

PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

5143
Policy No.

BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY

STUDENTS

Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation

I. POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of the Board of Education of Prince George’s County (“Board” or “Board of Education”) to create safe and productive learning environments in our schools by prohibiting bullying, harassment, or intimidation of any person on school property, at school-sponsored activities or by the use of electronic technology or in any manner that substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a school or school-sponsored activity in Prince George’s County Public Schools (“PGCPS”). Bullying, harassment, and intimidation are characterized by an imbalance of power. The Board’s intent is to maintain a safe school environment that is conducive to learning and to ensure that school administrators and staff take measures to promote the prevention of bullying, harassment, and intimidation.

II. PURPOSE

- A. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that school administrators take measures to promote the prevention of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in the learning environment, to inform parents of these efforts, and to prohibit reprisal or retaliation against individuals who report these acts.
- B. All students have the right to be free from bullying, harassment, or intimidation. The Board of Education is committed to providing a safe, productive, and inclusive learning environment. Bullying problems are symptomatic of relationship problems best addressed holistically by students, schools, parents/caregivers, and the entire community. PGCPS should be places where students are surrounded by caring adults who encourage students to treat others with kindness and empathy, while helping to build a relationship-focused, welcoming, supportive school environment fostering academic and personal growth for every student.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *Bullying* – Unwanted, demeaning behavior among students that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or is highly likely to be repeated, over time. To

be considered *bullying*, the behavior must be intentional and include: 1) an imbalance of power (students who *bully* use their physical, emotional, social, or academic power to control, exclude, or harm others), and 2) repetition (*bullying* behaviors happen more than once or are highly likely to be repeated based on evidence gathered). *Bullying* can occur through verbal, physical, or written conduct or electronic communication that creates a hostile educational environment by substantially interfering with a student's educational benefits, opportunities, or performance, or with a student's physical or psychological well-being.

- B. *Cyberbullying* – Bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. *Cyberbullying* can occur through texting, apps, or online via social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. *Cyberbullying* includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or hurtful content about another student. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation.
- C. *Electronic communication* – A communication transmitted by means of an electronic device, including a telephone, cell phone or computer.
- D. *Harassment* – Includes actual or perceived negative actions that offend, ridicule, or demean another student with regard to race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, family/parental or marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, ancestry, physical attributes, socioeconomic status, physical or mental ability, or disability.
- E. *Intimidation* – Any communication or action directed against another student that threatens or induces a sense of fear and/or inferiority. Retaliation may be considered a form of *intimidation*.
- F. *Retaliation* – An act of reprisal or getting back at a person who reports acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation or who are targeted students, witnesses, bystanders, or others with reliable information about acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.
- G. *School-sponsored activity* – Any activity that is sponsored, approved, conducted, planned, and /or supervised by PGCPs employees, regardless of the location of the activity or whether the activity is or is not held during the instructional day.
- H. *Targeted student* – A student who has been bullied, harassed, or intimidated.

IV. **STANDARDS**

- A. It is a violation of this policy for a PGCPs student to engage in bullying, harassment or intimidation on PGCPs property, on a school bus, at school-sponsored activities, or in any manner that substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a school regardless of where the incident occurs.

- B. In addition, the Board prohibits reprisal or retaliation against individuals who report these acts or who are targeted students, witnesses, bystanders, or others with reliable information about an act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.
- C. The Board recognizes that the whole-school approach should include elements of prevention, intervention/remediation and consequences to effectively address bullying, harassment or intimidation.
1. Prevention efforts must include:
 - a. Annual professional development for administrators and all staff to:
 - 1) inform staff about this Policy and the availability of the On-line Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Application;
 - 2) to increase awareness of the prevalence, causes, and consequences of bullying;
 - 3) to increase the use of evidence-based strategies for preventing bullying; and
 - 4) to provide teachers with classroom techniques to prevent and handle bullying in the classroom.
 - b. Conducting regular classroom lessons on social emotional learning that builds student capacity for self-awareness and management, and social awareness, as well as sensitivity and ~~tolerance~~ acceptance, including those based on a person's ability (cognitive, social emotional, and physical), ethnicity/race, family structure, language, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, physical attributes, and socio-economic status.
 - c. School-wide evidence-based anti-bullying programs implemented as a part of a system of positive behavioral supports and school improvement efforts at all grade levels. Included in the implementation of anti-bullying programs is an explanation of confidential ways to report acts of bullying and promoting the use of the On-line Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Application, which should be made available on the PGCPs website, included in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook and in various locations throughout each school.
 - d. School climate improvement efforts in order to promote student involvement in the anti-bullying efforts, peer support, mutual respect, and a culture which encourages students to report incidents of bullying to adults.
 - e. 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, and the means of preventing it.

