

School District of Manatee County

Bullying & Harassment Policy

(1) Statement prohibiting bullying and harassment.

It is the policy of the School District of Manatee County that all of its students, district employees, and any other persons have an educational setting that is safe, secure, and free from harassment and bullying of any kind. Conduct that constitutes bullying and harassment, as defined herein, is prohibited.

(2) Definition of bullying and harassment.

(a) Bullying is the mistreatment of an individual or group characterized by a willful intent to cause harm and a perceived advantage in power. These acts can be socially, emotionally, or physically damaging in nature and include, but are not limited to, teasing, name calling, rumor spreading, exclusion, intimidation, threats, damaging personal property, stealing, public or private humiliation, stalking, pushing, shoving, or other physical attacks, and sexual, religious, or racial/ethnic harassment.

(b) Harassment involves any threatening, insulting, or dehumanizing act or gesture which places an individual in reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property, has the effect of substantially interfering with an individual's educational performance, opportunities, or benefits, or has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of a school or activity.

(c) Bullying or harassment of any individual is prohibited:

1. During any education program or activity conducted by a district school;
2. During any school-related or school-sponsored program/ activity or on a school district bus;
3. Through the use of computers or other electronic devices which is initiated or accessed by any school district data system; or within the scope of the school district, meaning regardless of ownership, any computer, computer system, or computer network that is physically located on school property or at a school-related or school-sponsored program or activity; or
4. Through the use of data or computer software that is accessed at a non-school-related location, activity, function, or program or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the bullying substantially interferes with or limits the victim's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school or substantially disrupts the education process or orderly operation of a school.
5. The above section (e) does not require a school to staff or monitor any non-school-related activity, function, or program.

(d) Bullying and harassment encompasses retaliation against an individual by another for asserting or alleging an act of bullying or harassment. Reporting an act of bullying or harassment that is not made in good faith is considered bullying and harassment. Bullying and harassment also encompasses any perpetuation of the above conduct listed in the definitions of bullying and harassment by any individual or group with intent to demean, dehumanize, embarrass, or cause emotional or physical harm to a student or school employee by:

1. Incitement or coercion
2. Accessing or knowingly and willingly causing or providing access to data or computer software through a computer, computer system, or computer network within the scope of the district school system
3. Acting in a manner that has an effect substantially similar to the effect of bullying or harassment

(e) Bullying and Harassment also encompasses cyberbullying. **Cyberbullying** is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which includes, but is not limited to, 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 system, photo-electronic system, or photo-optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. Cyberbullying includes the creation of a webpage or weblog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person, or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying. Cyberbullying also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

Cyberstalking, as defined in s. 784.048(1)(d), F.S., means to engage in a course of conduct to communicate, or to cause to be communicated, words, images, or language by or through the use of electronic mail or electronic communication, directed at a specific person, causing substantial emotional distress to that person and serving no legitimate purpose. Additional definitions in s. 815.03, F.S. are also applicable.

(3) Description of the type of behavior expected from each student and employee of the school district.

The School District expects students to conduct themselves as appropriate for their levels of development, maturity, and demonstrated capabilities with a proper regard for

the rights and welfare of other students and school staff, the educational purpose underlying all school activities, and the care of school facilities and equipment. The school district believes that standards for student behavior must be set cooperatively through interaction among the students, parents/legal guardians, staff, and community members producing an atmosphere that encourages students to grow in self-discipline. The development of this atmosphere requires respect for self and others, as well as for district and community property on the part of students, staff, and community members. Since students learn by example, school administrators, faculty, staff, and volunteers will demonstrate appropriate behavior, treat others with civility and respect, and refuse to tolerate bullying or harassment.

(4) Consequences for a student or school district employee who commits an act of bullying or harassment.

