

Students

BULLYING

5131.911(a)

The Board of Education promotes a secure and happy school climate, conducive to teaching and learning that is free from threat, harassment and any type of bullying behavior and teen dating violence. Therefore, it shall be the policy of the Board that bullying and/or teen dating violence committed against a student by another student is prohibited.

The Board believes that a school environment in which students feel safe, supported, engaged and helpfully challenged is optimal for learning and healthy development. The Board seeks an environment in which students and adults feel socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically safe; an environment that is free of harassment, intimidation, teen dating violence and bullying.

In addition, the norms that are established by adults through consistent enforcement of all policies pertaining to conduct and modeling appropriate behavior at school and at home will reduce the instances and damage of bullying and/or teen dating violence. It is necessary for students to promote the concept that caring for others is a valued quality, one that is accepted and encouraged.

I. Definitions

A. “Bullying” means an act that is direct or indirect and severe, persistent, or pervasive, which:

1. causes physical or emotional harm to an individual;
2. places an individual in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm; or
3. infringes on the rights or opportunities of an individual at school.

Bullying shall include, but need not be limited to, a written, oral or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics.

- B. “**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.
- C. “**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 electronic communications.
- D. “**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

Students

BULLYING (continued)

5131.911(b)

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.

- E. **“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, photo-electronic or photo-optical system.
- F. **“Hostile environment”** means a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate.
- G. **“Outside of the school setting”** means at a location, activity or program that is not school related, or through the use of an electronic device or a mobile electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education.
- H. **“School employee”** means (a) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by a local or regional board of education or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; 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 elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with the local or regional board of education.
- I. **“School climate”** means the quality and character of school life with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults (and reflects norms, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures).

II. Bullying and Teen Dating Violence Conduct

- A. Examples of bullying include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. physical violence and attacks;
 - 2. verbal taunts, name-calling and disparaging language including ethnically-based or gender-based verbal disparaging language (including disparaging language directed toward one’s family);
 - 3. sexual harassment including unwanted sexual attention or insulting or degrading sexual remarks or conduct;
 - 4. threats and intimidation;
 - 5. extortion or stealing of money and/or possessions;
 - 6. exclusion from peer groups within the school;

Students

BULLYING (continued)

5131.911(c)

7. the misuse of electronic communications for the purpose of bullying, harassing, or sexually harassing other students within school or out of school (“cyberbullying”)
 8. teen dating violence;
 9. targeting of a student based on the student’s actual or perceived “differentiating” characteristics such as race; color; religion; ancestry; national origin; gender; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; socioeconomic or academic status; physical appearance; or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability.
- B. Such conduct is disruptive of the educational process and, therefore, bullying and teen dating violence are not acceptable behavior in this district and are prohibited.
- C. Students who engage in any act of bullying and/or teen dating violence on school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by the Board of Education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the Board of Education, and outside of the school setting if such bullying:
1. creates a hostile environment at school for the victim,
 2. infringes on the rights of the victim at school, or
 3. substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school,
- are subject to appropriate and escalating disciplinary action up to and including suspension and expulsion from school, and/or referral to law enforcement officials.

III. Safe School Climate Plan

- A. Consistent with the requirements under state law, the Board authorizes the Superintendent or designee(s), along with the Safe School Climate Coordinator, to be responsible for developing and implementing a Safe School Climate Plan in furtherance of this policy. As provided by state law, such Safe School Climate Plan shall include, but not be limited to provisions which:
1. enable students to anonymously report acts of bullying to school employees and require students and the parents or guardians of students to be notified at the beginning of each school year of the process by which students may make such reports;
 2. enable the parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying;
 3. require school employees who witness acts of bullying or receive reports of bullying to orally notify the safe school climate specialist, or another school administrator if the safe school climate specialist is unavailable, not later than one school day after such school

Students
BULLYING (continued)

5131.911(d)

- employee witnesses or receives a report of bullying, and to file a written report not later than two school days after making such oral report;
4. require the safe school climate specialist to investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of bullying and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly after receipt of any written reports made under this section and that the parents or guardians of the student alleged to have committed an act or acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of the student against whom such alleged act or acts were directed receive prompt notice that such investigation has commenced;
 5. require the safe school climate specialist to review any anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report;
 6. include a prevention and intervention strategy for school employees to deal with bullying and teen dating violence;
 7. provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying;
 8. require each school to notify the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed not later than forty-eight hours after the completion of the investigation described in subdivision (4), above (A) of the results of such investigation, and (B) verbally or by electronic mail, if such parents' or guardians' electronic mail addresses are known, that such parents or guardians may refer to the plain language explanation of the rights and remedies available under Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 10-4a and 10-4b published on the Internet website of the Board;
 9. require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student against whom such act was directed to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed and policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying;
 10. require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying to a meeting, separate and distinct from the meeting required in subdivision (9) above, to discuss specific interventions undertaken by the school to prevent further acts of bullying;
 11. establish a procedure for each school to document and maintain records relating to reports and investigations of bullying in such school and to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and annually report such number to the Department of Education and in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education;

