

Bullying Prevention Policy Guidelines

A QUALITY
EDUCATION
FOR
EVERY
CHILD



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Background

Due to the heightened concern around bullies and bullying behavior in and around our schools, increased calls for action have become louder and more demanding in recent years. Sadly, some of the well publicized events involving deadly violence in schools appear to have at least some connection to bullying of the perpetrators of these acts. A thoughtful and reasoned response has come from parties responsible for providing leadership and safety in our schools. This response includes a desire for clear and consistent policies that help guide school officials in addressing behaviors that may seem to be inconsequential, but that could grow into tragedy.

The Department of Public Instruction answered the call for leadership and direction in the policy arena by convening a work group of individuals that represented a wide array of organizations and perspectives on this issue. In the summer of 2006, the department called stakeholders together to examine policies that might provide direction in developing local positions on bullying. Throughout the following fall, drafts were reviewed and revised to provide the final version of Bullying Prevention Policy Guidelines that could be used by local school administrators. The pages that follow are meant to serve as guidelines rather than a policy document itself. Due to the variations on policy language and formats in use by over 400 public school districts, it was felt this document should advise rather than direct local policies.

Bullying Prevention Policy Guidelines

Introduction

School districts must provide a safe, secure, and respectful learning environment for all students, in school buildings, on school buses, and at school-sponsored events. While the majority of Wisconsin high school students report feeling safe at school, 12 percent of them also reported being bullied (i.e., picked on or harassed) in the past year.¹

Bullying is not a rite of passage that must be endured by young people. Instead, it is a behavior that schools must address because of its harmful social, physical, psychological, and academic impact on the bullies, the victims, and the bystanders. For example:

Victims of bullying may suffer depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and feelings of isolation, as well as school absenteeism and low academic achievement.

Victims may develop risk factors for violent acts.

Sixty percent of children identified as bullies in middle school go on to have arrest records.²

Bullying incidents may create a negative school climate impacting the learning environment of all students.

The research suggests that comprehensive school and community bullying prevention programs are effective. One component of a comprehensive bullying prevention program is a well-written and consistently implemented school board policy. The guidelines that follow provide elements of policies that might be considered for inclusion.

Guidelines for Effective Bullying Prevention Policies

The following elements should be considered for inclusion in a school district's policy related to the prevention of and response to bullying behaviors:

¹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2005). *2005 Wisconsin youth risk behavior survey: Executive summary*.

² Sampson, R. (2002). *The problem of bullying in schools*. Center for Problem-Oriented Policing. www.cops.usdoj.gov

Definition

Bullying includes aggressive or hostile behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the bullied. It is typically repeated over time.

Bullying takes many forms, including, but not limited to, physical or verbal assaults, nonverbal or emotional threats or intimidation, social exclusion and isolation, extortion, and the use of a computer or telecommunications to send embarrassing, slanderous, threatening, or intimidating messages.

Bullying is a form of victimization and is not necessarily a result of or part of an ongoing conflict.

Bullying can also be characterized by teasing, put-downs, name-calling, cruel rumors, false accusations, and hazing.

Prohibitions

Each of the following forms of bullying should be prohibited under a local policy:

Student-to-student behaviors characterized as bullying per the adopted definition, provided it takes place at school, during a school-sponsored activity, on school buses, or through the use of school equipment in the case of cyberbullying. Additionally, a student bullying an adult staff member, using the same criteria.

An adult school staff member bullying a student or another staff member.

Complaint Procedures

It is considered the responsibility of all students and school staff members to report acts of bullying in any of the above-described situations to a member of the school staff or administration, as designated by the policy to be a recipient of such reports.

All such reports are to be taken seriously by the party designated by the policy to receive the same. The school staff or administrator will support students and coworkers making such reports and protect against any potential retaliation for making such a report.

Students and staff making prompt, accurate, and thorough reports, either verbally or in writing, will have those reports recorded by the staff receiving the same. An investigation to determine the facts will take place immediately or as soon as practicable, in order to verify the validity and seriousness of the report.

