



The School Board of Okeechobee County

Chapter 5.00: Students

5.321*

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

POLICY

I. Statement Prohibiting Bullying and Harassment

- A. It is the policy of the Okeechobee County School District that all of its students and school employees have an educational setting that is safe, secure, and free from harassment and bullying of any kind. The District will not tolerate bullying and harassment of any type. Conduct that constitutes bullying and harassment, as defined herein, is prohibited.
- B. The District upholds that bullying or harassment of any student or school employee is prohibited:
 - 1. During any education program or activity conducted by a public K-12 educational institution;
 - 2. During any school-related or school-sponsored program or activity.
 - 3. On a school bus of a public K-12 educational institution;
 - 4. Through the use of data or computer software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, or computer network of a public K-12 education institution within the scope of the School District, meaning regardless of ownership, any computer, computer system, computer network that is physically located on school property or at a school-related or school-sponsored program or activity; or
 - 5. 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 the School District or a 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. School staff is not required to monitor any non-school-related activity, function, or program.

II. Definitions

- A. Bullying includes cyberbullying and means systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on one or more students or employees. It is further defined as unwanted and repeated written, verbal, graphic, or physical behavior, including any threatening, insulting, or dehumanizing gesture, by a student or adult, that is severe or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment; cause discomfort or humiliation; or unreasonably

interfere with the individual's school performance or participation; and may involve but is not limited to:

1. Teasing;
2. Social exclusion;
3. Threat;
4. Intimidation;
5. Stalking;
6. Physical violence;
7. Theft;
8. Sexual, religious, disability, or racial/ethnic harassment;
9. Public or private humiliation; or
10. Destruction of property.

The term *bullying* shall include cyberbullying whether or not specifically stated.

- B. Cyberbullying means 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, photoelectronic system, or photooptical 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.
- C. Harassment means any threatening, insulting or dehumanizing gesture, use of data or computer software, or written, verbal, or physical conduct directed against a student or school employee that:
1. Places a student or school employee in reasonable fear of harm to his/her person or damage to his/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.
- D. Bullying and harassment also encompass:
1. Retaliation against a student or school employee by another student or school employee 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 retaliation.
 2. Perpetuation of conduct listed in the definition of bullying (including cyberbullying) or harassment by an individual or group with intent to demean, dehumanize, embarrass, or cause emotional or physical harm to a student or school employee by:
 - a. Incitement or coercion;
 - b. 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;

- c. Acting in a manner that has an effect substantially similar to the effect of bullying or harassment.
 - E. Cyberstalking, as defined in Florida Statute, 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.
- III. Behavior Standards
- A. The Okeechobee County 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.
 - B. The 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. Because 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.
 - C. Students have the responsibility to conform to reasonable standards or socially acceptable behavior; respect the person, property, and rights of others; obey constituted authority; and respond to those who hold that authority as stated in the *Code of Student Conduct*.
- IV. Consequences for Committing, or Wrongful and Intentional Accusation of an Act of Bullying or Harassment
- A. 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.
 - B. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for students who commit acts of bullying or harassment or for students found to have wrongfully and intentionally accused another as a means 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*.
 - C. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a school employee, found to have committed an act of bullying or harassment, or found to have wrongfully and intentionally accused another as a means of bullying or harassment, shall be determined in accordance with District policies, procedures, and agreements. Additionally, egregious acts of harassment by certified educators may result in a sanction against an educator's state issued certificate as stipulated in the *Code of Ethics and Principles of Professional Conduct of the Education Profession in Florida*.
 - D. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a visitor or volunteer found to have committed an act of bullying or harassment, or found to have wrongfully and

intentionally accused another as a means of bullying or harassment, shall be determined by the school administrator after consideration of the nature and circumstances of the act, including possible exclusion from school grounds, and, if appropriate, reported to appropriate laws enforcement officials.