- f. Biennial school/building-specific data collection on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying which is used to guide local decision-making related to surveillance, prevention, intervention, and professional development.
 - g. Restorative practices and remedial measures designed to prevent the bullying behavior.
 - h. Place the QR code for reporting bullying on the back of student identification badges.
- 2. Reporting Act of Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation
 - a. The On-Line Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting Application should be used to report all incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation that occurred during the current school year on school property, at a school- sponsored activity on or off of school property, on a school bus, or through electronic communication on or off school property.
 - b. All staff who have reason to suspect that a student has been subjected to bullying, harassment, or intimidation, shall submit a report digitally via the Online Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting Application. All volunteers and contractors providing services for students should also adhere to these reporting requirements.
 - c. A school employee who reports an act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation under the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, Section 7-424.1 and in accordance with this policy is not civilly liable for any act or omission in reporting or failing to report an act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation under this Code section.
 - d. Inform students about the availability of the On-line Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting Application and assist students, upon request, in completing the On-line Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Application at school.
- 3. Investigation of Acts of Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation
 - a. Upon receiving a report of bullying, harassment, or intimidation, promptly conduct an adequate, reliable and impartial investigation, including the opportunity for the parties to present evidence.
 - b. Notify the parents of the targeted student and alleged offender of the outcome of the investigation once the investigation has been completed.
- 4. Intervention/Remediation efforts must include:
 - a. Professional development for school staff on how to respond appropriately to

students who bully, are bullied, and are bystanders who report bullying. Education/intervention for the students exhibiting bullying behaviors will include teaching replacement behaviors, empathy, tolerance and sensitivity to diversity.

- b. The development of a process for the assistance, upon request, in completing, confidential collection, and prompt investigation of Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reports that are submitted by students who are bullied, students who are bystanders, or parents/guardians. Information obtained from the forms shall be recorded for data collection, storage, and submission according to the requirements of Education Article 7-424, Annotated Code of Maryland.
 - c. Support/counseling for the targeted student with protection from retaliation and further episodes of bullying.
 - d. Interventions for the student committing the bullying that address the specific social-emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of that student to prevent further incidents, while taking great care to ensure the safety of the targeted student.
 - e. Utilizing community health and mental health resources for those students who are unable to stop bullying behaviors in spite of school intervention and for those students involved in bullying behaviors as perpetrators, targeted students, or witnesses whose mental or physical health, safety, or academic performance has been impacted.
 - f. Provision of information for parents about community health and mental health resources.
5. Consequences
- a. Consequences and remedial actions for students committing acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation, students engaged in reprisal or retaliation, and students who have made false accusations shall be consistently and fairly applied after appropriate investigation has determined that such an offense has occurred. A range of consequences is contained in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.
 - b. Schools should avoid using exclusionary discipline measures when addressing bullying behavior and such measures should only be used after all other available and appropriate behavioral interventions have been exhausted or if a student's continued presence in school would pose a threat to the safety of others. Suspensions, expulsions, or protective orders must not be viewed as punishments designed to prevent bullying. Instead, these are means of protecting the targeted student by providing community containment, while positive behavioral discipline is implemented.
 - c. Consequences should also include recognition for positive behavior exhibited by the student who has previously exhibited bullying behavior, the bullied student who is

implementing strategies to offset past problems, and the bystander who has taken an active role in addressing bullying behaviors.

V. IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board of Education hereby directs the Superintendent to update the administrative procedure addressing bullying, harassment, and intimidation consistent with Maryland's Model Policy Prohibiting Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation, and to provide information to parents, students, and employees to ensure implementation. At the Board of Education's first meeting in January of each year, the Superintendent/designee shall provide to the Board a summary report of Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting forms that were filed in the previous school year to assist the Board of Education in complying with the reporting requirements of MD Code, Education, § 7-424(e)(1).

VI. REFERENCES

Md. Code Ann., Educ. §§ 7-424, 7-424.1

Maryland State Board of Education Model Bullying Policy (updated December 2021)

Board Policy 0125 – Nondiscrimination

Administrative Procedure 5143 – Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation

VII. HISTORY

Policy Adopted
06/15/09

Policy Amended
10/15/09

Policy Amended
07/28/21

Policy Amended
06/09/22

Policy Amended
02/27/25