SUBJECT: STUDENT HARASSMENT AND BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION: PEER ABUSE IN THE SCHOOLS

The Board of Education is committed to providing a safe and productive learning environment within its schools that promotes respect, dignity and equality. The Board recognizes that acts of discrimination, such as harassment, hazing and bullying, are detrimental to student learning and achievement. These behaviors interfere with the mission of the district to educate its students, and they disrupt the operation of the schools. Such behavior affects not only the students who are its targets but also those individuals who participate and witness such acts.

To this end, the Board strictly prohibits all forms of discrimination, such as harassment, (policies 6121,7551) hazing (policy 7553) and bullying on school property, on school buses, and at school sponsored events and/or activities, whether occurring on or off campus, including any electronic format.

Engages in Bullying Behavior

The Board of Education requires the prohibition of harassment/bullying, along with the range of possible intervention activities and/or sanctions for such misconduct, to be included in the District Code of Conduct for all grade levels.

For purposes of this policy, the term "bullying" among children is defined, in general, as: "a variety of negative acts carried out repeatedly over time." It is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated over time. The person who is bullying has the intent to cause harm. Bullying conduct includes, but is not limited to, harassment that is related to race, color, weight, ethnicity, national origin, religion, religious practices, sexual orientation, gender or sex, age, disability, and physical appearance.

Bullying can take three forms:

a) Physical (including, but not limited to, hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, taking personal belongings);
b) Verbal (including, but not limited to, taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, making threats); and
c) Psychological (including, but not limited to, non-verbal actions, i.e. giving dirty looks or aggressive stares; spreading rumors; manipulating social relationships; or engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation.

It is important to note that a single negative act as enumerated above may also constitute "bullying" (if not more serious misconduct) based upon the particular circumstances such as the seriousness of the act and/or

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the intent of the actor. Administration will use discretion in reviewing each incident independently in the context of the situation.

Bullying/ harassment may constitute a violation of an individual's civil rights. The District is mindful of its responsibilities under the law and in accordance with district policy regarding civil rights protections.

Engages in Cyberbullying Behavior

As with other forms of bullying, cyberbullying is an attempt to display power and control over someone perceived as weaker. Cyberbullying involving students may occur both on campus and off school grounds and may involve student use of the District Internet system or student use of personal digital devices while at school, such as cell phones, digital cameras, and personal computers to engage in bullying. Cyberbullying is unacceptable, and offenders shall be subject to appropriate staff intervention which may result in administrative discipline.

Cyberbullying includes, but is not limited to, the following misuses of technology: harassing, teasing, intimidating, threatening, or terrorizing another student or staff member by way of any technological tool, such as sending or posting inappropriate or derogatory e-mail messages, instant messages, text or pager messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including chat rooms or blogs).

Cyberbullying has the effect of:

a) Placing a student in reasonable fear of physical, emotional or mental harm;
b) Placing a student in reasonable fear of damage to or loss of personal property; and
c) Creating an intimidating or hostile environment that substantially interferes with a student's educational opportunities.

Also, cyberbullying that occurs off-campus, and causes or threatens to cause a material or substantial disruption in the school, could allow school officials to apply the "***Tinker*** standard" where a student's off-campus "speech" may be subject to formal discipline by school officials when it is determined that the off-campus speech did cause a substantial disruption or threat thereof within the school setting [Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Sch. Dist. 393 U.S. 503 (1969)]. Such conduct could also be subject to appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with the District Code of Conduct and possible referral to local law enforcement authorities.

It is important to note that a single negative act as enumerated above may also constitute "cyberbullying" (if not more serious misconduct) based upon the particular circumstances, such as the seriousness of the act

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and/or the intent of the actor. Administration will use discretion in reviewing each incident independently viewed in the context of the situation.

The Board of Education shall require the prohibition of cyberbullying along with the range of possible intervention activities and/or sanctions for such misconduct to be included in the District Code of Conduct for all grade levels.

Rules against cyberbullying shall be publicized District-wide and shall be disseminated as appropriate to staff, students and parents. Disciplinary sanction for violation of Board policy and administration regulation shall be outlined in the District Code of Conduct as enumerated above and may also be incorporated in staff and student handbooks.