Students

BULLYING (continued)

5131.911(e)

12. direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline;
13. prohibit discrimination and retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying;
14. direct the development of student safety support plans for students against whom an act of bullying was directed that address safety measures the school will take to protect such students against further acts of bullying;
15. require the principal of a school, or the principal's designee, to notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency when such principal, or the principal's designee, believes that any acts of bullying constitute criminal conduct;
16. prohibit bullying (A) on school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the Board, and (B) outside of the school setting if such bullying (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, or (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school;
17. require, at the beginning of each school year, each school to provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district's safe school climate plan; and
18. require that all school employees annually complete the training described in Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 10-220a or 10-222j related to the identification, prevention and response to bullying.

The notification required pursuant to subdivision (8) (above) and the invitation required pursuant to subdivisions (9) and (10) (above) shall include a description of the response of school employees to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying. Any information provided under this policy or accompanying Safe School Climate Plan shall be provided in accordance with the confidentiality restrictions imposed under the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act ("FERPA") and the district's Confidentiality and Access to Student Information policy and regulations.

Students

BULLYING (continued)

5131.911(f)

- B. The District shall submit its Safe School Climate Plan to the State Department of Education for review and approval. Not later than thirty (30) calendar days after approval by the Department, the District shall make such plan available on the District's and each individual school in the school district's web site and ensure that the Safe School Climate Plan is included in the school district's publication of the rules, procedures, and standards of conduct for schools and in all student handbooks.

As required by state law, the District, after consultation with the Connecticut Department of Education and the Connecticut Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative, shall provide on the District's website training materials to school administrators regarding the prevention of and intervention in discrimination against and targeted harassment of students based on such students' (1) actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or (2) association with individuals or groups who have or are perceived to have one or more of such characteristics.

As required by state law, the District shall post on its website the plain language explanation of rights and remedies under Connecticut General Statutes §§ 10-4a and 10-4b, as developed and provided to the District by the Connecticut Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative.

- C. The Board expects prompt and reasonable investigations of alleged acts of bullying and/or teen dating violence. The Safe School Climate Specialist of each school is responsible for handling all complaints of alleged bullying. The Safe School Climate Specialist shall investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of bullying promptly.

D. Safe School Climate Assessment

1. The Board requires each school in the District, on and after July 1, 2012, and every other year thereafter, to complete an assessment using school climate assessment instruments, including surveys, approved and disseminated by the Department of Education pursuant to C.G.S. 10- 222h, as amended by PA 11-232. The Board will collect the school climate assessments of each District school and submit them to the Department of Education.
2. The Superintendent shall develop rules and procedures, which carry out the provisions of this policy. In designing administrative regulations (School Climate Plan), the Superintendent will consult with the greater school community, including parents and students. In addition, the Superintendent shall provide that students and parents of students are notified of this prohibition against bullying and/or teen dating violence and the penalties for violating the prohibition by ensuring the posting of such information at each school and by ensuring inclusion of such information in student and parent handbooks.
3. This policy shall not be interpreted to prohibit a reasonable and civil exchange of

Students

BULLYING (continued)

5131.911(f)

opinions, or debate that is protected by state or federal law.

Legal Reference:

Connecticut General Statutes

10-15b Access of parent or guardian to student's records. Inspection and subpoena of school or student records.

10-222d Policy on bullying behavior as amended by PA 08-160 and PA 11-232.

PA 06-115 An Act Concerning Bullying Policies in Schools and Notices Sent to Parents or Legal Guardians.

PA 11-232 An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws.

P.A 14-172 An Act Concerning Improving Employment Opportunities Through Education and Ensuring Safe School Climates

P.A. 14-196 (tangentially) An Act Concerning A State-Wide Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness Program

P.A. 14-232 An Act Concerning The Review and Approval of Safe School Climate Plans by the Department of Education and a Student Safety Hotline Feasibility Study

P.A. 14-234 An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

P.A. 13-3 An Act Concerning Gun Violence Prevention and Childrens' Safety

Adopted 8/29/2004

Revised and Adopted 6/2006

Revised and Adopted 7/2008

Revised and adopted 11/2010

Revised and Adopted 7/2011

Revised & Adopted 11/22/2011

Revised & Adopted 4/7/2015

Revised & Adopted 10/12/21

Students