

SERIES 2002-2003
CIRCULAR LETTER: C-20

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Theodore S. Sergi
Commissioner of Education

DATE: November 18, 2002

SUBJECT: Bullying Behavior in Schools

An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the Pledge of Allegiance was passed in this year's legislative session. The purpose of this letter is to provide guidance on the requirements related to bullying.

Section 1 of Public Act 02-119, An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Effective July 1, 2002) Each local and regional board of education shall develop a policy, **for use on and after February 1, 2003**, to address the existence of bullying in its schools. Such policy shall: (1) Enable students to anonymously report acts of bullying to teachers and school administrators, (2) enable the parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying, (3) require teachers and other school staff who witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying to notify school administrators, (4) require school administrators to investigate any written reports filed pursuant to subdivision (2) of this section and to review any anonymous reports, (5) include an intervention strategy for school staff to deal with bullying, (6) provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying, (7) require 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 to be notified, and (8) require each school to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection. The notification required pursuant to subdivision (7) of this section shall include a description of the response of school staff to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying. For purposes of this section, "bullying" means any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds or at a school-sponsored activity which acts are repeated against the same student over time.

In developing a policy to address bullying behavior, I would encourage local districts to seek the involvement of school administrators, teachers, students, parents and local law enforcement. The intent of the legislation is to ensure that acts of bullying behavior are reported to the appropriate school personnel; incidents are reviewed and investigated; and all parties are brought together to address the problem.

The legislation is clear that there are to be ways for students, teachers and parents to communicate and report acts of bullying and that each school maintain a publicly available list of the number of verified bullying acts that occurred in the school.

This legislation requires that school administrators investigate parents' written reports and review students' anonymous reports. I would encourage you to establish written procedures regarding how an investigation and review will be conducted.

The investigation and review of incidents of bullying and the required notice to parents or guardians of all students involved in a verified act of bullying and the school's response and any consequences that may result from further acts of bullying should comply with the rights of confidentiality of students. Check with your board legal counsel before releasing the required notice. Additionally, when referring to any consequences that may result from further acts of bullying, school administrators should not detail progressive discipline steps that may restrict aggressive enforcement of future offenses. Finally, while not required by this public act, parents or guardians of the student victim could be informed of actions taken by the school district to provide safety for the student victim who fears retaliation.

With permission from the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), a sample policy is attached. If you have questions about developing your board policy, please call Nancy Pugliese, Education Consultant, at 713-6582.

TSS:eld
Attachment

It is mandated to have a policy on this topic.

Students

Hazing

Bullying

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. Therefore it shall be the policy of the Board that bullying of a student by another student is prohibited.

Bullying is defined as any overt acts by a student or groups of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds or at a school sponsored activity, which acts are repeated against the same student over time.

Examples of bullying include, but are not limited to:

1. physical violence and attacks
2. verbal taunts, name-calling and put-downs including ethically-based or gender-based verbal put-downs
3. threats and intimidation
4. extortion or stealing of money and/or possessions
5. exclusion from peer groups within the school

Such conduct is disruptive of the educational process and, therefore, bullying is not acceptable behavior in this district and is prohibited.

Students who engage in any act of bullying, while at school, at any school function, or in connection to or with any district sponsored activity or event are subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including suspension, expulsion and/or referral to law enforcement officials.

A comprehensive program, involving everyone in the schools and the community, to address bullying at all school levels is essential to reducing incidences of bullying. Such a program must involve interventions at all levels, school wide, classroom and individual.

The District's program:

1. Permits anonymous reports of bullying by students and written reports by parents or guardians;
2. Requires teachers and other school staff to notify school administrators of bullying acts they witness and students' reports they receive;
3. Requires school administrators to investigate parents' written reports and review students' anonymous reports
4. Requires each school to maintain a publicly available list of the number of verified bullying acts that occurred there;

Students

Hazing

Bullying (continued)

5. Requires each school to have an intervention strategy for school staff to deal with bullying, including language about bullying in student codes of conduct; and
6. Requires notice to parents or guardians of all students involved in a verified act of bullying. The notice must describe the school's response and any consequences that may result from further acts of bullying.

The Board expects prompt and reasonable investigations of alleged acts of bullying. The Principal of each school or his/her designee is responsible for handling all complaints of alleged 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. It is necessary for students to promote the concept that caring for others is a valued quality, one that is accepted and encouraged.