Prevention and Intervention

The District will emphasize among staff and students, that cooperation and respect for others is a key district value. Curriculum and programs designed to help students build more supportive relationships will be emphasized and integrated in classroom instruction and in extracurricular activities. Staff members and students will be trained to respond to the warning signs of harassment and to recognize their responsibility to become actively involved in the prevention of harassment before overt acts occur.

Personnel at all levels are responsible for taking corrective action to prevent harassing behavior of which they have been made aware at all District property sites or activities and/or reporting such behavior to their immediate supervisor. Further, staff training shall be provided to raise awareness of the problem of harassment within the schools and to facilitate staff identification of and response to such harassing behavior among students.

Prevention and intervention techniques within the District to prevent harassing behavior and to support and protect victims shall include building-level and classroom-level strategies and activities as determined by administration.

Intervention by adults and bystanders is an important step in preventing escalation and resolving issues at the earliest stages. Intervention will emphasize education and skill building. Successful intervention includes remediation. Remedial responses to harassment include measures designed to correct the problem behavior, prevent another occurrence of the behavior and protect the target. Remediation may apply to an individual or be implemented through environmental approaches which address the school district as a whole. Staff, students and parents work in collaboration to define and implement any needed

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accommodations when a child does not feel safe at school.

Training and Awareness

The Board ensures that training opportunities are provided to all staff, including, but not limited to, bus drivers, cafeteria employees and all staff who have contact with students. The superintendent will appoint a District Dignity Act Coordinator. (DDAC) Each building will recommend for Board approval an individual at each school to act as Dignity Act Coordinator (DAC) who is the designated representative at each building. The District Dignity Act Coordinator will ensure that the Building DAC is thoroughly trained in human relations in the areas of race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender and sex in order to implement this policy. A list of the assigned DACs in each building will be provided to the Board. If for any reason, the position of Building Dignity Act Coordinator becomes vacant, a new Dignity Act Coordinator will be designated immediately, for an interim appointment, pending approval from the Board of Education, within 30 days of the date the position was vacated. The District must provide the change in information to parents or persons in parental relation as soon as practicable. This change does not constitute a revision to the Code of Conduct so as to provide a public hearing.

The District will establish guidelines for training which will be approved by the Board of Education. Training will be provided each school year for <u>all</u> District employees in conjunction with existing professional development training to raise staff awareness and sensitivity of bullying, discrimination, and/or harassment directed at students that are committed by students or school employees on school property, at a school function, or off school property when the actions create or would foreseeably create a risk of substantial disruption within the school environment or where it is foreseeable that the conduct might reach school property.

Training will include ways to promote a supportive school environment that is free from bullying, discrimination, and/or harassment. Training will:

a. Raise awareness and sensitivity to potential acts of harassment aimed at students.
b. Address social patterns of harassment and the effects on students.
c. Inform employees on the identification and mitigation of such acts.
d. Provide strategies for effectively addressing problems of exclusion, bias, and aggression.
e. Include safe and supportive school climate concepts in curriculum and classroom management.
f. Ensure school employees are knowledgeable in prevention methods and can respond to incidents of harassment.
g. Ensure the effective implementation of school policy on conduct and discipline.

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Instruction in grades Kindergarten through 12 will include a component on civility, citizenship, and character education. Such component will instruct students on the principles of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observance of laws and rules, courtesy, dignity, and other traits which will enhance the quality of their experiences in, and contributions to, the community. For the purposes of this policy, "tolerance," "respect for others," and "dignity" will include awareness and sensitivity to bullying, discrimination and/or harassment, and civility in the relations of people of different races, weights, national origins, ethnic groups, religions, religious practices, mental or physical abilities, sexual orientations, genders, and sexes. Such component must also include instruction on the safe and responsible use of the Internet and electronic communications.

Rules against bullying, discrimination, and/or harassment will be included in the *Code of Conduct*, publicized District-wide and disseminated to all staff and parents. Any amendments to the Code will be disseminated as soon as practicable following their adoption. New teachers shall be provided a complete copy of the current Code upon their employment. An age-appropriate summary shall be distributed to all students at a school assembly at the beginning of each school year.

