

DIOCESE OF ALLENTOWN
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

POLICY: PROHIBITING BULLYING, HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION OR HAZING

Purpose

The Secretariat for Catholic Education (Office of Education) for the Diocese of Allentown is committed to providing a caring, friendly, safe and respectful environment for all students, employees, volunteers, and visitors of our schools. Each Catholic school, in fulfilling its role within the educational mission of the Church, must share and live out, through Catholic Christian tradition, the message of Jesus Christ and be committed to providing an integrated Catholic educational environment that permeates all aspects of its daily life and operations. Therefore, acts of harassment, hazing, intimidation, and bullying (including cyberbullying) are unacceptable behaviors and are prohibited in our schools.

Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, harassment, intimidation or hazing constitute conduct that disrupts both a student’s ability to learn and a school’s ability to educate its students in a safe and embracing Catholic environment. This behavior is against the fundamental tenet of “love your neighbor as yourself,” and destroys respect for the dignity of the student, undermines the Christian identity of the school and deprives the student of a safe and caring learning environment.

The purpose of this policy is to guide the schools of the Diocese of Allentown in our goal of preventing and responding to acts of bullying, intimidation, violence and other similar disruptive behavior with “Zero Indifference”. Administration, faculty, staff, and volunteers are to demonstrate appropriate behavior by treating others with civility and respect, and being aware of and not tolerating harassment, intimidation, hazing, and bullying.

Definitions

For purposes of this Policy, the following definitions shall apply:

Bullying – repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, that:

- Creates a hostile educational environment
- Substantially interferes with a students’ education benefits, opportunities, or performance
- Causes physical or emotional harm to the individual or damage to their property

- Places an individual in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself, or of damage to his/her property
- Including but not limited to physical intimidation, assault, extortion, oral or written threats, slurs, innuendo, teasing and putdowns, demeaning comments, cartoon drawing, graffiti, pranks, name calling, threatening looks, gestures or actions, cruel rumors, false accusation, social isolation, flashing a weapon, taunting/ridiculing, stalking, and relationship undermining.

For the purpose of this Policy, whenever the term “Bullying” is used it is to denote either Bullying or Cyber-Bullying.

Cyber-Bullying –Bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by:

- Wire
- Radio
- Photo-electronic or photo-optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications

Cyber-Bullying shall also include the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or knowingly impersonates another person as author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of Bullying.

Cyber-Bullying shall also include 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.

Harassment, hazing, intimidation – acts, words or other behaviors, by an individual or group against another individual or group characterized by:

- Intent to harm.
- Intensity and duration over a period of time.
- An interpersonal relationship where there is an imbalance of power, not mutual or intentional provocation by the victim.
- Inflicting physical or emotional harm or discomfort or damage to the person’s reputation and/or relationships.
- A level so severe, persistent, or pervasive that an intimidation or threatening education environment is created or the orderly operation of the school is substantially disrupted.

Name-calling – the use of language to defame, demean or degrade individuals or groups.

Prohibitions

Bullying, harassment, hazing, intimidation and name-calling are prohibited:

- On school grounds owned, leased or used by a school;
- On property immediately adjacent to school grounds;
- At any school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds;
- At a school bus stop;
- On a school bus or any other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school
- Through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school or any personal devices.

Bullying, harassment, hazing, intimidation and name-calling are also prohibited at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a school if the act or acts in questions:

- Create a hostile environment at school for the individual.
- Infringe on the rights of the individual at school.
- Materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Responsibilities

All employees must act in an ethical, responsible and lawful manner in accordance with Diocesan policies in the Teacher Handbook, administrative regulations and state and federal law. To the extent that a person has supervision of other persons, activities and environments, each administrator, principal, teacher, aide or volunteer shall:

- Maintain a work place, work area, learning area and/or activity area free of bullying, harassment, hazing, intimidation or name-calling.
- Ensure that all information concerning the policy prohibiting bullying, harassment, hazing, intimidation or name-calling is disseminated to all subordinates, to all families, and to all students.
- Be alert to possible situations, circumstances, or events that may lead to or constitute bullying and immediately report to his or her immediate supervisor any actions viewed by him or her which, in his or her opinion, may be construed as falling within the definition of bullying as contained within the policy; and/or any instances, reports or allegations of bullying which come to his or her attention.

- Upon receiving an allegation of bullying, harassment, hazing, intimidation or name-calling individuals are responsible to submit a report in accordance with the individual building prevention and intervention plan.

Each school in the Diocese that is subject to this Policy shall be responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of a prevention and intervention plan. The Plan should include consultation with all stakeholders, which may include teachers, other staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, Intermediate Unit (IU) personnel, students, parents and guardians. Annual review of the Plan and this Policy should be provided by the Principal or his or her designee.

- Information regarding the policy against bullying, harassment, hazing, intimidation or name-calling shall be incorporated into the Teacher Handbook.
- It is the responsibility of the administration and staff to ensure that each child is made aware and understands definitions, conditions, and examples of bullying.
- Classroom lessons explaining inappropriate behaviors, role-playing such behaviors, modeling appropriate responses, and teaching proper steps in reporting incidents are to be provided periodically, on a basis to be determined, through a prevention program.
(*Example: Steps to Respect*)

Discipline and Remedial Action

The response to those who commit one or more acts of bullying, harassment, hazing, intimidation or name-calling should be determined based on the totality of the circumstances. In all cases, the Principal will be responsible to determine if a bullying offense occurred, or did not occur, and the school should attempt to actively involve parents/guardians in the remediation of the behavior(s) concerned.

- Initiate immediate talks with the bully or bullies.
- Talk with the Target student(s) and her/her parents/guardians.
- In determining the appropriate response to students who commit one or more acts of bullying, school administrators should consider:
 - The development, maturity levels, and/or special learning needs of the parties involved.
 - The levels of harm.
 - The surrounding circumstances.
 - The nature of the behaviors.
 - Past incidences or past or continuing patterns of behavior.
 - The relationship between the parties involved.
 - The context in which the alleged incidents occurred.

Depending on the severity of the incident, or the series of incidents, the administration may also take appropriate steps to ensure student safety. These may include implementing a safety plan, separating and supervising the students involved, exclusion of parents of involved students (victim and offender) from school premises and school sponsored activities to prevent extension of conflict, providing staff support for students when necessary, contacting IU school psychologist for counseling, reporting incidents to law enforcement, in school/out of school suspension or expulsion, loss of privileges in school.