

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF  
PHILADELPHIA

No. 249

Section: Pupils

Title:  
Bullying/Cyberbullying

Adopted: September 22,  
2010

Revised: March 26,  
2020

249 BULLYING/CYBERBULLYING

**Purpose**

The Board of Education (“Board”) is committed to providing a safe, positive learning environment for all students in the School District of Philadelphia (“District”). The Board recognizes the negative impact that bullying has on student health, welfare, and safety and on the learning environment at school. The Board recognizes that bullying creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, detracts from a safe environment, and may lead to more serious violence. Therefore, the Board prohibits bullying by District students.

**Definitions**

The following words and phrases, when used in this policy, shall have the meaning given to them in this section:

**Bullying:** An intentional electronic, written, verbal, nonverbal, psychological or physical act or series of acts directed at another student or students, which occurs in and/or outside a school setting, that is severe, persistent, or pervasive and has the effect of doing any of the following:[1]

1. Substantially interfering with a student’s education;
2. Creating a threatening school environment; or
3. Substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school.

Bullying is characterized by the following three (3) criteria:

1. It is aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing.
2. It is carried out repeatedly over time.

3. It occurs between people where there is an imbalance of power (e.g. physical strength, mental capacity, popularity, or social skills).

Bullying can take many forms and can include a variety of behavior. As defined in this policy, bullying refers to direct or indirect action, which may include but is not limited to:

1. Physical – hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, getting another person to hurt someone;
2. Verbal – slurs—including but not limited to racial, gender-based, or religious—name-calling, teasing, taunting, harassment, gossiping;
3. Nonverbal – threatening, obscene gestures, isolation, exclusion, stalking;
4. Psychological or Relational - involves spreading malicious rumors, and engaging in social isolations or intimidation; and
5. Cyberbullying – any form of bullying that occurs by the use of electronic communication devices or through means of social networking, email, instant messaging, text messaging, tweets, blogs, photo and video sharing, chat rooms, dash boards, websites or apps including personal profile websites or apps, such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook.

It is the intent of this policy that the term bullying include, but not be limited to, incidents that are reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as gender, age, race, color, sexual orientation (known or perceived), gender identity expression (known or perceived), national origin, religion, disability, socioeconomic status and/or political beliefs.

**Bullying designee:** The school-based staff person who receives reports of incidents of alleged bullying, conducts investigations, and determines whether an allegation is substantiated.

**Electronic communication:** A communication transmitted by means of an electronic or communication device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, cellular phone, or computing device.

**Online reporting process:** The process for reporting or submitting complaints of alleged bullying/cyberbullying behavior and documenting investigations, accessible on the District's website at: <https://www.philasd.org/bullying/>

**School setting:** In the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at a designated bus stop or at any activity sponsored, supervised or sanctioned by the school.[1]

## **Authority**

The Board prohibits all forms of bullying by District students. The Board encourages students or parents/guardians of students who believe they have been bullied or witness bullying behavior to immediately report such incidents using the online reporting process or to the building principal or bullying designee, or to any other member of the school staff, including teachers, guidance counselors, coaches and administrators. Any staff member who receives a report of alleged bullying shall immediately notify the principal or bullying designee of same.[1][2]

The Board directs the principal or bullying designee to investigate complaints of alleged bullying promptly and thoroughly, and directs appropriate school personnel to take corrective action when allegations are substantiated, including the convening of an IEP or Section 504 team when appropriate for either the victim or the offender. If the principal or bullying designee does not take action within the time frame required by this policy and its administrative procedures, students or parents/guardians should report the alleged bullying to the District hotline number listed in the administrative procedures to this policy.

Confidentiality of all parties, witnesses, the allegations, the filing of a complaint, and the investigation shall be maintained consistent with the District's legal and investigative obligations. All parties will be treated with dignity and due process.

No reprisals or retaliation shall occur as a result of good faith reports of alleged bullying or participation in an investigation of allegations of bullying.

## **Delegation of Responsibility**

In order to maintain an educational environment that discourages and prohibits bullying, the Board authorizes the Office of Student Support Services, or other office designated by the Superintendent, to coordinate the District's efforts to comply with this policy and applicable laws and regulations, including:[1]

1. Ensuring that this policy and administrative procedures are reviewed with students within 90 days of adoption of this policy and on an annual basis; and
2. Annually providing the following information with the Annual School Safety Report to the Pennsylvania Department of Education:
  - a. This policy and administrative procedures;
  - b. Report of bullying incidents; and
  - c. Information on the development and implementation of any and all research-based bullying prevention and intervention programs.

3. Informing staff about this policy and its administrative procedures, including the availability and use of the online reporting process;
4. Posting this policy and administrative procedures on the District's website; and
5. Reviewing this policy every three years and recommending necessary revisions to the Board.

Each student shall be responsible to respect the rights of others and to ensure an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and free from bullying. A student who violates this policy shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action consistent with the Code of Student Conduct, which may include counseling within the school, parental conference, loss of school privileges, disciplinary transfer, exclusion from extra-curricular activities and athletics, detention, suspension, or expulsion.[1][3][4]

The Superintendent or designee through the Office of Student Support Services shall develop administrative procedures to implement this policy.

### **Mandatory Regulatory Procedures**

The Superintendent, through the Office of Student Support Services or designee, shall implement research-based bullying prevention and intervention programs in all schools. Such programs shall provide training for District staff on this policy and for effectively responding to, intervening in, and reporting incidents of alleged bullying.[1][5]

All schools shall implement processes to prevent and mitigate acts of bullying, including:

1. Posting this policy in every classroom and in a prominent location within each school building;[1]
2. Providing professional development on the prevention, identification, reporting, investigation, and resolution of allegations of bullying and cyberbullying;
3. Informing students and parents/guardians about this policy and administrative procedures, including the availability and use of the online reporting process, during orientation/open house sessions within the first month of school, and through appropriate school communication (i.e., school website, email, parent/student handbook, posters, flyers); [1]
4. Informing students and parents/guardians that bullying and cyberbullying will not be tolerated and providing student training on the definitions of bullying and cyberbullying, examples of bullying/cyberbullying, the reporting process, and consequences of participating in bullying/cyberbullying towards students and staff;
5. Conducting developmentally appropriate prevention activities such as:

- a. Holding frequent classroom meetings or town hall meetings with students to discuss safety concerns;
- b. Establishing, teaching, and reinforcing rules against bullying/cyberbullying;
- c. Incorporating social and emotional learning into the curriculum whenever possible;
- d. Conducting classroom lessons on relevant topics such as inclusion, sensitivity, empathy, diversity, communication, problem solving, and tolerance;
- e. Including bullying/cyberbullying on every agenda for building committee/leadership team, grade group, and/or school-based staff meetings;
- f. Celebrating the annual national bullying awareness month (October); and
- g. Conducting student and/or parent focus groups or administering school-wide surveys to assess the nature and prevalence of bullying at the school, and identify bullying hot spots in and around the building.

### **Legal References**

1. [24 P.S. § 1303.1-A](#)
2. [22 Pa. Code § 12.3](#)
3. [Policy 218](#) - Code of Student Conduct
4. [Policy 233](#) - Suspension and Expulsion
5. [24 P.S. § 1302-A](#)

### **Related References**

1. [Policy 248](#) - Harassment and Discrimination of Students
2. [Policy 815](#) - Acceptable Use of Internet, Technology, and Network Resources
3. [“What is Bullying?” - The US Department of Education](#)
4. [20 U.S.C. § 7118](#)