MODEL POLICY TO ADDRESS
BULLYING
in Virginia's Public Schools

Model Policy to Address Bullying in Virginia's Schools

Board of Education
Commonwealth of Virginia

October 2013

Acknowledgements

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Research consistently demonstrates that a strong, proactive stance against aggression and bullying behavior is the best means of discouraging bullying in school settings; however, nothing replaces teaching and reinforcing positive and socially accepted behaviors in children.

Introduction

Bullying is a problem in many spheres of our culture: it exists in the work place, it exists in intimate relationships, and it exists in families and communities. Bullying exists in public schools but public schools are in a unique position to educate children and adolescents about its presence, danger, and negative consequences. Schools can also teach behaviors that will protect students from the harmful effects of bullying. Based on the findings of past and current research, this model policy promotes school practices that address bullying behaviors in schools.[1] This document provides the *Code of Virginia's* definition of "bullying" established in § 22.1-276.01. This model policy unequivocally considers bullying, aggression, and harassment as unacceptable behaviors; it promotes adoption of age-appropriate strategies designed for prevention, intervention, and accountability for bullying behaviors; and it promotes the use of whole-school and evidence-based practices in the classroom, in the school, and across the school division.

Virginia school boards have been required to include bullying prevention as a part of character education since 2005 (§ 22.1-208.01 of the *Code of Virginia*). In addition, school boards are expected to include bullying as a prohibited behavior in their student codes of conduct (§ 22.1-279.6.D of the *Code of Virginia*) and to implement policies and procedures to educate school board employees about bullying and the need to create a bully-free environment (§ 22.1-291.4 of the *Code of Virginia*) by July 1, 2014. The Virginia General Assembly's House Joint Resolution 625 (2011) required the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to study local school divisions' antibullying policies. This current model policy is an outgrowth of that study, and is designed to guide every school division in the development, promotion, and implementation of policies prohibiting bullying. In order to best address local conditions, such policy should be developed, promoted, and implemented through a collaborative process that includes all interested stakeholders: school administrators, school educators and staff, students, families, and the community-at-large. HB1871 enacted by the 2013 General Assembly required the Virginia Board of Education to develop by January 1, 2014, model policies and procedures for use by each school board regarding the prevention of bullying in their schools.

Bullying has been linked to negative outcomes for students who are its victims, for bystanders, and for students who are bullies themselves. Bullying negatively affects school climate. Bullying also has negative impacts on learning, health, behavior and school outcomes. For these reasons, every school division should be committed to providing a safe and civil environment for all students, employees, parents or guardians, volunteers, and visitors. Every school division should adopt policies that indicate bullying is not acceptable and that it will be met with consequences that are developmentally appropriate and sensitive to context.

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[1]Words and phrases in italics signify core facets and elements for school divisions to consider including in their policies, non-italicized words and phrases provide introduction, clarification, and deeper understanding of the italicized text.

A basic assumption of this model policy is that schools and school divisions will mobilize the energies within the school community and the community-at-large to promote and facilitate the reporting of suspected bullying incidents, to investigate all incidents thoroughly, and to use the resulting data to bolster and improve bullying reduction and prevention efforts. The model policy promotes the practices of educating students about bullying and its prevention, training staff in proactive ways to prevent and intervene in bullying situations, and maintaining a clearly defined investigation protocol overseen by a trained coordinator. Included in the appendices is a letter from United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights advising school leaders that some instances of bullying could constitute a violation of an individual's civil rights.

Research shows that a comprehensive approach to bullying in schools includes the following ten components: (1) A clear definition of bullying; (2) utilization of effective evidence-based program(s); (3) staff communication and training (annually); (4) feedback from teachers and other school staff; (5) student education (annually); (6) student surveys; (7) parent communication, education and surveys; (8) intervention(s) with victim; (9) intervention(s) with a student(s) who bullies(y); and (10) evaluation of prevention and intervention efforts. Many of these components are programmatic, rather than policy based. Thus, the sample policy wording below does not address each of them specifically. Lastly, while bullying behavior is reprehensible, school officials should remember that education is a developmental process and should not rush to criminalize bullying behavior.

