

BULLYING, HARASSMENT & INTIMIDATION (POLICY IVC-11)

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Policy Statement

All students in Worcester County Public Schools have a right to an educational environment that is safe, promotes optimal academic achievement and is free from any form of harassment. The Board of Education is committed to providing a nurturing, respectful educational environment, where the worth and dignity of individuals are valued, and their safety and rights are protected. Behaviors that compromise this environment, interfere with school operations or are otherwise contrary to the basic mission of public schools will not be tolerated. This policy is intended to apply to the harassment of students by Board of Education employees or other students, in compliance with Education Article §7-424.1, of the Maryland Annotated Code.

Definition

Harassment exists when there is a sufficiently severe action or persistent, pervasive pattern of actions or statements, directed at an identifiable individual or group. Bullying, harassment, or intimidation is defined as intentional conduct that creates a hostile educational environment by substantially interfering with a student's educational benefits, opportunities, or performance, or with a student's physical or psychological well-being and is:

- Motivated by actual or perceived personal characteristics including race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry, physical attributes, socioeconomic status, family status, or physical or mental disability; or threatening or seriously intimidating; and,
- Occurs on school property, at a school activity or event, or on a school bus; or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a school.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying, harassment, and intimidation. Cyberbullying means a communication transmitted by means of an electronic device and includes the use of social media sites. Cyberbullying shall include any future applications that fall under "electronic communication".

Forms of Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation

Forms of harassment may include but are not limited to the following:

- Verbal harassment, such as derogatory or offensive comments, jokes, slurs, intimidation, or gossip; and
- Physical harassment, such as inappropriate or offensive touching, impeding or blocking movement; and
- Visual harassment, such as derogatory or offensive writing, posters, pictures, objects, cards, cartoons, graffiti, drawings, gestures, or prolonged staring/leering; and
- Other forms of harassment which may include hazing, bullying, teasing, or cyberbullying by electronic communication. Electronic communication means a device, such as but not limited to, a telephone, cellular phone, computer, PDA, or pager.

Complaint/Reporting Procedures

Students who believe that they have been subject to bullying, harassment, or intimidation or who have knowledge of employees or students who may be engaging in bullying, harassment, or intimidation shall request, complete and submit a Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation reporting form to the school counselor or school administrator. Students employed by the Board of Education will report bullying, harassment, or intimidation in writing to their immediate supervisor or to the office of the Superintendent.

Retaliation against a student making a complaint in good faith is prohibited. Any complaint that cannot be resolved at the building level should be forwarded in writing to the Superintendent or designee.

Investigation

The principal or designee, upon receipt of a written report or complaint alleging bullying, harassment, or intimidation will investigate in a timely manner. In determining whether the alleged conduct constitutes a violation of this policy, the principal or designee should consider the surrounding circumstances, the nature of the behavior, past incidents or past continuing patterns of behavior, the relationships between the parties involved, and the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred. Whether a particular action or incident constitutes a violation of this policy requires a determination based on all the facts surrounding the circumstances. The principal or designee will determine whether the allegations have been substantiated and the complainant informed of the findings.

Disciplinary Action

The principal or designee will investigate all allegations. Any student who is found to have violated this policy (IV-C-11) will be subject to disciplinary action. The action may include, but is not limited to counseling, parent conferences, awareness training, referral to mental health services, alternative education placement, or suspension.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible. The identity of the complainant, the subject, and witnesses will be protected to the extent possible, though it is recognized that confidentiality cannot always be assured.

Notification & Awareness

Students will be informed of the policy prohibiting bullying, harassment, or intimidation. All schools will provide age-appropriate bullying, harassment, or intimidation awareness at the beginning of each school year. Student orientation will also include this awareness.