

#### IV-C-11 Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation of Students

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.

##### I. Definition

A. 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:

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

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

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

## II. Application to Employees

This policy also applies to harassment of students by Board of Education employees. Any employee who is found to be responsible for harassment of a student will be subject to disciplinary action. Also, any employee having knowledge of harassment of a student who fails to report it will be subject to disciplinary action.

## III. Application to Students

Harassment committed by students against students constitutes inappropriate behavior. All allegations will be investigated by the principal or designee. Depending on the severity of the offense, appropriate action will be taken. Any student who is found to have violated this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

## IV. Complaint/Reporting

- A. Students who believe they have been subject to bullying, harassment, intimidation or who have knowledge of employees or students who may be engaging in harassment, shall report such conduct promptly to the principal or designee or office of the Superintendent. All complaints/reports must be written using the *Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting Form*. Copies of this form will be available in the main office and guidance office in each school. Students employed by the Board of Education shall report harassment to their immediate supervisor or office of the Superintendent. Retaliation against a student making a complaint in good faith is prohibited.
- B. Grievances that students are not able to resolve informally should be presented in accordance with the provisions of policy VII-A-6, Title IX Grievance Procedure Policy.
- C. Information obtained from the *Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting and Investigation forms* shall be recorded for data collection, stored and submitted as required by Education Article §7-424.1. Summary information will be provided to each school annually.

## V. Investigation

- A. The principal or designee shall:
  - 1. Conduct an investigation of an alleged incident using the MSDE Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting Form.
  - 2. Notify parent/guardian of the victim and offender of the incident.
  - 3. Determine whether the allegations of bullying, harassment or intimidation have been substantiated and the complainant informed of the finding.
  - 4. The investigation shall be completed within two school days or as appropriate after receipt of a reporting form.

- B. Complaints of harassment of a student by an employee will be forwarded to the Superintendent or designee for investigation. The Superintendent or designee shall determine whether the allegations have been substantiated and the complainant informed of the finding. See IV. A.

## VI. Prevention, Intervention, Remediation and Consequences

This policy recognizes that prohibition of bullying, harassment, intimidation, reprisals and retaliation against those who report these behaviors. Consequences and remedial actions cannot be effective unless they are part of a school-wide program.

### A. Prevention

1. Each school should provide professional development for all staff and increase awareness, causes and consequences of bullying, harassment or intimidation for all students.
2. A school-wide program should be implemented to help address bullying, harassment, or intimidation which include strategies of positive behavior support, school climate and school improvement.

### B. Intervention/Remediation

1. The principal or designee shall provide education/intervention for students exhibiting behaviors of bullying, harassment, or intimidation, as well as measures designed to correct the inappropriate behavior, prevent future occurrences and protect the victim.
2. Schools may utilize school-based interventions as well as local agencies or community mental health services to assist students.

### C. Consequences

Consequences and remedial actions for students violating the Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation policy should be consistent with the range of consequences in the Worcester County Public Schools Code of Conduct.

## VII. 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 can not always be assured.

VIII. Notification

Notice of the policy prohibiting bullying, harassment or intimidation of students will be included in student handbooks, school agendas and reviewed annually with all students.

IX. Support Services

Schools will maintain a list of support services for students who have been targets of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. These services should be consistent with the policies and procedures of the Board of Education should be available to students, parents, guardians and staff members. Additional information or technical assistance is available through the Division Chief of the Student Services Branch or School Safety Specialist at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), at 410-767-0100.