Defining Bullying Behavior

Every school division policy should include a definition of bullying, which, at a minimum, is consistent to that adopted by Virginia's 2013 General Assembly (§ 22.1-276.01 the Code of Virginia):
> *"Bullying means any aggressive and unwanted behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor or aggressors and victim; and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma. 'Bullying' includes cyber bullying. 'Bullying' does not include ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict."*

Bullying means systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on another person. Bullying involves physical and emotional behaviors that are intentional, controlling, and hurtful, thus creating harassing, intimidating, hostile or otherwise offensive educational environments. Bullying behaviors include unwanted and repeated written, verbal, 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 an individual's school performance or participation; or creates a disruption in the educational environment.

Bullying is characterized by the following:

- Intentionally aggressive behavior designed to inflict harm;

- Repetitive behavior planned into the future;

- Interpersonal relationship marked by an imbalance of power.

Bullying behavior often occurs without apparent provocation, and is considered a form of abuse (i.e., peer abuse). Such peer abuse may be manifested both openly and directly or subtly and indirectly. Bullying may be communicated directly, in person, or via other communication method, including via technology (cyberbullying).

Bullying may be physical or emotional.

Physical bullying includes: hitting, punching, poking, shoving, pinching, jabbing, kicking, choking, unwanted touching, blocking, chasing and cornering, tripping, vandalizing, stealing, and writing graffiti (on both public and private property and by use of computers or other technological devices).

Emotional bullying includes: name-calling; threatening; taunting; malicious and incessant teasing; spreading rumors; mocking; public humiliation; stalking; making faces or obscene gestures; making offensive racial, religious or sexual comments; ganging-up on others; belittling; persistently excluding others from a group or activity (shunning); ignoring and lying.

Bullying also encompasses:

1. Retaliation against a student or school employee by another student for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. Intentional false reporting of bullying or harassment is considered retaliation.

2. Perpetuation of conduct listed in the definition of bullying or harassment by an individual or group with intent to demean, dehumanize, embarrass, or cause emotional or physical harm by

    a. inciting, goading or coercing,

    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 school division's system, and

    c. acting in a manner that has an effect substantially similar to the effect of bullying, e.g., hazing.

Bullying is of concern for a school division when an incident occurs at any time during an education program or activity conducted

      a. at any school-related or school-sponsored program or activity;

      b. on a school bus or chartered transportation for school sponsored activities and other means of transportation funded by public schools;

      c. in any community setting where the behavior or interaction of students extended beyond the school environment but has negative impact on the academic setting;[2]or

      d. through a communication device, computer system, or computer network in a school or off campus which poses a reasonable forecast of substantial disruption of school activities.

Cyberbullying refers to any threats by one student toward another typically through e-mails or on Web sites (e.g., blogs, social networking sites). Electronic communication that supports deliberate, hostile, hurtful messages intended to harm others is a form of bullying. Cyberbullying includes such things as sending mean, vulgar or threatening messages or images; posting sensitive, private information about another person; pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad; and defamatory online personal polling Web sites.

Bullying behaviors executed outside of school should not be tolerated if they negatively impact school climate, e.g., texting threats in the evening about physically assaulting a person the next day instills a climate of fear and intimidation which compromises the school climate.[3] Such incidents should be investigated and handled by school staff as quickly and expediently as possible. The Virginia General Assembly has also required that policies and procedures regarding bullying and cyberbullying may not prohibit expression of religious, philosophical, or political views, unless that expression creates an actual, material disruption of the work of the school.

Related Definitions

Harassment is a course of conduct which annoys, threatens, intimidates, alarms, or puts a person in fear of his/her safety. Harassment is unwanted, unwelcomed and uninvited behavior that demeans, threatens or offends the victim and results in a hostile environment for the victim and bystanders. Harassing behavior may include, but is not limited to, epithets; derogatory comments or slurs and lewd propositions; assault; impeding or blocking movement; offensive touching or any physical interference with normal school activity, work or movement, and visual insults such as derogatory posters or cartoons.

Sexual Harassment includes any unwelcome sexual advances, regardless of sexual orientation, requests for sexual favors, and other inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

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[2] Case law regarding the ability for schools to address activities occurring outside of the academic setting is emerging and should be reviewed as a school board policy is being developed.
[3] Ibid.

Discriminatory Harassment is harassment based on sex, gender, race, color, national origin, disability, religion, ancestry, age, marital status, genetic information or any other characteristic protected by law (or based on a belief that such characteristic exists) which is prohibited by federal and/or state law. (See Appendix B.)

