

# Mercer County School District

## Policy on Bullying

### Introduction

This policy is based largely on the work developed by an anti-bullying task force that was assembled by the staff at the DuPage Regional Office of Education, and it is believed to be in full compliance with rules and regulations of the Illinois School Code.

The purpose of the Policy on bullying is to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that no student will be subject to any bullying and to otherwise secure a safe, orderly and respectful environment that promotes teaching and learning.

A feature of this Policy is the clarifying Comments to each section. The purpose of these Comments is to provide practical examples to assist in the interpretation and application of the Policy.

### I. The Illinois School Code

The Illinois General Assembly finds that “a safe and civil school environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve and that bullying causes physical, psychological, and emotional harm to students and interferes with students’ ability to learn and participate in school activities. Because of the negative outcomes associated with bullying in schools, the General Assembly finds that school districts and non-public, non-sectarian elementary and secondary schools should educate students, parents, and school district personnel about what behaviors constitute prohibited bullying.” 105 ILCS 5/27-23.7.

and

“Every school district shall create and maintain a policy on bullying and must communicate its policy to students and their parents on an annual basis.” Id.

and

“The School board, in consultation with the parent-teacher advisory committees on student discipline and other community based organizations, must include provisions in the student discipline policy to address students who have demonstrated behaviors that put them at risk for aggressive behavior, including without limitation bullying, as defined in the policy. These provisions must include procedures for notifying parents or legal guardians and early intervention procedures based on available community based and district resources.” 105 ILCS 5/10-20.14(d).

### II. Bullying Defined

**Bullying** is any type of conduct that may:

1. Reflect a coercive imbalance of power; AND
2. Is purposeful and repeated; AND
3. Places an individual in reasonable fear of substantial detrimental effect to his or her person or property or to otherwise substantially interfere in participating in any activity.

## Clarifying Comments

The Illinois legislature defines “Bullying” as meaning:

“Any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

- (1) Placing the student or students in reasonable fear or harm to the student’s or students’ person or property;
- (2) Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student’s or students’ physical or mental health;
- (3) Substantially interfering with the student’s or students’ academic performance; or
- (4) Substantially interfering with the student’s or students’ ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.”

105 ILCS 5/27-23(b)

The Illinois legislature also authorizes school boards and their discipline advisory committees broad discretion to establish appropriate behavioral standards for their respective schools, which take into consideration but are not limited to conduct prohibited by State and federal laws. See, 105 ILCS 5/10-20.14(d). The statutory definition of bullying set forth in the School Code is intended to be incorporated into the Policy definition of bullying, but is not intended to limit conduct that otherwise falls within the Policy definition from being classified as bullying conduct if that conduct does not also fall within the School Code’s definition.

For purposes of this Policy “Conduct” includes:

- Physical acts, such as physical contact with another, stalking, sexual assault and destruction or damage to property of another;
- Written and electronic communication any medium as well as verbal threats made to another or blackmail, or demands for protection money;
- Non-verbal threats or intimidation such as aggressive menacing gestures may also be considered conduct for purposes of this policy;
- Use of school property, including computers, the electronic network, or any other electronic device, to communicate with others; and.
- Any of the above conduct which occurs off school grounds when such conduct creates. Or reasonably can be expected to create, a substantial disruption in the school setting and/or at school sponsored activities and events.

In addition to that conduct described above, *examples* of conduct that may constitute bullying included the following:

- Blocking access to school property or facilities;
- Stealing or hiding or otherwise defacing books, backpacks or other personal possessions;
- Verbal, written, or electronic means of repeated or pervasive taunting, name-calling, belittling, mocking putdowns, or demeaning humor relating to a student’s race, color, gender, sexual orientation, ancestry, religion, disability, or other personal characteristics, whether or not the student actually possesses them, that could reasonably be expected to result in the disruption of school activities or that results in a hostile educational environment for the student.

Conduct that would *not ordinarily* be considered bullying for purposes of this policy includes:

- Mere teasing
- “talking trash”
- Trading insults
- The expression of ideas or beliefs (expressions protected by the First Amendment), so long as such expression is not lewd, profane, or intended to intimidate or harass another.