Concluding whether a particular action or incident constitutes a violation of this policy requires a determination based on all of the facts and surrounding circumstances. The physical location or time of access of a computer-related incident cannot be raised as a defense in any disciplinary action. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for students who commit acts of bullying or harassment may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion, as outlined in the Code of Student Conduct. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a school employee found to have committed an act of bullying or harassment may be disciplined in accordance with district policies, procedures, and agreements. Additionally, acts of harassment by certified educators may result in a sanction against an educator's state issued certificate. (See State Board of Education Rule 6B-1.006, FAC., *The Principles of Professional Conduct of the Education Profession in Florida*.) Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a visitor or volunteer, found to have committed an act of bullying or harassment shall be determined by the school administrator after consideration of the nature and circumstances of the act. This may include an official trespass warning or a report to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

(5) Consequences for a student or employee of the school district who is found to have wrongfully and intentionally accused another of an act of bullying or harassment.

Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a student found to have wrongfully and intentionally accused another of bullying or harassment range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion, as outlined in the Code of Student Conduct. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a school employee found to have wrongfully and intentionally accused another as a means of bullying or harassment may be disciplined in accordance with district policies, procedures, and agreements. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a visitor or volunteer, found to have wrongfully and intentionally accused another of bullying or harassment shall be determined by the school administrator after consideration of the

nature and circumstances of the act, including reports to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

(6) Procedure for receiving reports of an alleged act of bullying or harassment, including provisions that permit a person to anonymously report such an act.

(a) At each school, the principal or the principal's designee is responsible for receiving complaints alleging violations of this policy. All school employees are required to report alleged violations of this policy to the principal or the principal's designee. All other members of the school community, including students, parents/legal guardians, volunteers, and visitors are encouraged to report any act that may be a violation of this policy anonymously or in-person to the principal or principal's designee.

(b) Each school in the district shall establish and prominently publicize to students, staff, volunteers, and parents/legal guardians, how a report of bullying or harassment may be filed either in-person or anonymously and how this report will be acted upon. The victim of bullying or harassment, anyone who witnessed the bullying or harassment, and anyone who has credible information that an act of bullying or harassment has taken place may file a report of bullying or harassment. A school employee, school volunteer, student, parent/legal guardian or other persons who promptly reports in good faith an act of bullying or harassment to the appropriate school official and who makes this report in compliance with the procedures set forth in the district policy is immune from a cause of action for damages arising out of the reporting itself or any failure to remedy the reported incident. Submission of a good faith complaint or report of bullying or harassment will not affect the complainant or reporter's future employment, grades, learning or working environment, or work assignments.

(c) Any written or oral reporting of an act of bullying or harassment shall be considered an official means of reporting such act(s). Reports may be made anonymously, but formal disciplinary action may not be based solely on an anonymous report.

(7) Process to investigate whether a reported act of bullying or harassment is within the scope of the district school system and, if not, a process for referral of such an act to the appropriate jurisdiction. Computers without web-filtering software or computers with web-filtering software that is disabled shall be used when complaints of cyberbullying are investigated.

(a) A principal or designee who is trained in investigative procedures will initiate an investigation of whether an act of bullying or harassment is within the jurisdiction of the school district.

(b) The principal or designee will provide a report on results of the investigation with recommendations for the principal to make a determination if an act of bullying or harassment falls within the jurisdiction of the district.

1. If it is within jurisdiction of the district, follow the procedures for investigating Bullying and Harassment under (8).
2. If it is outside jurisdiction of the district, and determined a criminal act, refer to appropriate law enforcement.
3. If it is within jurisdiction of the district and determined a criminal act, refer to appropriate law enforcement agency and do not proceed to investigation under (8) until proper clearance by law enforcement.
4. If it is outside jurisdiction of the district, and determined not a criminal act, inform parents/legal guardians of all students involved.

(8) Procedure for the prompt investigation of a report of bullying or harassment and the persons responsible for the investigation.

(a) The principal or designee who is trained in investigative procedures will initiate the investigation. The individual who conducts the investigation may not be the accused perpetrator (harasser or bully) or victim.

(b) Documented interviews of the victim, alleged perpetrator, and witnesses are conducted privately, separately, and are confidential. Each individual (victim, alleged perpetrator, and witnesses) will be interviewed separately and at no time will the alleged perpetrator and victim be interviewed together.

