

SUBJECT: BULLYING/HARASSMENT PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

The Board of Education affirms its commitment to maintaining both educational and work settings which support respect, dignity and equality. Further, the Board of Education also recognizes its responsibility to provide an environment that is free of harassment, hazing, and/or bullying. The Board of Education recognizes that these acts are counter to the mission of the district and the goals of the Board of Education. By disrupting the learning environment, these behaviors affect all concerned with the educational mission: those bullied, those doing the bullying, and bystanders.

As a result, the Board of Education forbids all forms of harassment, hazing, and bullying on any district property, school buses, or school-sponsored event – both on and off school grounds that either substantially disrupts the learning environment or negatively affects the rights of others.

Definitions**Harassment**

For purposes of this policy, the term “harassment” is defined as the creation of a hostile environment by conduct or by verbal threats, intimidation or abuse that has or would have the effect of unreasonably and substantially interfering with a student’s educational performance, opportunities or benefits, or mental, emotional or physical well-being; or conduct, verbal threats, intimidation or abuse that reasonably causes or would reasonably be expected to cause a student to fear for his or her physical safety. The harassing behavior may be based on a person’s actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sex, sexual orientation, or gender (identity or expression).

Bullying

For purposes of this policy, the term "bullying" (which is subsumed under the term “harassment”) is defined, in general, as a variety of hostile activities which harms or induces fear through the threat of further aggression and/or creates terror. “Bullying” is a form of harassment that consists of inappropriate and often persistent behavior including threats or intimidation of others, treating others cruelly, terrorizing, coercing, or habitual put-downs and/or badgering of others. Bullying can take at least three forms:

- Physical (including, but not limited to, hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, taking personal belongings);
- Verbal (including, but not limited to, taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, making threats); and
- Psychological (including, but not limited to, spreading rumors; manipulating social relationships; or engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation).

Bullying is characterized by:

- Power Imbalance – occurs when a bully uses his/her physical or social power over a target
- Intent to Harm – the bully seeks to inflict physical or emotional harm and/or takes pleasure in this activity
- Threat of Further Aggression – the bully and the target believe the bullying will continue
- Terror – when the bullying increases it becomes “systematic violence or harassment used to intimidate and maintain dominance.” -Barbara Coloroso, *The Bully, The Bullied & The Bystander*

Hazing

“Hazing” is a form of harassment which involves committing an act against a student or coercing a student into committing an act that creates a risk of emotional, physical or psychological harm to a person, in order for the student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student or other organization, or for any other purpose. The fact that a victim may consent to the act does not excuse the behavior or lessen the offense.

Cyberbullying

As with other forms of bullying, cyberbullying is an attempt to display power and control over someone perceived as weaker. Cyberbullying involving District students may occur both on campus and off school grounds and may involve student use of the District Internet system or student use of electronic devices while at school, such as cell phones, digital cameras, and personal computers to engage in bullying.

Cyberbullying includes, but is not limited to, the following misuses of technology: harassing, teasing, intimidating, threatening, or terrorizing another student or staff member by way of any technological tool, such as sending or posting inappropriate or derogatory e-mail messages, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or Web site postings (including blogs).

Cyberbullying has the effect of:

- a) Physically, emotionally or mentally harming a student;
- b) Placing a student in reasonable fear of physical, emotional or mental harm;
- c) Placing a student in reasonable fear of damage to or loss of personal property; and
- d) Creating an intimidating or hostile environment that substantially interferes with a student's educational opportunities.

Also, cyberbullying that occurs off-campus, which endangers the health and safety of students or staff within the school or can be reasonably forecast to cause a material or substantial disruption to the educational process, is prohibited. Such conduct could also be subject to appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with the District Code of Conduct and possible referral to local law enforcement authorities.

Prevention and Intervention

The school learning environment provides an opportunity for both students and staff to gain an appreciation in a key district value: the importance of respect and working positively with others. The District recognizes that by requiring the implementation of an anti-bullying program, through both direct student instruction and professional development for staff, both students and staff will learn key elements about bullying prevention: the warning signs of bullying and everyone's responsibility to take an active role in preventing bullying before overt acts of bullying happen. Personnel at all levels are responsible for taking corrective action to prevent bullying behavior of which they have been made aware at School District sites or activities and/or reporting such behavior to their immediate supervisor.

The District recognizes the importance of eliminating unacceptable student conduct and works proactively to prevent these behaviors. School personnel who become aware of harassment shall act promptly to address the harassment, with the goal of preventing it from recurring. Where appropriate, school personnel will address the effects on the student who was harassed. Remedial measures will generally include counseling of persons(s) who have been harmed by harassment and person(s) who have been responsible for the harassment of others and implementing monitoring programs to follow up on addressed issues of harassment.

Prevention and intervention techniques within the District to prevent against bullying behavior and to support and protect victims shall include building-level and classroom-level strategies and activities as determined by administration. Individual intervention will be provided by appropriate staff members to bullies/participants, victims and their parents to help ensure that the bullying stops.