Filing a report in good faith will not reflect upon the individual's status, nor will it affect his or her grades or employment status by the district if the complainant is an adult staff member. The district shall keep the complaint confidential for both the accused and the accuser, until such time as the misconduct is confirmed and sanctions are imposed.

Sanctions and Support

Programs designed to prevent bullying behavior redirect students from continuing to bully and to support both victims of bullies and the bullies themselves should be explored. These programs take many forms and include classroom activities and instruction.

Where it is determined that students participated in bullying behavior in violation of the policy, the school district staff responsible for maintaining order and discipline may take disciplinary action including suspension, expulsion, and referral to law enforcement officials for possible legal action.

Employees found to have participated in bullying behavior, or having become aware that bullying was taking place and failed to report the behavior, are considered to be in violation of the prohibition expressed by the policy. They may be subject to disciplinary action consistent with the collective bargaining agreement or disciplinary action established by policy or practice.

Disclosure and Public Reporting

Notification to all parties subject to this policy defining and prohibiting bullying shall be made annually. A summary of the policy will be incorporated into student and employee handbooks. It will also be distributed to organizations in the community having cooperative agreements with the schools.

Data on the number and types of reports made under this prohibition, the results of investigations undertaken to verify the details made in complaints, and the sanctions imposed for incidents found to be violation of the same are to be kept on an annual aggregated basis. No individuals, either complainants or violators, will be named in such reports.

Annual reports will be presented to the school board for use in development of prevention programs and/or modifications of this and other related policies. The annual report will be made available to the public upon request.

Conclusion

Students in Wisconsin schools are depending on the adults in their lives to ensure a safe, supportive learning environment in which they can thrive and reach their full potential. The information provided in this document is designed to assist school districts in developing effective bullying prevention policies that meet their local needs.

In conclusion, the following guidance is offered for consideration by educators, parents, and community members as they work to provide effective programming:

An assessment needs to be conducted to determine the prevalence of bullying, where it is happening, who is involved, and when it is happening.

Programs must be implemented K–12 and must be comprehensive in nature, including policy, curriculum, and interventions.

Administrators must provide strong leadership and commitment for antibullying programs to be successful.

Policy needs to be communicated regularly to students, parents, teachers, and others. Rules against bullying need to be enforced consistently.

The climate of the school must discourage bullying.

Parents need to be educated about bullying, and they need to be involved in prevention efforts.

Quality bullying prevention programming, strategies, and resources need to be developed or purchased.

Strategies for hot spots such as buses, cafeterias, lavatories, and other locations need to be developed. Environmental redesign may need to be considered. Technological monitoring may be effective.

Training needs to be provided for administrators, teachers, and all school staff, including cafeteria workers, bus drivers, playground supervisors, and others.

The district's computer-use policy needs to include cyberbullying in the list of unacceptable uses of district equipment.

Resources need to be identified to assist bullies, victims, bystanders, and families.

Data must be maintained regarding the effectiveness of bullying prevention efforts.

Resources

Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, <http://popcenter.org/Problems/problem-bullying.htm>

Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESA)

National Education Association, www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullying.html

National Resource Center for Safe Schools, www.safetyzone.org

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

School-wide Prevention of Bullying, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, www.nwrel.org

Stop Bullying Now, Health Resources and Services Administration, www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, www.ed.gov

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, www.cops.usdoj.gov

Wisconsin Association of School Boards, www.wasb.org

Wisconsin Clearinghouse, <http://wch.uhs.wisc.edu>

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Bullying Prevention Curriculum, Grades 3–5*.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Student Services Prevention/Wellness Team, <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/index.html>

Wisconsin Public Television—Teen Connection, www.wpt.org

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While funding for bullying prevention programs may be available at the local level, school districts are reminded that dollars from the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program may also be used to assist with these efforts.