Reports and Investigation of Allegations of Harassing Behavior

Any student who believes that he/she is being subjected to harassing behavior, as well as any other person who has knowledge of or witnesses any possible occurrence of harassment, shall report the behavior to the building principal or designee. The building principal or designee to whom the report is made shall investigate the complaint and take appropriate action to include, as necessary, referral to the next level of supervisory authority. Investigation of allegations of harassment follows the procedures utilized for complaints of harassment within the School District. Allegations of harassment shall be promptly investigated and will be treated as confidential and private to the extent possible within legal constraints. The superintendent, principal, or their designee shall notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency when it is believed that any harassment, bullying, and/or discrimination constitutes criminal conduct.

Students who have been harassed, parents whose children have been harassed, or other students and staff who observe harassing behavior are encouraged and expected to make a verbal and/or written complaint in accordance to provided guidelines. Complaints will be documented, tracked, and handled in accordance with the regulations and procedures accompanying this policy and the district policies on non discrimination and harassment and the District Code of Conduct. If a staff member is unsure of the reporting procedure he/she is expected to inquire about the process by speaking with his/her supervisor or the Dignity Act Coordinator in his/her building. Incidents will be included in the Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting (VADIR) system when applicable by the building DAC.

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All school personnel are required to report any incidents of student-to-student and staff-to-student harassment observed to their building principal, immediate supervisor or the Dignity Act Coordinator at his/her school building within one school day after witnessing or receiving a report of such incident. The employee must then file a written report within two (2) school days after making the oral report. All employees must provide details of the incident, including where it occurred and the specific nature of the incident including, but not limited to, the types of bias involved (actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender, sex, or other). Where multiple types of bias are involved, they will all be reported, whether the incident resulted from student and/or employee conduct and involved physical contact and/or verbal threats, intimidation or abuse. After the DAC investigates the complaint, the results of the investigation shall be reported back to both the target and the accused. If either party disagrees with the results of the investigation, they can appeal the findings. Students, parents and staff have the option to report an incident using the Dignity Act Reporting Form found on the District website. This form may be used to file complaints anonymously, however the District seeks to work in partnership with parents, staff, and students to resolve problems. Anonymous reporting can limit the ability of the DAC to resolve complaints.

Disciplinary Consequences/Remediation

Responses to student violations of this policy shall be age-appropriate and include both appropriate remedial responses and consequences for a student or staff member who commits one or more acts of harassment. Consequences will be unique to the individual incident and will vary in method and severity according to the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of behaviors, and must be consistent with the District Code of Conduct.

Confidentiality

It is district policy to respect the privacy of all parties and witnesses to bullying. To the extent possible, the District does not release the details of a complaint or the identity of the complainant or the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed to any third parties who do not need to know such information. However, because an individual's desire for confidentiality must be balanced with the District's legal obligation to provide due process to the accused, to conduct a prompt and thorough investigation and/or take necessary action to resolve the complaint, the district retains the right to disclose the identity of parties and witnesses to complaints in appropriate circumstances to individuals with a need to know. The staff member responsible for investigating complaints (DAC) discusses confidentiality standards and concerns with complainants.

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Prohibition of Retaliatory Behavior (Commonly Known as "Whistle-Blower" Protection)

The Board prohibits any retaliatory behavior directed against complainants, victims, witnesses, and/or any other individuals who participate in the investigation of allegations of harassment. Follow-up inquiries and/or appropriate monitoring of the alleged perpetrator and victim shall be made to ensure that harassing behavior has not resumed and that all those involved in the investigation have not suffered retaliation.

Dissemination, Monitoring, Review and Reporting

This policy or a plain language summary shall be published in student registration materials, student, parent and employee handbooks, and posted on the district website. A form to report harassment, bullying, cyber bullying, or intimidation, will be posted on the district's website. The District will ensure that the process of reporting harassment is clearly explained to all staff, students, and parents.

The policy will be reviewed to assess its effectiveness on an annual basis by the District Health and Wellness Committee who will recommend changes to the Board for its consideration.

Civil Service Law Section 75-b
NOTE: Refer also to Policies #3410 – District Code of Conduct
#3420 -- Anti-Harassment in the School District
#7551 -- Sexual Harassment of Students
#7553 -- Hazing of Students
#6121 – Anti-Harassment/Anti-Discrimination in the District (Personnel)
#7551 -- Anti-Harassment/Anti-Discrimination in the District (Students)