Each school may set rules or policies for civility, courtesy and responsible behavior to address conduct of this type.

The examples set out in these Clarifying Comments are meant to be illustrative and are not exhaustive of conduct that may or may not be considered “Bullying.” Nor are they intended to limit the exercise of discretion granted to school administrators under Sections 5/10-20.12(d) or 5/10-22.6 of the School Code for addressing instances of student misconduct.

### **III. Bullying is prohibited**

Bullying is NOT acceptable and is strictly prohibited. Bullying conduct that is covered by this Policy is conduct that occurs on school property or at school or at school sponsored activities or events; while students are being transported or walking to or from school or school sponsored activities or events; while students are waiting at school bus stops, or when the conduct otherwise would substantially impede the educational environment, regardless of where the conduct occurs.

Any student who engages in bullying will be subject to appropriate discipline, up to and including suspension or expulsion and referral to local law enforcement. A student’s bullying conduct also may be addressed through any other behavioral interventions.

Any student who is a bystander to any bullying conduct and who fails to take any action to discourage the bullying conduct also may be subject to appropriate discipline.

No student shall be retaliated against for reporting bullying conduct. Any student who is determined to intentionally have falsely accused another of bullying shall be subject to appropriate discipline.

#### **Clarifying Comments**

The highest risk location for bullying occurs:

- On the school bus
- Walking to and from school
- On school playgrounds
- In school cafeterias, locker rooms, and in bathrooms
- Through use of the Internet and cellular phones

This Policy applies to bullying that may occur at any of these locations, but is not limited to these locations.

For purposes of this Policy, a **bystander** to bullying is a witness to bullying conduct and may be considered to be aiding or abetting the bully. This aiding and abetting includes, but may not be limited to, standing idly by, looking away or otherwise actively encouraging the bully.

**Responding to bullying:** In determining the appropriate response to or discipline of students who engage in bullying behavior, the school's administration should consider the ages and maturity of the students involved; they type, frequency and any pattern of behaviors; the context in which the incidents occurred; and any other relevant circumstances. In this regard, this Policy recognizes the sound principles in any response or discipline that may be imposed.

#### **IV. Report and Investigation**

Anyone who witnesses any conduct that could constitute bullying shall make a written report as soon as possible to any school staff member. This report then shall be submitted to the principal or designees(s) responsible for student discipline who as soon as practicable shall conduct or cause to be conducted a thorough investigation of the alleged incident. Discipline and/or other intervention appropriate to the outcome of the investigation shall be imposed consistent with the School District's adopted discipline code.

The police and State's Attorney shall be notified immediately of all incidents involving bodily harm, property damage or any conduct which reasonably is believed by the school administrator(s) to be a violation of the criminal laws. The investigation of any such bullying conduct shall proceed in cooperation with the police and other applicable law enforcement authorities. The School District always retains its' right to investigate and impose any discipline for violation of this Policy, whether or not criminal charges are pursued.

The Superintendent or designee periodically shall review disciplinary incidents involving bullying conduct or conduct placing students at risk of bullying for purposes of monitoring: 1) the effectiveness of the District's programs and interventions in creating a climate of mutual respect and civility in the school community, and 2) the application of this policy in a non-discriminatory manner. A report of the Superintendent's findings shall be made to the Board of Education at least once a year.

#### **V. Notification / Training**

Students and Parents / legal guardians will be notified of this Policy annually through receipt of the school's Handbook. The Policy is also posted on the school's website.

The school shall include a program on bullying prevention and character instruction appropriate to all grade levels. Such a prevention program includes incorporating student social and emotional development, as required by State law.

All partners to this agreement understand the importance of the most current and up-to-date information on issues relating to bullying and agree to utilize their best efforts in participating in training and sharing information on this important topic. Any training in the schools will include training for all teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, coaches, sponsors of student groups and any volunteer who is engaged in interacting with students on a regular basis.