- **Eye Contact:** In some cultures, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect, not evasion or disengagement.
- **Silence:** Silence may be used intentionally to demonstrate respect, deference, or contemplation, rather than disengagement or defiance.
- **Conflict Resolution Styles:** Preferences for collaborative versus hierarchical problem-solving may differ across cultural groups.

District personnel should make a good-faith effort to understand and adapt to the wide variety of communication practices in a diverse workplace, especially before interpreting a behavior as uncivil, unprofessional, or disrespectful.

III. DEFINITIONS

District Personnel: solely for purposes of this policy, includes, District employees, volunteers and contractors.

Civility is defined as treating others with dignity, respect, and making a good faith effort to regard other's feelings. Corrective action may be taken by supervisors to enhance work performance. The language used to correct or reinforce work standards must be respectful and work related. It is important to note that civility standards must be interpreted through a cultural lens. Civility requires that even the most critical feedback be delivered respectfully, privately, and courteously. Examples of civility include:

1. Treating others with dignity, courtesy, respect, politeness, and consideration;
2. Speaking in tones of voice that are appropriate for the circumstances;
3. Being respectful of others' right to express their views, even if you disagree;
4. Managing conflict with others in a way that honors the dignity of each person.

Incivility deals with a broad range of behaviors. Generally, incivility is defined as behavior that would cause a reasonable person to feel a sense of threat, cause undue stress, and/or cause disturbances of good order. Incivility can be subtle or overt. It may be a single event or may involve a continuing series of incidents and may involve the abuse of authority or position. Incivility may be unintended or deliberately directed at another individual or group of people. While incivility may be intentional or unintentional, its impact on others must

be considered and addressed promptly.

Uncivil conduct for the purposes of this policy is defined as, but not limited to the following:

1. Using language, behavior, or tone that is hostile, threatening, intimidating, malicious, derisive, disdainful, or degrading to another individual;
2. Directing vulgar, obscene or profane gestures or words at another individual;
3. Taunting, jeering, or inciting others to taunt or jeer at another individual;
4. Engaging in excessively loud or aggressive verbal communication, including speaking in a manner that is perceived as hostile, or repeatedly interrupting someone during a time and setting where respectful dialogue is expected;
5. Using personal epithets, slurs, or other references as terms of abuse (including but is not limited to the “N” word), contempt, or hostility toward another individual;
6. Gesturing or behaving in a manner that puts another in fear of their physical safety, including invading their personal space after being directed to move away;
7. Physically blocking another individual’s ability to exit from a room or location;
8. Remaining in the area or on district property after being asked to leave.
9. Violating the privacy of another individual’s belongings (except for lawful searches by school officials conducted in connection with the administration of district rules and applicable laws: and/or
10. Preventing reasonable expressions of differing viewpoints in a manner that is not disruptive or disrespectful particularly in settings where open dialogue is appropriate.

Disrespectful behavior is defined as discourteous, rude or offensive words, gestures or other behavior that may devalue and undermine a person and their dignity or self-esteem or creates an intimidating, hostile, abusive or offensive environment. Examples of disrespectful and/or unprofessional behavior that are prohibited by this policy include, but are not limited to:

1. **Bullying:** bullying is a pattern of repeated behavior that a reasonable person would find hostile, offensive, intimidating, oppressive, subjugating, threatening, or not aligned with the District's mission or values. Bullying behavior may take many forms including physical, verbal, and non-verbal acts or behaviors. Workplace bullying refers to repeated, unreasonable actions of individuals (or a group) directed towards an employee (or a group of employees), which is intended to intimidate and create a risk to health and safety of the individual. Workplace bullying may also involve repeated abuse or misuse of power. A single physical, verbal, or non-verbal act or behavior generally will not constitute bullying unless especially severe and egregious;
2. **Hostility/Intimidation:** yelling, hostile or spiteful conduct, that is deliberate or repeated and/or causes harm to the targeted person's or persons' mental or physical wellbeing, safety, or economic status. This includes physical intimidation, non-verbal behavior such as: silent treatment or refusal to collaborate, unwanted touching, or isolation; using threatening or abusive language, profanity, or language that is intended to be or is perceived by others to be berating, rude, or coercive;
3. **Belittling conduct:** name calling; playing unwelcome "pranks" on a person; making fun of someone or telling jokes at their expense; taking, vandalizing, or otherwise damaging a person's personal or work property; spreading false information or rumors about someone; seeking submission or misuse of power, authority, rank, status, or other privilege;
4. **Microaggressions:** Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional forms of discrimination that can appear as comments, questions, or behaviors that insult, invalidate, or exclude individuals from marginalized groups. They may be verbal or non-verbal behaviors that may demean, dismiss, or insult individuals or groups, particularly along lines of identity, status, or culture. Patterns of such behavior may be addressed under this policy when they contribute to a hostile environment. They also include questioning someone's citizenship, making assumptions about intelligence based on race or gender, or dismissing concerns about racism or bias.
5. **Violence:** throwing tools, office equipment, or other objects as an expression of frustration or anger or implying that one will act with violence as a method of influencing the actions of others;
6. **Sabotage:** intentionally interfering with a process of work or otherwise undermining a person's work or withholding information;