Although the focus of this policy is prevention, it is recognized that acts of bullying and harassment may still transpire. In such instances, disciplinary action may occur in accordance with the District's Code of Conduct. Consequences shall depend upon the specific circumstances surrounding the incident, the developmental level of the student, their disciplinary history, and must be consistent with the District's Code of Conduct.

Rules against bullying shall be publicized District-wide and shall be disseminated as appropriate to staff, students and parents.

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Otselic Valley Central School District Bully Prevention Rules:

Rule 1: We will not bully others.

Rule 2: We will try to help students who are bullied.

Rule 3: We will try to include students who are left out.

Rule 4: If we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

Olweus Bully Prevention Program

Training

Staff training shall be provided to raise awareness of the problem of bullying within the schools and to facilitate staff identification of and response to such bullying behavior among students. Training will be provided to employees in conjunction with the District's existing professional development in order to:

- raise awareness and understanding of the school district's Code of Conduct;
- raise awareness and sensitivity to potential acts of discrimination or harassment directed at students that are committed by students or school employees on school property or at school functions; including, but not limited to, discrimination or harassment based on a person's actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practices, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex;
- enable employees to prevent and respond to incidents of discrimination and harassment.

Dignity Act Coordinator

At least one employee in every school shall be designated as a Dignity Act Coordinator and instructed in the provisions of the proposed rule and thoroughly trained in methods to respond to human relations in the areas of race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender and sex.

The designation of each Dignity Act Coordinator shall be approved by the board of education annually.

The name(s) and contact information for the Dignity Act Coordinator(s) shall be shared with all school personnel, students, and persons in parental relation. This shall be done by:

- including in District Code of Conduct
- posting on District website • included in at least one district or school mailing per school year
- posted in highly-visible areas of school buildings
- made available at the district and school level administrative offices

In the event a Dignity Act Coordinator vacates his or her position, another school employee shall be immediately designated for an interim appointment as Coordinator, pending approval of a successor Coordinator by the Board of Education within 30 days of the date the position was vacated. In the event a Dignity Act Coordinator is unable to perform the duties of his or her position for an extended period of time, another school employee shall be immediately designated for an interim appointment as the Dignity Act Coordinator, pending return of the previous Dignity Act Coordinator to his or her duties as Dignity Act Coordinator.

Complaint Procedures

Students, or a parent(s) or legal guardian(s) who believe his/her student has been subjected to harassment by another student, teacher, administrator or other school personnel should report the incident(s) immediately to the Dignity Act Coordinator or another school administrator, teacher or counselor. If the student, parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) desires further assistance regarding the complaint, the Superintendent may be contacted.

Complaints can be filed by completing an "Otselic Valley CSD Rights Bully Prevention Form". These forms are located in the school library, the guidance office and in the building's main office. Forms can also be accessed and completed online on the District's homepage: www.ovcs.org. Forms can be deposited into any specified drop boxes in the building or turned into the main office. Online forms can be e-mailed directly to the appropriate building administrator. All inquiries and harassment complaints filed with the District are confidential to the extent possible as described below. Confidentiality also applies to the investigative process.

Investigation Procedures and Decision of Investigator

Upon receipt of a report or complaint alleging harassment, the appropriate building administrator shall undertake or authorize an investigation. The investigation may be conducted by school administrators or by the Office of Special Programs.

The investigation will be completed as soon as practicable. The investigation will, at a minimum, consist of personal interviews with the complainant, the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed, and others who may have knowledge of the alleged incident(s) or circumstances giving rise to the complaint.

Upon a finding that harassment has occurred, an appropriate response shall be fashioned by the appropriate administrator. Building principals addressing violations of this policy by students and the superintendent addressing violations of this policy by employees and/or students should consider the surrounding circumstances, the nature of the behavior, past incidents or continuing patterns of behavior, the relationships between the parties involved and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred.

Steps may be taken by the appropriate administrator to protect the complainant, pupils, teachers, administrators or other personnel participating in the investigation pending completion of an investigation of alleged harassment.

Retaliation

Retaliation means some type of adverse action taken against an individual or individuals as a result of filing a complaint or participating in the complaint process.

Retaliation or intimidation for participating in the complaint process is prohibited. Retaliation against any student seeking assistance at their school, filing a complaint, or participating in the investigative process is grounds for a subsequent retaliation/harassment complaint and potential discipline.

Confidentiality

The Otselic Valley Central School District will respect the privacy of the complainant, the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed and the witnesses as much as possible, consistent with our legal obligations to investigate, take appropriate action, and conform to any legal discovery or disclosure obligations.

Legal Compliance

Dignity for All Students – Education Law Article 2

NOTE: Refer also to Policies #3410 -- Code of Conduct on School Property

#3420 -- Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment in the School District
#7551 -- Sexual Harassment of Students
District Code of Conduct on School Property

Adoption: June 23, 2012