V. Reporting an Act of Bullying or Harassment

- A. At each school, the principal or the principal's designee shall be responsible for receiving complaints alleging violations of this policy.
- B. All school employees are required to report alleged violations of this policy to the principal or the principal's designee.
- C. 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.
- D. The principal of 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.
- E. 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.
- F. A school employee, school volunteer, student, parent/legal guardian or other person 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.
- G. 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.
- H. Any written or oral reporting of an act of bullying or harassment shall be considered an official means of reporting such act(s).
- I. Reports may be made anonymously, but formal disciplinary action may not be based solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

VI. Investigation of a Report of Bullying or Harassment

- A. The investigation of a reported act of bullying or harassment is deemed to be a school-related activity and shall begin 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 school aboard a school bus or at a school bus stop.
- B. The principal or designee shall select an individual(s) trained in investigative procedures to initiate the investigation. The person may not be the accused perpetrator (harasser or bully) or victim.

- C. Documented interviews of the victim, alleged perpetrator, and witnesses shall be conducted privately, separately, and shall be 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.
 - D. The investigator shall collect and evaluate the facts including but not limited to:
 - 1. Description of incident(s) occurred;
 - 2. Context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred;
 - 3. How often the conduct occurred;
 - 4. Whether there were past incidents or past continuing patterns of behavior;
 - 5. The relationship between the parties involved;
 - 6. The characteristics of parties involved, *i.e.*, grade, age;
 - 7. The identity and number of individuals who participated in bullying or harassing behavior.
 - 8. Where the alleged incident(s) occurred;
 - 9. Whether the conduct adversely affected the student's education or educational environment;
 - 10. Whether the alleged victim felt or perceived an imbalance of power as a result of the reported incident; and
 - 11. The date, time, and method in which the parents/legal guardians of all parties involved were contacted.
 - E. Whether a particular action or incident constitutes a violation of this policy shall require a determination based on all the facts and surrounding circumstances and shall include:
 - 1. Recommended remedial steps necessary to stop the bullying and/or harassing behavior; and
 - 2. A written final report to the principal.
 - F. The maximum of ten (10) school days shall be the limit for the initial filing of incidents and completion of the investigative procedural steps.
 - G. The highest level of confidentiality possible will be upheld regarding the submission of a complaint or a report of bullying and/or harassment and the investigative procedures that follow.
- VII. Investigation to Determine Whether a Reported Act of Bullying or Harassment is Within the Scope of the District
- A. The principal or designee will assign an individual(s) who is trained in investigative procedures to initiate an investigation of whether an act of bullying or harassment is within the scope of the School District.
 - B. The trained investigator(s) will provide a a report on results of investigation with recommendations for the principal to make a determination if an act of bullying or harassment falls within the scope of the District.
 - 1. If it is within the scope of the District, a thorough investigation shall be conducted.

2. If it is outside the scope of the District and determined a criminal act, the principal shall refer the incident(s) to appropriate law enforcement.
3. If it is outside the scope of the District and determined not a criminal act, the principal or designee shall inform the parents/legal guardians of all students involved.

VIII. Notification to Parents/Guardians of Incidents of Bullying or Harassment

A. Immediate notification to the parents/legal guardians of a victim of bullying or harassment.

1. The principal, or designee, shall promptly report via telephone, personal conference, and/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).
2. 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 the parent/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 w, 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.”

B. Immediate notification to the parents/legal guardians of the perpetrator of an act of bullying or harassment.

The principal, or designee, shall promptly report via telephone, personal conference, and/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).

C. Notification to local agencies where criminal charges may be pursued.

Once the investigation 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 and/or in writing.

IX. Referral of Victims and Perpetrators of Bullying or Harassment for Counseling

When bullying or harassment is suspected or when a bullying incident is reported, counseling services shall be made available to the victim(s), perpetrator(s), and parents/guardians.