Optional language:

A bullying prevention program shall be implemented which strives to develop a school and home environment:

- characterized by warmth, positive interest and involvement by adults;
- firm limits to unacceptable behavior;
- where non-hostile, non-physical negative consequences are consistently applied in cases of violations of rules and other unacceptable behaviors;
- where adults act as authorities and positive role models; and
- where students are included in efforts to improve school climate.

The Superintendent shall develop rules and procedures, which carry out the provisions of this policy. [In designing administrative regulations, the Superintendent should consult with the greater school community, including students.] In addition, the Superintendent shall provide that students and parents of students are notified of this prohibition against bullying 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. [**Alternate language:** this policy shall be included in all student and faculty handbooks and shall be disseminated to the public in a manner to be determined by the Superintendent.]

Students

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Bullying (continued)

This policy shall not be interpreted to prohibit a reasonable and civil exchange of opinions, or debate, that is protected by state or federal law.

- (cf. 0521 - Nondiscrimination)
- (cf. 5114 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process)
- (cf. 5131 - Conduct)
- (cf. 5131.21 - Violent and Aggressive Behavior)
- (cf. 5131.912 – Aggressive Behavior)
- (cf. 5131.91 - Hazing)
- (cf. 5144 - Discipline/Punishment)
- (cf. 5145.4 - Nondiscrimination)
- (cf. 5145.5 - Sexual Harassment)
- (cf. 5145.51 - Peer Sexual Harassment)
- (cf. 6121 - Nondiscrimination)
- (cf. 6121.1 - Equal Educational Opportunity)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

PA 02-119, An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the Pledge of Allegiance

Policy adopted:

A sample regulation on this topic to consider.

Students

Hazing

Bullying

RATIONALE: The purpose of the policy on bullying is to promote consistency of approach and to create a climate in which all types of bullying are regarded as unacceptable. Attitudes and practices can contribute to bullying, to lower levels of confidence, self-esteem and lack of achievement.

AIMS: The anti-bullying program within the district schools seeks to accomplish the following goals:

- To promote a secure and happy environment free from threat, harassment and any type of bullying behavior.
- To take positive action to prevent bullying from occurring.
- To inform parents and students of the school's expectations and to foster a productive partnership which helps to maintain a bully-free environment.
- To make staff aware of their role in fostering the knowledge and attitudes which will be required to achieve the above aims.

DEFINITION OF BULLYING: Bullying, as defined by Connecticut statute is "any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds or at a school sponsored activity which acts are repeated against the same student over time." It can also be defined as repeated and systematic harassment and attacks on others, perpetrated by individuals or groups. Bullying takes many forms and can include many different behaviors, such as but not limited to:

1. physical violence and attacks
2. verbal taunts, name-calling and put-downs including ethically-based and gender-based verbal put-downs
3. threats and intimidation
4. extortion or stealing of money and/or possessions
5. exclusion from peer groups within the school

Students

Hazing

Bullying (continued)

CRUCIAL FACTORS TO COMBAT BULLYING:

1. Awareness and involvement on the part of adults, with regards to bully-victim problems.
2. Survey of bully/victim problems to determine the scope of the problem in each school.
3. A school conference day devoted to bully/victim problems.
4. Appropriate supervision during recess, lunch time and changing of classes by adult staff.
5. Consistent and immediate consequences for aggressive behavior.
6. Generous praise for pro-social and helpful behavior by students.
7. Specific class rules against bullying.
8. Class meetings about bullying
9. Serious individual talks with bullies and with victims.
10. Serious talks with parents of bullies and victims.
11. A meeting of the school's parent organization on this topic.
12. A curriculum that promotes communication, friendship and assertive skills.
13. Improved communication among administrators, teachers, parents and students.
14. Listening respectfully to bullying concerns raised by students, parents and staff.
15. Avoidance of sex-role stereotyping. (e.g. males need to be strong and tough)
16. Avoidance of competitiveness at school.
17. Use of classmates to help alleviate the plight of victims and include them in group activities.

The above measures are considered part of an effective school-wide anti-bullying program, per research on this topic.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGED ACTS OF BULLYING:

1. Students may report bullying situations anonymously to members of the school staff.
2. Parents/guardians may report bullying situations to members of the school staff in writing.
3. Student and/or parent/guardian reports shall be reported to the school administration.
4. School administrators shall investigate in a timely fashion parents' written reports and review students' anonymous reports to determine the action required.

