

Students

MOUNT PLEASANT COTTAGE SCHOOL UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT**SUBJECT: BULLYING IN THE SCHOOLS**

The School District is committed to creating and maintaining a learning environment which is free of discrimination and intimidation. Based upon the principle that every student is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect, bullying of a student by another student is strictly prohibited on school property, in school buildings, on school buses, at school sponsored events and/or activities whether occurring on or off campus. Bullying, like other disruptive or violent behavior, is conduct that interferes with the student's ability to learn as well as the school's ability to educate its students in a safe and secure environment. The prohibition of bullying - along with the range of possible intervention activities and/or sanctions for such misconduct - will be included in the *District Code of Conduct* for all grade levels. Any student who is in violation of District policy and/or regulation prohibiting bullying behavior will be subject to appropriate disciplinary measures (and/or intervention strategies as may be determined by administration) in accordance with applicable laws and/or regulations, District policy and administrative regulations and the *District Code of Conduct*.

Definitions/Examples of Prohibited Conduct

For purposes of this regulation, the term "bullying" among children is defined, in general, as: "a variety of negative acts carried out repeatedly over time. It involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, with a more powerful child or group attacking those who are less powerful." Bullying can take three forms:

- 1) Physical (including, but not limited to, hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, taking personal belongings);
- 2) Verbal (including, but not limited to, taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, making threats);
- 3) Psychological (including, but not limited to, spreading rumors; manipulating social relationships; or engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation).

The District also prohibits "Internet bullying" (also referred to as "cyber-bullying") including the use of instant messaging, email, websites, chat rooms, and text messaging when such use interferes with the operation of the school; or infringes upon the general health, safety and welfare of District students or employees.

However, a single negative act as enumerated above may also constitute "bullying" (if not more serious misconduct) based upon the particular circumstances such as the seriousness of the act and/or the intent of the actor.

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SUBJECT: BULLYING IN THE SCHOOLS (Cont'd.)**Reporting of Complaints: General Guidelines**

- 1) Any student who believes that he/she is being subjected to bullying behavior, as well as any other person who has knowledge of or witnesses any possible occurrence of bullying, shall report the bullying to any staff member or the Building Principal.
- 2) The staff member/Building Principal to whom the report is made (or the staff member/Building Principal who witnesses bullying behavior) shall investigate the complaint and take appropriate action to include, as necessary, a referral to the next level of supervisory authority and/or other official designated by the District to investigate allegations of bullying. Investigations of allegations of bullying shall follow the procedures utilized for complaints of harassment within the School District, including the filing of "informal" and/or "formal" complaints and levels of appeal.
- 3) All allegations of bullying, whether written or verbal, formal or informal, will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and impartially in accordance with law and/or regulations, District policy, administrative regulations, and the *District Code of Conduct*.
- 4) To the extent possible, within legal constraints, all allegations of bullying behavior will be treated as confidentially and privately as possible. However, disclosure may be necessary to complete a thorough investigation of the charges and/or to notify law enforcement officials as warranted, and any disclosure will be provided on a "need to know" basis. *When school officials receive a complaint or report of alleged bullying behavior that may be criminal in nature or that could lead to in-school or out-of-school violence, law authorities should be immediately notified.*
- 5) Administration shall also refer to and use, as appropriate, existing policies and administrative regulations (such as those addressing harassment in the school setting, threats of violence in the school, hazing of students), the *District Code of Conduct* and the appropriate School Safety Plan when investigating allegations of bullying.
- 6) The Superintendent/designee is to be informed as soon as possible regarding all allegations and/or reports regarding bullying of students and the status of any investigations.
- 7) All investigations of allegations of bullying in the school setting, as well as any action taken, shall be appropriately documented in order to create a written record that demonstrates the District's efforts to reduce incidents of bullying and to facilitate the evaluation of the District's efforts to reduce such behavior.

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- 8) Parents of students subjected to possible bullying behavior and/or students filing a complaint of bullying behavior, as well as parents of accused students, may be notified by the appropriate administrator of such occurrence and/or allegations as warranted and in accordance with legal guidelines. Applicable due process procedures will be followed depending upon the nature of the investigation and possible disciplinary sanctions, including due process procedures mandated pursuant to federal and state law and regulation if the accused student has been identified as having a disability or is suspected of having a disability.