(c) The investigator shall collect and evaluate the facts including, but not limited to:

1. Description of incident(s) including nature of the behavior and the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred, etc.;
2. How often the conduct occurred;
3. Whether there were past incidents or past continuing patterns of behavior;
4. The characteristics of parties involved (i.e., grade, age, etc.);
5. The identity and number of individuals who participated in bullying or harassing behavior;
6. Where the alleged incident(s) occurred;
7. The date, time, and method in which the parents/legal guardians of all parties involved were contacted.

(d) The investigation shall be completed in no more than 10 school days. The highest level of confidentiality possible will be upheld regarding the submission of a complaint or a report of bullying and harassment, and the investigative procedures that follow.

(e) The investigation of a reported act of bullying or harassment is deemed to be a school-related activity and begins with a report of such an act. Incidents that require

a reasonable investigation when reported to appropriate school authorities shall include alleged incidents of bullying or harassment allegedly committed against a child while the child is en route to or from school aboard a school bus or at a school bus stop.

(f) The physical location or time access of a computer-related incident cannot be raised as a defense in any disciplinary action initiated.

(9) Procedure for providing immediate notification to the parents/legal guardians of a victim of bullying or harassment and the parents/legal guardians of the perpetrator of an act of bullying or harassment as well as, notification to all local agencies where criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator.

(a) The principal, or designee, shall promptly report via telephone, personal conference, or in writing, the occurrence of any incident of bullying or harassment as defined by this policy to the parent or legal guardian of all students involved on the same day an investigation of the incident(s) has been initiated. Notification must be consistent with the student privacy rights under the applicable provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).

(b) If the bullying incident results in the perpetrator being charged with a crime, the principal, or designee, shall by telephone or in writing by first class mail, inform parents/legal guardian of the victim(s) involved in the bullying incident about the Unsafe School Choice Option (No Child Left Behind, Title IX, Part E, Subpart 2, Section 9532) that states "...a student who becomes a victim of a violent criminal offense, as determined by State law, while in or on the grounds of a public elementary school or secondary school that the student attends, be allowed to attend a safe public elementary school or secondary school within the local educational agency, including a public charter school."

(c) Once the investigation under (7) by the school has been completed and it has been determined that criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator, all appropriate local law enforcement agencies will be notified by telephone or in writing.

(10) Procedure to refer victims and perpetrators of bullying or harassment for counseling.

(a) Any teacher or parent/legal guardian may request informal consultation with school staff (e.g., school counselor or other district student services staff) to determine the severity of concern and appropriate steps to address the concern (the involved students' parents or legal guardian may be included).

(b) The referral process to provide professional assistance or services shall include a process by which school personnel or parent/legal guardian may refer a student

to a school intervention team with a problem-solving focus for consideration of appropriate services. Parent or legal guardian notification is required at this point.

(c) If a formal discipline report or formal complaint is made, the principal or designee must make a determination based on interview questions or observation as to the need for a referral to victim services provided within the school. Further assessment by school counselor or other district student services staff may warrant community referrals, at which time parent involvement is required.

(d) A school-based component to address intervention and assistance as determined appropriate by the intervention team will include:

1. Counseling and support to address the needs of the victims of bullying or harassment
2. Research-based counseling/interventions to address the behavior of the students who bully and harass others (e.g., empathy training, anger management)
3. Research-based counseling/interventions which includes assistance and support provided to parents/legal guardians, if deemed necessary or appropriate

(e) Any change in services for students with disabilities eligible under IDEA will be determined by an IEP team

(11) Procedure for including incidents of bullying or harassment in the school's report of data concerning school safety and discipline data required under s. 1006.09(6), F.S.

(a) The school district will utilize Florida's School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) Statewide Report on School Safety and Discipline Data, which includes bullying/harassment as an incident code as well as bullying-related as a related element code.

(b) Any incident of bullying or harassment will not be reported as a SESIR violation unless it meets the following definition:

The SESIR definition of bullying is systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on one or more students or employees that is severe or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment; or unreasonably interfere with the individual's school performance or participation. The SESIR definition of harassment is any threatening, insulting, or dehumanizing gesture, use of data or computer software, or written, verbal, or physical conduct that 1) places a student or school employee in reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property, 2) has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's educational performance, opportunities, or benefits, or 3) has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of

a school including any course of conduct directed at a specific person that causes substantial emotional distress in such a person and serves no legitimate purpose.