- A. The teacher or parent/legal guardian may request informal consultation with school staff, e.g., school counselor, school psychologist, and/or crisis counselor to determine the severity of concern and appropriate steps to address the concern. The teacher may request that the involved student's parents or legal guardians are included.

- B. School personnel or the parent/legal guardian may refer a student to the school-based intervention team for consideration of appropriate services. Parent or legal guardian involvement shall be required when the student is referred to the school-based intervention team.
 - C. If a formal discipline report or formal complaint is made, the principal or designee must refer the student(s) to the school-based intervention team for determination of counseling support and interventions. Parent or legal guardian involvement shall be required.
 - D. The school-based intervention team may recommend:
 - 1. Counseling and support to address the needs of the victims of bullying or harassment;
 - 2. Research-based counseling or interventions to address the behavior of the students who bully and harass others, e.g., empathy training, anger management, small group counseling, and/or classroom training; and/or
 - 3. Research-based counseling or interventions which include assistance and support provided to parents/legal guardians, if deemed necessary or appropriate.
- X. Reporting Incidents of Bullying and Harassment
- A. Incidents of bullying or harassment shall be reported in the school's report of data concerning school safety and discipline data required under Florida Statute. The report shall include each incident of bullying or harassment and the resulting consequences, including discipline and referrals. Cyberbullying incidents shall be included within the bullying incidents category. The report shall also include each reported incident of bullying or harassment that did not meet the criteria of a prohibited act under this section with recommendations regarding such incidents.
 - B. The District will utilize Florida's School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) Statewide Report on School Safety and Discipline Data, which includes bullying and harassment as incident codes as well as bullying-related as a related element code.
 - 1. Bullying and/or harassment incidents shall be reported in SESIR with the bullying or harassment code.
 - 2. If the bullying/harassment results in any of the following SESIR incidents, the incident will be coded appropriately using the relevant incident code and the bullying-related code. Such incidents are:
 - a. Alcohol
 - b. Arson
 - c. Battery
 - d. Breaking and Entering
 - e. Disruption on Campus
 - f. Drug Sale/Distribution Excluding Alcohol
 - g. Drug Use/Possession Excluding Alcohol
 - h. Major Fighting
 - i. Homicide
 - j. Kidnapping
 - k. Larceny/Theft
 - l. Robbery
 - m. Sexual Battery

- n. Sexual Harassment
- o. Sexual Offenses
- p. Threat/Intimidation
- q. Trespassing
- r. Tobacco
- s. Vandalism
- t. Weapons Possession
- u. Other Major (Other major incidents that do not fit within the other definitions)

- C. Discipline and referral data shall be recorded in Student Discipline/Referral Action Report and Automated Student Information System.
- D. The District shall 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.
- E. 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 shall include the incident basis. Victims of these offenses shall also have the incident basis (sex, race, or disability) noted in their student records.

XI. Instruction on Identifying, Preventing, and Responding to Bullying or Harassment

- A. The District shall ensure that schools sustain healthy, positive, and safe learning environments for all students. It is committed to maintain a social climate and social norms in all schools that prohibit bullying and harassment. This requires the efforts of everyone in the school environment – teachers; administrators; counselors; school nurses; other non-instructional staff such as bus driver, custodians, food service personnel, media specialists; parents/legal guardians; and students.
- B. Students, parents/legal guardians, teachers, all non-instructional staff members, 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.

XI. Reporting to a Victim’s Parents/Legal Guardians the Actions Taken to Protect the Victim

The principal or designee shall by telephone, personal conference, and/or in writing report 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 has been initiated. According to the level of infraction, parents/legal guardians will be notified by telephone, personal conference, and/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 the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).

XIII. Publicizing the Policy

- 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 and through other reasonable means.
- C. The Superintendent shall also make all contractors contracting with the District aware of this policy.
- D. Each school principal shall develop an annual process for discussing the school district policy on bullying and harassment with students.
- E. 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.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY:

1001.41, 1001.42, F.S.

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