

UNIVERSAL SCHOOL ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

Purpose

The Universal School Board recognizes that a school that is physically and emotionally safe and secure for all students promotes good citizenship, increases student attendance and engagement, and supports academic achievement. To protect the rights of all students and groups for a safe and secure learning environment, the Board prohibits acts of bullying, harassment, and other forms of aggression and violence. Bullying is contrary to State law and school policy. Bullying or harassment, like other forms of aggressive and violent behaviors, interferes with both a school's ability to educate its students and a student's ability to learn. It is the goal of Universal School to create a learning environment where students are protected from bullying so they feel safe and supported in their efforts to succeed academically and develop emotionally into responsible, caring individuals. The Board expects students to conduct themselves in a manner in keeping with their levels of development, maturity, and demonstrated capabilities with a proper regard for the rights and welfare of other students, school staff, and volunteers. The Board asks every student, with the support of his/her parent(s), guardian(s) and the adults at school, to commit to the following principles, which will apply to everyone on school property and at school-related activities:

- I will not bully others.
- I will try to help anyone I suspect is being bullied.
- I will work to include students who are left out.
- If someone is being bullied, I will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

Scope

This policy protects Universal School students against bullying and harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender-related identity or expression, unfavorable discharge from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic. The scope of this policy includes the prohibition of every form of bullying, harassment, and cyberbullying, whether in the classroom, on school premises, immediately adjacent to school premises, when a student is traveling to or from school, or at a school-sponsored event, whether or not held on school premises. Bullying or harassment, including cyberbullying, that is not initiated at a location defined above is covered by this policy if the incident results in a potentially material or substantial disruption of the school learning environment for one or more students and/or the orderly day-to-day operations of any school or school program.

Definitions

“Bullying/Harassment” is any gesture or written, verbal, graphic, or physical act (including electronically transmitted acts) that is reasonably perceived as being dehumanizing, intimidating, hostile, humiliating, threatening, or otherwise likely to evoke fear of physical harm or emotional distress. Bullying and harassment also include forms of retaliation against

individuals who report or cooperate in an investigation under this policy. Such behaviors are considered to be bullying or harassment whether they take place on or off school property, at any school-sponsored function, or any time or place where a child's imminent safety or over-all well-being may be at issue.

Bullying may take various forms, including without limitation, one or more of the following: harassment, threats, intimidation, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, theft, public humiliation, destruction of property, or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

“Cyberbullying” means using information and communication technologies to bully. Cyberbullying means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation 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 without limitation electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. Cyberbullying includes 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 effects 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 effects enumerated in the definition of bullying.

“Retaliation” means any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

“Peer Conflict” means disagreements and oppositional interactions that are situational, immediate and developmentally appropriate. When school employees are aware of peer conflict, they are expected to guide students in developing new skills in social competency, learning personal boundaries and peaceably resolving conflict, and to model appropriate social interactions. These interventions are designed to prevent Peer Conflict from escalating to Bullying.

“Restorative Measures” means a continuum of school-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, that: (i) are adapted to the particular needs of the school and community, (ii) contribute to maintaining school safety, (iii) protect the integrity of a positive and productive learning climate, (iv) teach students the personal and interpersonal skills they will need to be successful in school and society, (v) serve to build and restore relationships among students, families, schools, and communities, and (vi) reduce the likelihood of future disruption by balancing accountability with an understanding of students' behavioral health needs in order to keep students in school.

Intervening to Address Bullying

The Board believes that standards for student behavior must be set through interaction among the students, parents, and staff of the school, producing an atmosphere that encourages students to grow in self-discipline and their ability to respect the rights of others. The development of this atmosphere requires respect for self and others, as well as for school property on the part of students, staff, and parents.

The Board believes that the best discipline for aggressive behavior is designed to (1) support students in taking responsibility for their actions, (2) develop empathy, and (3) teach alternative ways to achieve the goals and solve the problems that motivated the aggressive behavior. Staff members who interact with students shall apply best practices designed to *prevent* discipline problems and encourage students' abilities to develop self-discipline and make better choices in the future.

Reporting Bullying and Harassment

Responsibilities of Universal School Employees

All school employees who witness incidents of bullying or school violence or who possess reliable information that would lead a reasonable person to suspect that a person is a target of bullying, must:

- (1) intervene immediately in a manner that is appropriate to the context and ensures the safety of all people involved;
- (2) report the incident of bullying or retaliation to the Principal/Designee as soon as practicable, but within 24 hours, on the Bullying Complaint Form (Attachment A) found on the school's website under the PBIS tab;
- (3) cooperate fully in any investigation of the incident and in implementing any safety plan established by the Principal/Designee.
- (4) encourage students *not* to be part of the problem, *not* to pass on the rumor or derogatory message, to notify authority

Responsibilities of Students, Parents and Guardians

Since bystander support of bullying and harassment can encourage these behaviors, the Board prohibits both active and passive support for acts of bullying. No student who witnesses bullying may stand by or participate in the bullying, but must notify an adult at school and an adult at home as quickly as practicable. Any parent or guardian who witnesses or is notified of bullying has an obligation to advise the Principal/Designee as quickly as practicable. Reports can be made to any school employee in person, or by completing *Attachment A* found on the school's website under the PBIS tab and submitting it to the Principal/Designee. Anonymous reports will be accepted by the Principal/Designee; however, no disciplinary action will be taken on the sole basis of an anonymous report. Anonymous reports will be investigated with the same procedure, timeliness and vigor as other reports and disciplinary action can occur based on the results of the investigation