Students

Hazing

Bullying (continued)

RESPONSE TO ALLEGED ACTS OF BULLYING: (continued)

5. Written notice shall be provided to the parents/guardians of a child involved in a verified act of bullying. The notice shall describe the school's response and any consequences that may result from further acts of bullying.
6. A list shall be maintained in the Principal's office of verified bullying acts. Such list is available upon request to the public.
7. Language about bullying and the scope of the policy shall be included in all student/parent/employee handbooks.

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. To implement procedures to confront bullying in any form.
2. To listen to all parties involved in incidents.
3. To investigate as fully as possible, and to report such incidents to the school administration.
4. To take appropriate action, or to refer the matter to a member of the administration.
5. To record and inform parents of bullying incidents.
6. To promote the use of a range of teaching and learning styles and strategies which challenge bullying behavior.
7. To promote open management styles which facilitate communication and consultation throughout the school setting.
8. To foster by example the values the school believes in.
9. To promote the use of interventions which are least intrusive and most effective.
10. To hold regular discussions on this issue with administration, staff, students and parents.
11. To support victims of bullying by means of individual and peer counseling.
12. To initiate efforts to change the behavior of the bullies through class discussions, counseling, reinforcement and sanctions where appropriate.

Students

Hazing

Bullying (continued)

SUGGESTED STEPS FOR INTERVENING IN BULLYING SITUATIONS:

- Intervene immediately; stop the bullying behavior once seen or becoming aware of it.
- Talk to the bully and victim, separately. If more than one child is involved in perpetuating the bullying, talk to each of the perpetrators separately, in quick succession.
- If a peer mediation program is in place, be careful in referring cases where there is bullying, as the power imbalance will likely make this a very intimidating situation for the victim. The victim's communication and assertiveness skills may be very low and will be further eroded by fear resulting from past intimidation and fear of future retaliation. Consider excluding such cases from peer mediation.
- Consult with administrators and/or other teachers to get a broader perspective on the problem and to alert them to the problem. Get advice as to how this situation fits with Board and school policies and/or refer to written guidelines.
- Expect that the perpetrator(s) will minimize and deny his/her/their actions and responsibility.
- Refer to school and class codes of conduct in telling the bully why their behavior was unacceptable. Indicate the expected behavior. Inform the bully(ies) of the sanctions which will be imposed and that their parents will be involved.
- Reassure the victim that all possible steps will be taken to prevent a recurrence.
- Inform the parents of the bully and of the victim as soon as possible. Involve parents early before behavior patterns become entrenched and more serious.
- Involve parents in designing a creative plan of action, whenever possible.
- Involve victims in groups and situations in which they can make appropriate friends and develop social skills and confidence. (e.g. peer support groups, new student orientation group, class cooperative learning group, special activity group or club) The goals are to develop the child's peer support network, social and other skills and confidence. Specific instruction in assertiveness may also be helpful.
- For the bully(ies) provide specific re-education regarding his/her/their behavior, in addition to sanctions such as removal of privileges, detention, etc.
- Follow up in communicating with parents and with other teachers and administrators about the situation until it is clearly resolved.

Students

Hazing

Bullying (continued)

SUGGESTED STEPS FOR INTERVENING IN BULLYING SITUATIONS: (continued)

- Monitor the behavior of the bully and of the victim on a school-wide basis.
- If the bully(ies) do not change their behavior, despite concerted efforts by school personnel they, not the victim, should be removed from the class or school or transferred to another program/situation. Consequences for the perpetrators will be of considerable interest to all students and will set the tone for future situations.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES:

Classroom activities on an ongoing basis are important to the anti-bullying program. The following measures should be taken in the classroom:

- Developing a class code of conduct with regard to treatment of other students, with specific reference to bullying and exclusion of other students. Both desirable and unacceptable behavior should be simply and clearly defined and written, with student input.
- Following up with immediate, consistent, non-violent consequences for all bullying and aggressive behavior.
- Recognizing and praising positive, friendly and supportive behaviors of students toward one another on a frequent basis.
- Teaching non-violent, non-racist, and non-sexist ideas, values and behaviors, as a core part of the daily curriculum.
- Teaching social skills, including communication, making friends, accepting feedback from others, conflict resolution, appropriate assertiveness and problem solving.
- Modeling by the teacher of positive, respectful, and supportive behavior by the teacher toward students.
- Using cooperative learning groups to include less popular, more timid children in small, positive and accepting social groups.

Regulation approved: