

COVENTRY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
COVENTRY, RI

HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION AND BULLYING

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to eliminate harassment, intimidation and bullying. It provides definitions, disciplinary sanctions, and reporting procedures and guidelines for awareness and training.

PHILOSOPHY:

All members of the school community have the right to be treated with respect. They have the right to work and study in a safe, supportive, nurturing environment. Harassment, intimidation and bullying harm the school community. They disrupt a school's ability to educate students, threaten public safety, and may inflict psychological harm on the victims. Harassment, intimidation and bullying will not be tolerated in the Coventry schools.

DEFINITIONS:

1. Harassment, intimidation, cyberbullying, discrimination or bullying (hereinafter referred to as bullying, for the purpose this Policy) means any intentional written, verbal or physical act or threat. or an act that a reasonable person should know will have the effect of physically harming a student or school employee, damaging a person's property, placing a student or school employee in reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or property, or is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student or work environment for a staff member.
2. Sexual Harassment includes degrading remarks, gestures and jokes, notes, graffiti, and spreading rumors to indecent exposure, being touched, grabbed, pinched, or brushed against in a sexual way.

35 R.I.G.L. 16-85-2 (Lindsay Ann Burke Act)

Per the *Lindsay Ann Burke Act*, the training shall specifically include, but not limited to, basic principles and warning signs of dating violence, the school district's dating violence policy and may also include; identifying issues of confidentiality and safety related to dating violence, and appropriate school-based interventions for dating violence.

It is strongly recommended that these same concepts related to bullying and sexual violence are integrated into trainings. The school's bullying, dating violence, and sexual violence policy shall be reviewed at the training to ensure that school staff are able to appropriately respond to incidents at school, provide instruction on how to file a complaint against bullying, dating violence, and sexual violence, and understand the disciplinary action that may be taken against those who commit such acts.

The following is recommended:

- Administrators and school staff shall complete at least three hours of training on bullying, sexual violence, and teen dating violence;
- Recent school staff hires will receive training within their first year in the district.

35 R.I.G.L.16-21-30 (Student Education)

Ongoing age-appropriate education on healthy relationships shall be provided to all students in grades K-12, with specific instruction relating to teen dating violence taught yearly in grades 7–12. Per the Lindsay Ann Burke Act this curriculum shall include, but not be limited to, defining teen dating violence, recognizing dating violence warning signs and characteristics of healthy relationships. Additionally, students shall be provided with the school district's bullying, teen dating violence, and sexual violence prevention policy.

3. Bullying occurs when a person, while at school, intentionally assaults, batters, threatens, harasses, stalks, menaces, intimidates, extorts, humiliates, or taunts another person. Bullying also occurs when a person or a group organizes a campaign of shunning against another person or when a person or a group maliciously spread rumors about another person. In most circumstances bullying does not include a mutual fight between two people of roughly equal strength who are angry with each other. Such fights are subject to discipline as a violation of school rules prohibiting fighting.

Bullying may involve, but is not limited to:

- Unwanted teasing
 - Threatening
 - Intimidating
 - Stalking
 - Cyberstalking
 - Cyberbullying
 - Physical violence
 - Theft
 - Sexual, religious, or racial harassment
 - Public humiliation
 - Destruction of school or personal property
 - Social exclusion, including incitement and/or coercion
 - Rumor or spreading of falsehoods
4. In the context of this policy, “at school” refers to any location inside a school, on school property, immediately adjacent to school property, on a school bus or other school vehicle, at school bus stops, while students are walking to or from school, or at any school-sponsored activity or event, whether or not held on school property. This policy will also apply to any activity outside of school that results in disrupting the educational environment of the school.
 5. Cyberstalking means to engage in a course of conduct to communicate, or to cause to be communicated, words, images, or language by or through the use of electronic mail or electronic communication, directed at or about a specific person, causing substantial emotional distress to that person and serving no legitimate purpose.

6. Cyberbullying is defined as the willful and repeated harassment and intimidation of a person through the use of digital technologies, including, but not limited to, email, blogs, social websites (e.g. MySpace, Facebook), chat rooms, and instant messaging.

Bullying encompasses

- Retaliation against a student or school employee by another student or school employee for asserting or alleging an act of bullying.
- Retaliation also includes reporting a baseless act of bullying that is not made in good faith.
- Perpetuation of conduct listed in the definition of bullying by an individual or group with intent to demean, dehumanize, embarrass, or cause emotional or physical harm to a student or school employee by:
 - Incitement or coercion;
 - 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 district school system; or acting in a manner that has an effect substantially similar to the effect of bullying.