Conduct that may rise to the level of harassment, intimidation, and bullying may take many forms: slurs, rumors, jokes, innuendoes, demeaning comments, drawings, cartoons, pranks, ostracism, physical attacks or threats, gestures, or acts relating to an individual or group, whether electronic, written, oral, or physically transmitted messages or images. There is no requirement that targeted students actually possess any characteristic that is the basis for harassment, ridicule, intimidation, or bullying.

Bullying and Harassment Prohibited

A school division's policy needs to affirm that bullying or harassment of any student is prohibited, regardless of where it originated, if it disrupts the educational environment.

Additional Definitions

Aggressor/Bully – is a student, staff member, or other member of the school community who engages in the bullying of others.

Bystanders – are individuals that allow bullying to persist by simply watching and remaining passive. Passive observers give tacit permission to bullies while more active bystanders *instigate* the aggressor by prodding her/him to continue or by laughing, cheering, or making comments that encourage the bullying behavior.

Retaliation – when an aggressor bullies another who has reported incidents of bullying.

Staff – includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, classified staff, substitute and temporary teachers, volunteers, or paraprofessionals.

Targeted Student/Victim – is a student against whom bullying has allegedly been perpetrated.

Essential Elements of School Board Policy

School division policy should reflect a range of whole-school, evidence-based intervention strategies that use individual, classroom, school, and division-level approaches. These strategies should encompass the aspects of <u>prevention</u>, <u>intervention</u>, and <u>accountability and consequences.</u> These strategies should be evidence-based and developmentally appropriate and should incorporate a spirit of rehabilitation and restoration wherever possible. Annual training for faculty and staff on identifying and intervening on-the-spot, as well as procedures for reporting and following up, should be provided. All students and parents should be provided annual education regarding identifying bullying behaviors, intervening in developmentally appropriate ways, and reporting and providing consequences. Annual surveys of students, faculty, staff and parents should be conducted to develop, evaluate and modify efforts and programming.

Prevention and Intervention

It is recommended that school divisions' policies incorporate

1. schoolwide evidence-based anti-bullying programs as part of a system of postive behavioral supports and school improvement efforts across grade levels,

2. school climate improvement efforts to promote student involvement in the anti-bullying efforts, peer support, mutual respect, and creation of a culture which encourages students to report bullying to adults,

3. collaboration with families and the community to inform parents about the prevalence, causes, and consequences of bullying; including its central role as a public health hazard, the means of preventing it, and the methods of reporting it should it happen or occur, and

4. the designation of a bullying prevention coordinator. Research indicates this single point of contact is an essential component for planning, implementing and managing programs, and completing investigations according to procedures.

    A bullying prevention coordinator is a person who serves as the primary school division contact to receive copies of all formal and informal reports of bullying incidents. S/he ensures policy is implemented and that all staff within the division are properly educated and trained. Every school division should have a designated bullying prevention coordinator.

    The bullying prevention coordinator

    a. serves as the school division's primary contact for harassment, intimidation, and bullying;

    b. supports and assists the school principal (or designee) in resolving complaints (except where the complaint is against the principal or designee);

    c. reviews all copies of incident reporting forms, discipline referral forms, and letters to parents providing the outcomes of investigations, before these are mailed to parents;

    d. uses school bullying and complaint data to identify divisionwide patterns of behavior and areas of concern;

    e. implements school division policy and procedures by overseeing the investigative processes, including ensuring that investigations are prompt, impartial, and thorough;

    f. assesses the training needs of staff and students to ensure successful implementation of policy throughout the school division ensuring that staff receive annual training and technical assistance based on the results of staff and student surveys;

g. develops a procedure for maintaining written records of all incidents of bullying and their individual resolution; and

h. disseminates her/his contact information liberally throughout the school division.

5. information dissemination

The school division's Web site, and each school Web site in the division, should prominently post information on reporting bullying; the name and contact information for making a report to a school administrator; and the name and contact information for the school division prevention coordinator. The school division's policy and procedure(s), including a defintion of bullying, examples of bullying behaviors, and methods for reporting, should be available in each school in user-friendly language.

Annually, the superintendent should ensure that a report summarizing the bullying prevention policy and procedure(s) is provided in student, staff, volunteer, and parent handbooks throughout schools and school division offices, and is posted on the school division's Web site.