Prohibition of Retaliatory Behavior (Commonly Known as "Whistle-Blower" Protection)

The District prohibits any retaliatory behavior directed against complainants, victims, witnesses and/or any other individuals who participated in the investigation of allegations of bullying. Follow-up inquiries and/or appropriate monitoring of the alleged bully and victim shall be made to ensure that bullying behavior has not resumed and that all those involved in the investigation have not suffered retaliation.

Knowingly Makes False Accusations

Any individual who *knowingly* makes false accusations against a student as to allegations of bullying behavior may also face appropriate disciplinary action.

District Responsibility/Training

Principals in each school building and/or program supervisors will be responsible for informing students and staff on a yearly basis of District policy and regulations regarding the prohibition of bullying behavior by students.

Personnel at all levels are responsible for taking corrective action to prevent bullying behavior of which they have been made aware at School District sites or activities and/or reporting such behavior to their immediate supervisor. Further, staff training shall be provided to raise awareness of the problem of bullying within the schools and to facilitate staff identification of and response to such bullying behavior among students.

Prevention and intervention techniques within the District to prevent bullying behavior and to support and protect victims shall include building-level and classroom-level strategies and activities as determined by administration. Individual intervention will be provided by appropriate staff members to bullies, victims and their parents to help ensure that the bullying stops.

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SUBJECT: BULLYING IN THE SCHOOLS (Cont'd.)Strategies to Reduce Bullying

The following is a list of suggested strategies and training classes to mediate bullying based upon information provided by the *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*:

- 1) Publicize rules against bullying and post them school-wide, accompanied by a range of possible sanctions. (Note: Sanctions for bullying are also to be addressed in the *District Code of Conduct*.)
- 2) Use student and adult mentors to assist victims and bullies. Build self-esteem and foster mutual understanding of and appreciation for differences in others.
- 3) Develop a buddy system that pairs students with a particular friend or older buddy with whom they share class schedule information and plans for the school day and on whom they can depend for help.
- 4) Provide an on-campus parents' center that recruits, coordinates and encourages parents to take part in the educational process, to volunteer and to assist in school activities and projects.
- 5) Add adult classes in parenting skills and student classes in anger management, assertiveness training and behavior modification training.
- 6) Disseminate the *District Code of Conduct* to teachers, students and parents as mandated pursuant to law and regulation.
- 7) Emphasize discipline that stresses appropriate behavior instead of reprimands that focus on punishing wrong behavior.
- 8) Build friendship groups that support children who are regularly bullied by peers.
- 9) Create peer mediation programs and teen courts to train students to mediate problems among themselves.
- 10) Make available conflict and dispute resolution curricula, in an age-appropriate manner, at designated grade levels.
- 11) Increase staff supervision in areas such as hallways, cafeterias, playgrounds and athletic playing fields, locker rooms, buses, as well as at school sponsored events - whether on or off campus in order to reduce the opportunity for bullying behavior by students.

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- 12) Involve school counselors or mental-health professionals where appropriate.
- 13) Involve community members in the District's anti-bullying activities (e.g., convene meetings with leaders of the community to discuss the School District's anti-bullying program, involve media to help publicize the District's anti-bullying prevention and intervention activities, and engage community members as appropriate in the development of school-community activities to promote anti-bullying behavior.

Dissemination/Publication of District's Prohibition against Bullying Behavior by District Students

The District's policy and regulations prohibiting bullying behavior by students will be published in appropriate school publications such as teacher/employee handbooks, student handbooks and/or school calendars. A copy of District policy and regulations prohibiting bullying behavior by students will be available upon request. Further, the District prohibition of bullying by students - along with the range of possible intervention activities and/or sanctions for such misconduct - shall be included in the *District Code of Conduct* for all grade levels.

NOTE: Refer also to Regulations #3420R -- Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment in the School District
#7550R -- Dignity for All Students Act
#7551R -- Sexual Harassment of Students
#7552R.1 -- Cyberbullying Behavior in the Schools
#7553R -- Hazing of Students
District Code of Conduct