Bullying also encompasses, but is not limited to, unwanted harm towards a student or employee in regard to their real or perceived sex, race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability (physical, mental, or educational), marital status, socio-economic background, ancestry, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, linguistic preference, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or social/family background or being viewed as different in its education programs or admissions to education programs and therefore prohibits bullying of any student or employee by any Board member, district employee, consultant, contractor, agent, visitor, volunteer, student, or other person in the school or outside the school at school-sponsored events, on school busses, and at training facilities or training programs sponsored by the district.

7. Accused is defined as any district employee, consultant, contractor, agent, visitor, volunteer, student, or other person in the school or outside the school at school-sponsored events, on school busses, and at training facilities or training programs sponsored by the district who is reported to have committed an act of bullying, whether formally or informally, verbally or in writing, of bullying.
8. Complainant is defined as any District employee, consultant, contractor, agent, visitor, volunteer, student, or other person who formally or informally makes a report of bullying, orally or in writing.

Prohibition on Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying:

Harassment, intimidation and bullying are prohibited in the public schools of Coventry, Rhode Island. The prevention of harassment, intimidation and bullying is part of Coventry School District's Strategic Plan and School Safety Plan.

Prohibition on Retaliation:

Retaliation or threats of retaliation in any form designed to intimidate the victim of bullying, those who are witnesses to harassment, intimidation or bullying, or those investigating an incident of such conduct shall not be tolerated. In most cases retaliation or a threat of retaliation shall be treated as another incidence of bullying and will result in the imposition of a short- or long-term school suspension in the case of a student, or following contract provisions in the case of a school employee and, in appropriate cases, referral to the police. (R.I.G.L. 11-42-2. Extortion and blackmail) (R.I.G.L. 11-59-2. Stalking prohibited)

Prohibition Against False Reports:

False reports concerning harassment, intimidation or bullying will be subject to appropriate school discipline, including short- or long-term suspension from school or employee discipline according to contract provisions.

Disciplinary Sanctions:

Disciplinary consequences will be determined on a case-by-case basis and reflect the number and severity of disciplinary issues. Student disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with Coventry School District's Conduct, Behavior, and Discipline Policy (#5131). Student disciplinary sanctions for harassment, intimidation or bullying may include but are not limited to:

- Loss of the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities;
- Loss of the opportunity to participate in school social activities;
- Loss of the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises;
- Loss of school bus transportation;
- Transfer to another school;
- Community service;
- In house suspension;
- Short-term school suspension (10 or fewer days of suspension) or long-term school suspension (suspension for more than 10 days);
- Admonitions, warnings and counseling.

Disciplinary consequences for school employees will be in accordance with contract provisions and may include: written warning, suspension without pay, or termination.

Reporting:

The Coventry School District shall establish, and prominently publicize to students, staff, volunteers, and parents how a report of harassment, intimidation or bullying may be filed and how this report will be acted upon. The victim of bullying, anyone who witnessed the bullying, and anyone who has credible information that an act of bullying has taken place may file a report of bullying.

- To the greatest extent possible, all complaints will be treated as confidential and in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"); the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA") and any other applicable law.

- Limited disclosure may be necessary to complete a thorough investigation as described above. The district's obligation to investigate and take corrective action may supersede an individual's right to privacy.
- The complainant's identity shall be protected, but absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The identity of the victim of the reported act shall be protected to the extent possible.

Responsibilities of Students:

Students who observe an act of harassment, intimidation or bullying, or who have reasonable grounds to believe that bullying is taking place, are obligated to report it to school authorities. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. The victim of bullying shall, however, not be subject to discipline for failing to report the bullying.