Response Plan

1. The principal or designee shall promptly investigate and address reports of bullying, by
 - a. Making all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within 10 school days after the date the report of a bullying incident was received and taking into consideration additional relevant information received during the course of the investigation about the reported bullying incident.
 - b. Involving appropriate school support personnel and other staff persons with knowledge, experience, and training on bullying prevention, as deemed appropriate, in the investigation process.
 - c. Consistent with federal and State laws and rules governing student privacy rights, the principal or designee shall promptly inform parent(s)/guardian(s) of every student involved in an alleged incident of bullying and discuss, as appropriate, the availability of social work services, counseling, interventions, and restorative measures.
 - d. Consistent with federal and State laws and rules governing student privacy rights, the principal or designee shall promptly inform parent(s)/guardian(s) of every student involved in an alleged incident of bullying and discuss the investigation, the finding of the investigation, and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying
2. The principal or designee shall use interventions to address bullying, that may include but are not limited to social work services, restorative measures, counseling, or community-based services.
3. A student will not be punished for reporting bullying or supplying information, even if the investigation concludes that no bullying occurred. However, knowingly making a false accusation or providing false information will be treated as *bullying*.

Consequences for Universal School Employees not Upholding Policy

When it is determined that an employee was aware that bullying was taking place but failed to report it, the employee will be considered to have violated this policy. The Principal shall consider employee discipline for such violations.

Appropriate Consequences and Restorative Measures for acts of Bullying

Factors for Determining Consequences

- Age, development, and maturity levels of the parties involved
- Degree of harm (physical and/or emotional distress)
- Surrounding circumstances
- Nature and severity of the behavior(s)
- Incidences of past or continuing pattern(s) of behavior
- Relationship between the parties involved
- Context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred

Factors for Determining Restorative Measures

Personal

- Life skill competencies
- Experiential deficiencies
- Social relationships
- Strengths
- Talents
- Traits
- Interests
- Hobbies
- Extra-Curricular activities
- Classroom participation
- Academic performance

Environmental

- School culture
- School climate and lack of connectedness
- Student-staff relationships and staff behavior toward the student
- Level of consistency in staff responses to bullying or harassing behaviors
- Level of consistency in application or severity of consequences given to students
- Staff-staff relationships witnessed by students
- General staff management of classrooms and other educational environments
- Staff ability to prevent and de-escalate difficult or inflammatory situations
- Social-emotional and behavioral supports
- Social relationships
- Family situation
- Range and number of opportunities for student engagement, involvement, and recognition for achievement (beyond academics and athletics)

Consequences and appropriate remedial actions for a student or staff member who engages in one or more acts of bullying or harassment may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion, in the case of a student, or suspension or termination in the case of an employee. School employees will also be held accountable for bullying or harassing behavior directed toward school employees, volunteers, parents, or students.

Consequences for a student who commits an act of bullying and harassment shall vary in method and severity according to the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of problem behaviors and performance, and must be consistent with school expectations. Restorative measures shall be designed to: *correct the problem behavior, prevent another occurrence of the behavior; and protect the victim of the act.* The consequences and remedial measures may include, but are not limited to, the examples listed below:

Examples of Consequences

- Admonishment
- Participation in a guided reflection process designed to teach alternative behavior
- Temporary removal from the classroom
- Loss of privileges
- Classroom or administrative detention
- Office Referral
- In-school suspension
- Out-of-school suspension
- Legal action
- Expulsion or termination (staff)

Examples of Restorative Measures

Strategies for Individual Behavioral Change:

- Framing the aggressive behavior as a failed attempt to solve a real problem or reach a goal. The adult assists the misbehaving student to find a better way to solve the problem or meet the goal.
- Restitution or restoration
- Transformative conferencing/restorative justice practices
- Supervised peer support group
- Corrective instruction or other relevant learning or service experience
- Supportive discipline to increase accountability for the bullying offense
- Supportive interventions
- Behavioral assessment or evaluation
- Behavioral management plan, with benchmarks that are closely monitored
- Parent conferences
- Therapy

Strategies for Environmental Change

- Activities or strategies designed to help the student who engaged in bullying or harassment reflect on the offending behavior, maintaining an emotionally-neutral and strength-based approach
- School surveys for determining the conditions contributing to harassment, intimidation, or bullying
- Change process to improve school culture
- School climate improvement/improvement in conditions for learning and instructional pedagogy
- Adoption of research-based, systemic bullying prevention programs
- Increased supervision
- Disciplinary actions for staff who contributed to the problem
- Referral to family counseling

The Board requires the principal/designee to be responsible for determining whether an alleged act constitutes a violation of this policy. In so doing, the principal/designee shall conduct a prompt, thorough, and complete investigation of each alleged incident. The investigation is to be completed within three school days after a report or complaint is made. The parents of the students involved shall receive written notification from the school on the outcome of the investigation (in compliance with current privacy laws and regulations). All reports on instances of bullying and/or harassment must be recorded by the school for annual data review.

Retaliation and False Accusations

The Board prohibits reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying or harassment or cooperates in an investigation. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who engages in reprisal or retaliation shall be determined by the administration after consideration of the nature, severity, and circumstances of the act.

The Board prohibits any person from falsely accusing another as a means of bullying or harassment. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person found to have falsely accused another as a means of bullying or harassment may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion.

Training and Prevention

Students and staff will be given instruction on how to prevent bullying and harassment. This will include instruction on the process for filing complaints and the process/consequences that will result from the complaint.

Distribution and Evaluation

This policy shall be posted on the school's website and included in Parent/Student and Staff handbooks, as well as distributed via the school assignment notebooks.

This policy will be evaluated for its outcomes and effectiveness by analyzing the following:

- a. The frequency of victimization;
- b. Student, staff, and family observation of safety at school;
- c. Identification of areas of a school where bullying occurs;
- d. The types of bullying utilized; and
- e. Bystander intervention or participation

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