6. education

Each year students should receive age-appropriate information on the recognition and prevention of harassment, intimidation, or bullying behaviors at student orientation sessions and on other appropriate occasions. Information provided should include a copy of the Bullying Incident Report Form (Appendix D) or a link to a Web-based reporting form.

7. training

Staff should receive annual training on the school division's bullying prevention policy and procedures as regards their roles and responsibilities in responding immediately to bullying incidents, as well as the reporting, intervening and following-up with victims and bullies. Annual professional development should increase staff awareness of the prevalence, causes, and consequences of bullying, and continually promote the use of evidence-based strategies for preventing bullying. Professional development should be provided for employees hired after the annual training has been conducted.

8. conducting of school safety surveys

Students and staff should be surveyed at least biennially regarding the prevalence and characteristics of bullying in their school; data collected should be used to guide local decision making and program planning related to surveillance needs, prevention, intervention, and professional development. School safety survey results should be shared with the school board for eventual dissemination to the public.

Reporting, Investigating and Recording Incidents

> *School division policies should outline procedures that will be followed to ensure prompt investigation and response to any report of an incident of bullying. These procedures should protect the victim from additional bullying or retaliation.*

School division policy and procedures should include clear instructions for reporting, filing and investigating instances of bullying. Reporting may be anonymous, and students and parents should be encouraged to report any behaviors that they question. All reports should be documented on the school form(s) and appropriate records kept.

Step 1: Reporting an incident (see sample Bullying Incident Report Form in Appendix D)

    a. Any student who believes s/he has been the target of bullying, or any other person in the school community who observes or receives notice that a student has or may have been the target of bullying, may report incidents verbally or in writing to any staff member.

    b. An incident reporting form may be filed anonymously (schools may make submission of the form available via the Web, a physical drop box, and/or a verbal or written report may be made to any school staff member); the reporting form should note that no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor based solely on an anonymous report. (Example: An unsigned incident reporting form dropped on a teacher's desk led to the increased monitoring of the boys' locker room in 5th period.)

    c. All reports of intimidation or bullying should be recorded on a school division incident reporting form and submitted to the principal or designee, unless the designee is the subject of the complaint, and to the bullying prevention coordinator. All reports that have an identified complainant should be investigated.

    d. All staff should document oral reports of bullying incidents made to them.

Step 2: Investigating

> *Upon receipt of a report of bullying, the school principal or designee shall promptly conduct an investigation.*

    a. When investigating the incident all of the surrounding facts, circumstances, severity, and age/developmental factors should be considered.

    b. At each school in the school division, the procedures for investigating bullying should include

1) investigation by a trained individual employed by the school division, and selected by the principal or designee. <u>The designee(s) may not be the accused perpetrator (harasser or bully) or victim</u>.

2) documentation of interviews conducted by the bullying prevention coordinator with the victim, alleged perpetrator, and witnesses (interviews are confidential, and are conducted privately and separately). <u>At no time should the alleged perpetrator and victim be interviewed together</u>.

3) the collection and evaluation of the facts including, but not limited to

   a) a description of the incident(s) including the nature of the behavior and the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred;

   b) how often the conduct occurred;

   c) whether there were past incidents or past continuing patterns of behavior;

   d) the relationship between the parties involved;

   e) the characteristics of parties involved (i.e., grade, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.);

   f) the identity and number of individuals who participated in bullying or harassing behavior;

   g) where the alleged incident(s) occurred (time/date/place of incident);

   h) whether the conduct adversely affected the student's education or adversely affected the educational environment;

   i) whether an imbalance of power is evident; and

   j) the date, time, and method of informing parents/legal guardians of all parties involved in the incident.

> ***Whether conduct is "substantially interfering with a student's education" should be determined by considering a targeted student's grades, attendance, demeanor, interaction with peers, participation in school and extracurricular activities, and other performance or behavioral indicators. Negative changes in behavior would be particularly noteworthy.***

c. Whether a particular action or incident constitutes a violation of bullying prevention policy requires a determination based on all the facts and surrounding circumstances and includes

   1) recommended remedial steps necessary to stop the bullying and/or harassing behavior,

2) a safety plan and follow-up with the victim, and

3) a final written report to the principal.