(c) If a **bullying** or **harassment** incident occurs and meets the above definition, then it will be reported in SESIR with either the bullying or harassment code. If the bullying or harassment results in any of the following SESIR incidents the incident will be coded appropriately using the relevant incident code AND the related element code entitled **bullying-related**. Those incidents are:

- Alcohol
- Arson
- Battery
- Breaking and Entering
- Disruption on Campus
- Drug Sale/Distribution Excluding Alcohol
- Drug Use/Possession Excluding Alcohol
- Fighting
- Homicide
- Kidnapping
- Larceny/Theft
- Robbery
- Sexual Battery
- Sexual Harassment
- Sexual Offenses
- Threat/Intimidation
- Trespassing
- Tobacco
- Vandalism
- Weapons Possession
- Other Major (Other major incidents that do not fit within the other definitions)

(d) Discipline and referral data will be recorded in Student Discipline/Referral Action Report and Automated Student Information System for acts of bullying.

(e) The district will provide bullying incident, discipline, and referral data to the Florida Department of Education in the format requested, through Surveys 2, 3 and 5 from Education Information and Accountability Services, and at designated dates provided by the Department. Data reporting on bullying, harassment, unsubstantiated bullying, unsubstantiated harassment, sexual harassment and threat/intimidation incidents as well as any bullying-related incidents that have as a basis sex, race or disability should include the incident basis. Victims of these offenses should also have the incident basis (sex, race or disability) noted in their student record.

(12) A list of programs authorized by the school district that provide instruction to students, parents/legal guardians, teachers, school administrators, counseling staff, and school volunteers on identifying, preventing, and responding to bullying or harassment, including instruction on recognizing behaviors that lead to bullying and harassment and taking appropriate preventive action based on those observations.

The district ensures that schools sustain healthy, positive, and safe learning environments for all students. It is important to change the social climate of the school and the social norms with regards to bullying. This requires the efforts of everyone in the school environment – teachers, administrators, counselors, school nurses other non-teaching staff (such as bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, or school librarians), parents/legal guardians, and students.

Students, parents/legal guardians, teachers, school administrators, counseling staff, and school volunteers shall be given instruction at a minimum on an annual basis on the district's policy and regulations against bullying and harassment. The instruction shall include evidence-based methods of preventing bullying and harassment, as well as how to effectively identify and respond to bullying in schools.

The School District of Manatee County provides or recommends the following list of authorized programs including, but not limited to:

- Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)
- Positive Behavior Support (PBS)
- Second Step/ Steps to Respect
- Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders (AVB)
- i-Safe
- Character Counts
- Safe School Ambassadors
- Life Skills Training
- Not in My School! (District program)

Decisions to include additional instructional programs or activities, not previously listed within this policy, will be made on a case-by-case basis and authorized by individual school principals.

(13) Procedure for regularly reporting to a victim's parents/legal guardians the actions taken to protect the victim.

The principal or designee shall by telephone or in writing report the occurrence of any incident of bullying as defined by this policy to the parent or legal guardian of all students involved within 24 hours of the initiation of an investigation of the incident. According to the level of infraction, parents/legal guardians will be notified by telephone or writing of actions being taken to protect the child. The frequency of notification will depend on the seriousness of the bullying or harassment incident. Notification must be consistent with the student privacy rights under the applicable provisions of FERPA.

(14) Procedure for publicizing the policy which must include its publication in the code of student conduct required under s. 1006.07(2), F.S., and in all employee handbooks.

(a) At the beginning of each school year, the Superintendent or designee shall, in writing, inform school staff, parents/legal guardians, or other persons responsible for the welfare of a student of the district's student safety and violence prevention policy.

(b) Each district school shall provide notice to students and staff of this policy through appropriate references in the code of student conduct and employee handbooks, or through other reasonable means. The Superintendent shall also make all contractors contracting with the district aware of this policy.

(c) Each school shall develop an annual process for discussing the school district policy on bullying and harassment with students in a student assembly or other reasonable format. Reminders of the policy and bullying prevention messages such as posters and signs will be displayed around each school and on the district school buses.