Responsibilities of Staff:

1. Reporting: School staff shall take all reasonable measures to prevent harassment, intimidation and bullying and shall report all such acts that come to their attention. In this context the staff includes substitutes and volunteers working in the school.
2. School Atmosphere: School staff at all times will model correct and courteous behavior to each other, to students, and to visitors to the school. Abusive or humiliating language or demeanor will not be accepted. An effort will be made to ensure that each student is well-known by at least one adult so that the student will have someone to turn to at school if a harassment, intimidation or bullying situation develops. To the extent possible the influence of cliques and other exclusive student groups will be diminished by the creation of a range of inclusive school activities in which students will be encouraged to participate. (R.I.G.L. 16-38-4 Exclusive Clubs)

Responding to Reports of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying:

1. Investigation: The principal, or his/her designee, shall investigate all allegations of harassment, intimidation and bullying. If the allegation is found to be credible, appropriate disciplinary sanctions, subject to any appropriate due process procedures, will be imposed. The investigation will include an assessment of what effect the harassment, intimidation or bullying has had on the victim.
2. Police Notification: When the harassment, intimidation or bullying involves conduct that may violate criminal law, the police shall be notified. If the act is outside the scope of the district, and determined a criminal act, referral to appropriate law enforcement shall be made immediately, the parent will be notified, and the referral documented by the principal/designee. While the district does not assume any liability for incidences that must be referred for external investigation, it encourages the provision of assistance and intervention as the principal/designee deems appropriate, including the use of the School Resource Officer and other personnel.

3. Help for the Victim: If the victim's mental health has been placed at risk, appropriate referrals will be made. If the conduct includes a violent criminal offense, the victim will be informed of any school transfer rights he or she may have under the Federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. If the victim is a school employee, appropriate referrals will be made.
4. Mediation Board: The principal of any school in the Coventry School District may establish a Mediation Board to resolve complaints of harassment, intimidation or bullying in circumstances where mediation may provide an appropriate remedy. The Mediation Board may, when appropriate, include students.
5. Voluntary Participation in Mediation: No student or school employee who is the victim of harassment, intimidation or bullying shall be required to participate in mediation or to accept any apology tendered by the alleged bullying offender. The decision of a victim not to participate in a mediation program shall not diminish the obligation of the school to impose discipline against the offender who has committed an act of harassment, intimidation or bullying.
6. Individualized School Safety Plan: If a student or a school employee is the victim of serious or persistent harassment, intimidation or bullying, the principal of the school or his/her designee will prepare a written school safety plan outlining what steps will be taken to provide the victim with a safe educational or work environment. This plan will be developed, if possible, with input from the parents of the student or staff members. Staff members who are to implement the plan will help formulate it. School-based intervention and assistance will be determined by a collaborative problem-solving method and may include, but is not limited to:
 - counseling and support to address the needs of the victims of bullying;
 - counseling interventions to address the behavior of the bully (e.g., empathy training, anger management);
 - intervention which includes assistance and support provided to parents and family members;
 - analysis and evaluation of school culture with resulting recommendations for interventions aimed at increasing peer ownership and support;

Awareness and Training:

1. Instruction in the Prevention of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying: Students and staff shall be provided instruction in this district's policy and regulations against harassment, intimidation and bullying. This instruction shall include methods of discouraging and preventing such behavior, along with instruction on how to file a complaint, and the disciplinary action that may be taken against those who commit acts of harassment, intimidation or bullying. This policy shall be included in the employee handbook and training materials for any employee working in this district, as well as in student handbooks for each school in the district.
2. Social Skills Training: The school health program and school counseling services will include appropriate social skills training to help students and school employees avoid isolation, and to help them interact in a healthy manner.
3. Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Prevention Task Force: The principal of each school in this district shall establish a Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Prevention

Task Force, as needed. This Task Force may include parents, school staff, and law enforcement officers, as well as community members and, if age allows, students. The purpose of this Task Force will be to develop policies and programs to educate students and staff about the harm caused by harassment, intimidation and bullying. The Task Force may also create programs to prevent or diminish such conduct. The program recommendations of the Task Force shall be subject to review by the School Committee before the programs are implemented. The duties of the Task Force may be assigned to the school's student intervention team [R.I.G.L. 16-7.1-2] or to the school's school improvement team [R.I.G.L.16-53.1-2].

Reporting to the Superintendent and School Committee:

School principals may be asked to provide the Superintendent of Schools and the School Committee with a semi-annual report on incidents of harassment, intimidation and bullying that have taken place in the schools under their respective supervision. This report will include a statement describing what remedial action has been taken to address such conduct.

References: Titles 11-21-1, 11-21-2, 11-42-2, 11-59-2, 16-7.1-2, 16-21-7, 16-21-21, 16-21-23, 16-21-26, 16-38-4, and 16-53.1-2 of the General Laws of Rhode Island; Federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*.

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