Step 3: Reporting investigation results

> *The bullying prevention coordinator should provide a report of the investigation with recommendations to the principal.*

Three possible outcomes exist:

a. If the incident falls within the scope of school division policy, appropriate consequences and/or interventions should be implemented. The prescribed actions should be designed to prevent and remediate the bullying and should include graduated interventions that are appropriate to the context and severity of the behavior. Appropriate support services should be provided for others affected by the bullying behavior.

b. If the incident falls outside of the scope of school division policy, and/or is determined to be a criminal act, referral should be made to appropriate law enforcement authorities.

c. If the incident falls outside of the scope of school division policy, and is determined not be a criminal act, the parents/legal guardians of all students involved should be informed.

Step 4: Additional considerations

a. The principal or designee may determine that other steps must be taken before the investigation is complete.

b. The investigation should be completed within two school days from the initial complaint or report. If more time is needed to complete an investigation, the school division should provide all involved parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or the student(s) with weekly updates.

Following the completion of the investigation and the submission to the school division administrator, the principal or designee shall respond to the parent/guardian of the alleged aggressor and victim(s) stating

1) the results of the investigation,

2) if the allegations were substantiated and there was a violation of policy, and

3) the process for any party to challenge the findings.

If the school principal or designee determines that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the school principal or designee should take appropriate disciplinary action, notify the parents or guardians of the perpetrator, and notify the parents or guardians of the victim. If the school principal or designee believes that the situation is placing the victim in a position of harm or danger, s/he should notify local law enforcement.

Step 5: School division recordkeeping and review

a. It is recommended that statistics regarding the number of incident reports submitted at each school be reported to division level data managers on a monthly or quarterly basis. These summaries should include the number of incidents, and number of students involved, that were substantiated and the number still under investigation. It should also include demographics about those involved in the reported incidents, i.e., each student's grade, race/ethnicity, or other pertinent information. Locations where bullying took place should be noted. Regular review of bullying incident data will aid the school division and school in prevention planning.

b. The statistics about incident reports should parallel the reports of behaviors on the discipline, crime and violence reporting form and have "bullying" disaggregated from other behaviors.

Considerations for students with disabilities:

Any bullying of a student with a disability that result in the student not receiving meaningful educational benefits constitutes a denial of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (See Appendix C.) Furthermore, some bullying of students with disabilities may also constitute discriminatory harassment and trigger additional responsibilities under the civil rights laws. (See Appendix B.)

School division policies should outline procedures that will be followed when a student with a disability is involved in any bullying incident.

A. Convene the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team to determine whether, as a result of the effects of the bullying, the student's needs have changed, and if the IEP is no longer designed to provide meaningful educational benefit. The decisions must be made by the IEP Team and be consistent with the IDEA parental participation provisions. Parents have the right to request an IEP Team meeting at any time that a student's needs may have changed as a result of the bullying.

1) If the IEP is no longer designed to provide a meaningful educational benefit to the student, the IEP Team must then determine to what extent additional or different special education or related services are needed to address the student's needs, and revise the IEP accordingly.

2) IEP Teams should exercise caution when considering a change in placement or the location of services and should keep the student in the original placement unless the student can no longer receive FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE) placement.

3) The placement of a student with disabilities in a more restrictive "protected" environment setting to avoid bullying behavior may constitute a denial of the IDEA's requirement that the school provide FAPE in the LRE.

4) Schools may not attempt to resolve the bullying situation by unilaterally changing the frequency, duration, intensity, placement, or location of the student's special education and related services.

5) If a student with a disability engages in bullying behavior, the IEP Team should review the student's IEP to determine if additional supports and services are needed to address the inappropriate behavior.

6) The IEP Team and other school personnel should examine the environment in which the bullying occurred to determine if changes to the environment are necessary.

Notification

A school division policy on bullying should include a procedure for providing notification to the parents/legal guardians of an alleged victim of bullying and the parents/legal guardians of the alleged perpetrator of an act of bullying, as well as notification to all local agencies where criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator. Such a notice would occur when and if the behavior is determined to reach the level of criminal behavior.

Notification language might be modeled after the following:

The principal, or designee, shall promptly report via telephone, personal conference, and/or in writing, the occurrence of any incident of bullying 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).

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 should be notified.

Additional considerations:

A. Statement of rights to other legal recourse

This model policy may not be interpreted to prevent a victim of harassment, intimidation or bullying or a victim of cyberbullying from seeking redress or other legal remedies under any other available law, whether civil or criminal.

