

Diocese of Camden

Catholic Schools Office

BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

Introduction

The Diocese of Camden and the Catholic Schools Office believe that each Catholic school in the Diocese of Camden must be aware that its purpose is rooted in the mission of the Church. 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 a Catholic educational environment that permeates all aspects of its daily life and operations.

Each student should be challenged to reach his/her full potential, develop a love of learning and learn in an environment that fosters respect and understanding of one another. It is essential that we do our best to provide a safe, positive and productive educational environment where each student may be afforded the opportunity to achieve his or her maximum potential, without being subjected to Bullying, Cyber-Bullying or Retaliation. Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, Retaliation and other similar disruptive or violent behaviors constitute conduct that disrupts both a student's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its students in a safe environment. Pastors, principals, faculty, and other employees are expected to demand that all students treat each other with civility and respect. Bullying, Cyber-Bullying and Retaliation are not to be tolerated.

Accordingly, the Bullying Prevention Policy ("Policy") has been duly promulgated by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Camden ("the Bishop") to apply to all Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Camden and all Parish Schools located within the Diocese of Camden, as well as to all other schools to which the Bishop or a pastor or group of pastors has authority to appoint or approve governing officers or administrators.

Definitions

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

Aggressor means a student who engages in Bullying or Retaliation.

Bullying is the repeated use, by one or more students, of written, oral, or electronic expressions or physical acts or gestures of any combination thereof, with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the victim, directed at a Target, which a reasonable person should know would have the effect of:

- causing physical or emotional harm to the Target or damage to the Target's property;
- placing the Target in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself, or of damage to his/her property;
- causing the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the Target's education; or
- materially and substantially disrupting the educational process or the orderly operation of a school.

An isolated incident, however egregious, is not Bullying. Numerous acts of misconduct against different students do not constitute Bullying. Such conduct may warrant disciplinary action, but is not Bullying.

Bullying includes Cyber-Bullying.

Cyber-Bullying means 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
- Electromagnetics
- Photo-electronic or photo-optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications.

Cyber-Bullying also includes 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 message, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of Bullying.

Cyber-Bullying 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 people, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of Bullying.

Plan means the Bullying prevention and intervention plan established by the school.

Retaliation means any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment directed against a student who reports Bullying or provides information during an investigation of Bullying.

School Grounds means property on which the school building or facility is located or property that is owned, leased or used by a school for a school-sponsored activity, function, program, instruction or training.

Staff means all employees of the school or parish and other individuals who receive stipends from the school or parish.

Target means a student against whom Bullying or Retaliation has been perpetrated.

Prohibition against Bullying and Retaliation

Bullying is prohibited:

- on School Grounds;
- on property 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 as school bus or any other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school; or
- through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school

Bullying by students is also prohibited at other locations and through other means if it:

- causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the Target's education; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of a school.

Nothing contained in this Policy or in any Plan shall require a school to monitor any non-school related activity, function or program.

Prevention and Intervention Plan

The principal (or the individual who holds a comparable position) (herein, the "Principal") of each school shall be responsible for overseeing the development of a prevention and intervention plan in consultation with others, which may include Staff, school volunteers, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents and guardians. The Plan must comply with the requirements of this Policy. The Plan must be promulgated by September 1, 2014.

The Plan shall include, but need not be limited to:

- definitions of Bullying and Retaliation as contained in this Policy;
- prohibitions against Bullying and Retaliation;
- clear procedures for students, Staff, parents or guardians and others to report Bullying or Retaliation;
- the range of disciplinary actions that may be taken against an Aggressor for Bullying or Retaliation; provided, however, that the disciplinary actions shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior;
- a provision that a student who knowingly makes a false accusation of Bullying or Retaliation may be subject to disciplinary action;
- a strategy for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for Aggressors and Targets and for appropriate family members of such students;
- provisions establishing a Bullying prevention program or curriculum;
- provisions for informing parents and guardians about the Bullying prevention program or curriculum of the school.

A provision for ongoing professional development to build the skills of all Staff members, including, but not limited to, the Principal, educators, faculty, other staff, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and volunteers, to prevent, identify and respond to Bullying. The Plan shall be reviewed and updated at least every three years.

The Principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan within his or her school.

Reporting

Any Staff member who witnesses or becomes aware of Bullying or Retaliation shall report the incident(s) immediately to the Principal or to the Staff member designated in the Plan as responsible for receiving such reports, or to both the Principal and such designee.

Investigation

Upon receipt of such a report, the Principal or his or her designee shall promptly conduct an investigation.

Investigation of Complaint

Once a complaint has been reported, the Principal or his or her designee shall promptly investigate to determine if Bullying has occurred. The Principal will review the disciplinary history of the student(s) accused for indication of a pattern or past history of similar behavior. A written report of the investigation shall be prepared when the investigation is complete. The report shall include findings of fact, a determination of whether acts of Bullying were verified, and, when acts of Bullying were verified, the disciplinary action taken and any non-disciplinary action provided or recommended to the parents or guardians.

Retaliation

Retaliation against a person who reports Bullying, provides information during an investigation of Bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about Bullying shall be prohibited.

Disciplinary Action

Once the investigation is complete, the Principal or his or her designee shall determine the consequences for the Aggressor(s) on a case-by-case, age appropriate basis. Bullying can take many forms and can vary dramatically in how serious it is, and what impact it has on the victim and other students. While conduct that rises to the level of Bullying will generally warrant disciplinary action against the students responsible for Bullying, whether to impose disciplinary sanctions and what sanctions to impose in a particular case are matters within the professional discretion of the Principal or his or her designee. It is the goal of the school to have students achieve redemption, learn, and stop Bullying.

Disciplinary action for children in preschool and kindergarten will generally be handled by the child's teacher working with the student, the student's family and the Principal (as needed). These children are very young and are learning social skills.

Non-disciplinary Intervention

When Bullying is identified early and/or when acts do not reasonably require a disciplinary response, students may be counseled as to the definition of Bullying, its prohibition, and their duty to avoid any conduct that could be considered Bullying.

Training

Annual training on the Plan shall be provided for Staff and, at the discretion of the Principal, for volunteers who have significant contact with students.

Publication and Notice

At the beginning of each school year, the Principal or his or her designee shall provide notice to the Staff of the Policy and the Plan. Relevant student-related sections of the Plan shall be included in the school handbook provided to the students and their parents or guardians each year.

The Plan shall be posted on the school's website.

Notifications

If the Principal or his or her designee determines that Bullying or Retaliation has occurred, he/she shall:

- notify the local law enforcement agency if called for by the Memorandum of Agreement with Law Enforcement;
- notify the parents or guardians of the Aggressor; and
- notify the parents or guardians of the Target.

The specific disciplinary consequences imposed on the Aggressor will not be disclosed to the parents or guardians of the Target, unless required by law.

If Bullying or Retaliation involves students from other schools, and the Principal identifies those students and their schools in the course of the investigation, then the Principal or his or her designee shall notify the appropriate administrator of the other schools of the incident so that the other schools may take appropriate action.

Student Assistance

Each school shall provide counseling or referral to appropriate services, including guidance, academic intervention, and protection to students (both Targets and Aggressors) affected by Bullying or Retaliation, as necessary.

Available Consultation

If any Staff member has questions concerning this Policy, he or she is encouraged to contact the Catholic Schools Office.