7. Invasive use of technology: using email, social media or other technology to harass or bully; using statements, photographs, video, or audio that could be reasonably viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening, or intimidating;
8. Intentionally making a false report of a violation of this policy.

IV. REPORTING PROCEDURES

Informal Complaint Process: District personnel may choose to immediately communicate in a respectful and professional manner to the individual engaging in behavior that is believed to violate this policy, explaining why their behavior is offensive, and asking them to stop. Often, communicating with the individual is effective because the person may not know that the behavior is inappropriate or offensive. Addressing situations informally when possible is encouraged. Informal resolution is encouraged where appropriate, but the District recognizes that power imbalances or identity-based dynamics may make this option unsafe or ineffective. In such cases, employees are encouraged to report the concern directly to a supervisor or HR Consultant.

Formal Complaint Process: If the behavior continues after it has been addressed through the informal process, the matter is to be reported in writing to a supervisor and/or manager or the HR Consultant assigned to their site/department. If the complaint or a concern is submitted in writing to the HR Consultant, an initial inquiry will be conducted to determine whether there is a reasonable basis to proceed with an investigation or take alternative action. If there is a reasonable basis to move forward, an HR Consultant ([HRC Distribution List](#)) and the supervisor will take appropriate and proportionate action to resolve the matter while adhering to any relevant statute, collective bargaining unit or district policies.

An employee may obtain information from their supervisor, manager, or their designated HR Consultant about filing a formal complaint. ([Professional and Respectful Workplace Complaint Form](#)). If the prohibited behavior or communication is coming from the supervisor, employees are encouraged to go to their next-level manager and/or HR Consultant.

During the complaint process, the confidentiality of the information received, the privacy of the individuals involved, and the wishes of the complainant will be protected to as great a degree as is reasonably possible. During and after the review and resolution of the complaint, all parties, including witnesses when applicable, will be required to maintain strict confidentiality, unless otherwise authorized by law. Employees are expected to cooperate with and participate fully and in good faith by

providing forthright, accurate, complete, and timely information, including statements, testimony, evidence, etc., and to maintain the confidentiality of what is discussed as directed. The failure to cooperate in good faith may result in disciplinary action.

Any District action taken pursuant to this Policy will be consistent with requirements of applicable collective bargaining agreements, contracts, Minnesota Statutes, and District policies. The District will take such disciplinary action it deems necessary and appropriate, including warning, suspension or termination to end and prevent any further occurrences of disrespectful behavior. The District reserves the right to determine whether any type of behavior is disrespectful and injurious to the dignity of employee, stakeholders, students, and morale of the organization.

Complaints which fall under Board Policy 415: Discrimination, Harassment, Violence Retaliation, should be filed pursuant to that policy.

If there is a complaint against a member of the Board of Education, refer to Policy 212.00 - Complaints Against a Member of the Board of Education.

To ensure equity in enforcement, the District commits to trauma-informed, culturally responsive investigation practices and will take steps to ensure that individuals from underrepresented groups feel safe and supported when reporting disrespectful or biased behavior.

The district strictly prohibits retaliation against any individual who, in good faith, reports a concern under this policy or participates in an investigation. Retaliatory actions include, but are not limited to, intimidation, reprisal or harassment. Staff engage who engage in retaliation may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Cross References:

Policy 415.00:	Discrimination, Harassment, Violence and Retaliation Policy
Policy 212.00	Complaints Against a Member of the Board of Education
Policy 418.00	Gender Inclusion - Staff
Policy 500.00	Gender Inclusion - Students