B. Relationship to other laws

The school division should ensure its compliance with all state and federal laws regarding harassment, intimidation or bullying. Nothing in this model policy or its procedures prevents a student, parent/guardian, school or school division from taking action to remediate harassment or discrimination based on a person's gender or membership in a legally protected class under local, state, or federal law.

C. Procedure to refer victims and perpetrators of bullying for counseling

A school division referral procedure should establish a protocol for intervening when bullying or harassment is suspected or when a bullying incident is reported. School division leadership should provide a continuum of supports appropriate to the range of possible severity of incidents (from students who could benefit from social skills training to those who will face criminal charges). School policy should include

1. a process by which the teacher or parent/legal guardian may request informal consultation with school staff, such as the school counselor, school psychologist, student assistance specialist/team to determine the severity of concern and appropriate steps to address the concern (the involved students' parents or legal guardian may be included),

2. a referral process to provide professional assistance or services that includes:

   a. a process by which school personnel or a parent/legal guardian may refer a student to the school intervention team (or an equivalent school-based team with a problem-solving focus) for consideration of appropriate services (Parent or legal guardian involvement is required at this point), and

   b. a school-based component to address intervention and assistance as determined appropriate by the intervention team that includes

      1) counseling and support to address the needs of the victims of bullying or harassment,

      2) research-based counseling/interventions to address the behavior of the students who bully and harass others (e.g., empathy training, anger management), and

      3) research-based counseling/interventions which include assistance and support provided to parents/legal guardians, if deemed necessary or appropriate.

Conclusion

In addition to inspiring and educating the mind, one of education's long-standing functions has been the instilling of values and character traits for successful functioning in and movement through society. Educators and administrators in Virginia's public schools have not been ignorant of bullying behavior, it is only recently, however, that social science research has demonstrated the detrimental and devastating impact that unchecked and unaddressed bullying behavior can have on individuals and groups of students, and the whole school climate.

Social and political forces are demanding more humane, civil, and courteous behavior of citizens. These forces make it necessary for school boards and school leadership to adopt explicit policies that regard bullying behavior as unacceptable and intolerable. Schools must seek to prevent bullying and harassing behavior, and they must intervene respectfully and effectively in each particular context so that victims are restored to a settled and peaceful state of being, and aggressors are appropriately corrected, rehabilitated and socialized.

APPENDIX A

Sample School Board Policy Regarding Anti-Bullying

Bullying is the systematic and chronic inflicting of physical hurt or psychological distress on another person. The Code of Virginia at § 22.1-276.01defines bullying as

> *…any aggressive and unwanted behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor or aggressors and victim; and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma. 'Bullying' includes cyber bullying. 'Bullying' does not include ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict.*

The ABC School Board adopts the definition of bullying as stated in the Code of Virginia and expounds upon it for further clarification to ensure an anti-bullying learning environment is maintained in all schools.

Bullying involves physical and emotional behaviors that are intentional, controlling, and hurtful that create harassing, intimidating, hostile or otherwise offensive educational environments. Bullying is unwanted and repeated written, verbal, or physical behavior, including any threatening, insulting, or dehumanizing gesture, by a student or adult, that is severe or pervasive enough to create feelings of intimidation, alienation, or humiliation which unreasonably interfere with the school performance or participation of others.

The ABC School Board is committed to instilling in students the finest values of humanity and civility that civilization knows. Bullying is unproductive and unacceptable in-schools. Bullying harms the school culture and climate, and the individual lives of the victim, the bystander, and the bully. Bullying should be prevented and intervention should be taken in cases where bullying has been reported or is suspected.

Bullying prevention and intervention programming should include evidenced-based curricula and practices and strategies. Incidents of bullying are to be reported and investigated as soon as possible. Developmentally appropriate intervention with students accused of bullying, as well as those identified as the victims, and resolution of all complaints are essential to maintaining a safe learning environment. Records are to be kept and collected, and the data analyzed annually.

A bullying prevention coordinator should be designated to oversee program planning and implementation that includes: (1) annual training for faculty, staff and students on how to prevent and identify bullying, how to report suspected bullying, and how to take developmentally appropriate steps to intervene with bullying; (2) procedures for receiving, reporting and investigating complaints; (3) parental involvement; (4) privacy and confidentiality for all involved individuals; and (5) notification of law enforcement when it is suspected a criminal offense may have occurred. This policy should be prominently displayed on the division's and individual school's Web sites and in every school building.

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