

Bullying behavior alleged to be based on race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, religion or disability should be addressed under the procedures set forth in the Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity & Affirmative Action Policy (AC)

Definitions

The following terms are defined in Maine law (20-A MRSA § 6554):

Bullying

“Bullying” includes, but is not limited to a written, oral or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof directed at a student or students that:

- A. Has, or a reasonable person would expect it to have, the effect of:
 - 1. Physically harming a student or damaging a student’s property; or
 - 2. Placing a student in reasonable fear of physical harm or damage to his/her property;
- B. Interferes with the rights of a student by:
 - 1. Creating an intimidating or hostile educational environment for the student; or
 - 2. Interfering with the student’s academic performance or ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities or privileges provided by the school; or
- C. Is based on:
 - a. A student’s actual or perceived characteristics identified in 5 MRSA § 4602 or 4684-A (including race; color; ancestry; national origin; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; religion; physical or mental disability) or other distinguishing personal characteristics (such as socioeconomic status; age; physical appearance; weight; or family status); or
 - b. A student’s association with a person with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics or any other distinguishing characteristics; and that has the effect described in subparagraph A. or B. above.

Cyberbullying

“Cyberbullying” means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including but not limited to, a transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted by the use of any electronic device including, but not limited to, a computer, telephone, cellular telephone, text messaging device or personal digital assistant.

For the purpose of this policy, bullying does not mean mere teasing, put-downs, “talking trash,” trading of insults, or similar interactions among friends, nor does it include expression of ideas or beliefs so long as such expression is not lewd, profane or does not interfere with students’ opportunity to learn, the instructional program or the operations of the schools. This does not preclude teachers or school administrators from setting and enforcing rules for civility, courtesy and/or responsible behavior in the classroom and the school environment.

The determination whether particular conduct constitutes bullying requires reasonable consideration of the circumstances, which include the frequency of the behavior at issue, the location in which the behavior occurs, the ages and maturity of the students involved, the activity or context in which the conduct occurs, and the nature and severity of the conduct.

Retaliation

“Retaliation means” an act or gesture against a student for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. “Retaliation” also includes reporting that is not made in good faith on an act of bullying (i.e., the making of false allegations or reports of bullying).

School Grounds

“School grounds” means a school building; property on which a school building or facility is located; and property that is owned, leased or used by a school for a school-sponsored activity, function, program, instruction or training. “School grounds” also includes school-related transportation vehicles.

Alternative Discipline

“Alternative discipline” means disciplinary action other than suspension or expulsion from school that is designed to correct and address the root causes of a student’s specific misbehavior while retaining the student in class or school, or restorative school practices to repair the harm done to relationships and persons from the student’s misbehavior.

Bullying Reports

Students and Parents/Guardians

Students who believe they have been bullied, or who have witnessed or learned about an act of bullying are strongly encouraged to report this behavior to the lead teacher or school superintendent.

Parents/guardians may report bullying on behalf of their children or when they have witnessed or are aware of the occurrence of bullying.

Reports of bullying may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Any student who has been determined to have made a false report of bullying will be subject to disciplinary consequences.

School Employees

For the purposes of this procedure, “school employees” includes coaches, advisors for cocurricular or extracurricular activities and volunteers.

All school employees are expected to intervene when they see acts of bullying in progress and are required to report incidents of bullying they have witnessed or become aware of to the lead teacher or superintendent as soon as practicable.

School employees who fail to report bullying or who have made a false report of bullying will be subject to disciplinary consequences up to and including termination, in accordance with any applicable collective bargaining agreement.

Others

Contractors, service providers, visitors or community members who have witnessed or become aware of bullying are encouraged to report such incidents to the lead teacher or superintendent.

Form of Reports

Complaints or reports of bullying may be made orally or in writing, but all reports will be documented in writing by school personnel authorized to receive complaints or reports, using the school unit’s reporting form (JICK-E1).

School employees are required to make reports of bullying to the lead teacher or superintendent in writing. Although students, parents and others, as identified above, may make bullying reports anonymously, all persons reporting incidents of bullying are encouraged to identify themselves.

Bullying reports may be made anonymously, but in no instance will action be taken against any person or organization affiliated with the schools solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

The lead teacher will forward a copy of the report to the Superintendent by the end of the next school day.

Interim Measures

The lead teacher, in consult with the school superintendent, may take such interim measures as he/she deems appropriate to ensure the safety of the targeted student and prevent further bullying and will inform the parents of the targeted student of measures taken. **See important note below**

[NOTE: School personnel will be careful to respect the confidentiality of student information when communicating with the parents of a student who has reported being bullied. It should be sufficient to inform the parents of what the school is doing to protect the student from further bullying and to convey that the incident will be investigated and appropriate disciplinary consequences will be applied, without providing details that would be considered a violation of FERPA or an invasion of privacy.]

Investigation

The superintendent will promptly review all documentation of the allegations, including the substance of the complaint or report prepare a confidential written report within 5 working days after the completion of the investigation

Response to Bullying by Students

If bullying has been substantiated, the lead teacher, in consult with the school superintendent, will determine the appropriate disciplinary consequences, which may include detention, suspension or expulsion; alternative discipline; remediation; and/or other intervention.

Alternative discipline includes but is not limited to:

- A. Meeting with the student and the student's parents;
- B. Reflective activities, such as requiring the student to write an essay about the student's misbehavior;
- C. Mediation when there is mutual conflict between peers, rather than one-way negative behavior, and when both parties freely choose to meet;
- D. Counseling;
- E. Anger management;
- F. Health counseling or intervention;
- G. Mental health counseling;
- H. Participation in skills building and resolution activities, such as social-emotional cognitive skills building, resolution circles and restorative conferencing;
- I. Community service; and

- J. In-school detention or suspension, which may take place during lunchtime, after school or on weekends.

Alternative discipline measures may be invoked as prescribed in 20-A § 6554(2)(A).]

If the bullying behavior appears to be a criminal violation, the superintendent will notify local law enforcement authorities.

If bullying has been substantiated, the superintendent will provide written notification to:

- A. The parents/guardians of the targeted student, including the measures being taken to ensure the student's safety; and to
- B. The parents/guardians of the student found to have engaged in bullying, including the process for appeal.

All communications to parents must respect the confidentiality of student and employee information as provided by federal and Maine law and regulations.

Appeals

Any appeal of the lead teacher/superintendent decisions in regard to consequences for bullying must be submitted, in writing, within 14 calendar days of the parental notification. The Superintendent will review the investigation report and actions taken and decide whether to sustain or deny the appeal. The Superintendent's decision shall be final.

Cross Reference: AC- Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity & Affirmative Action
JICK – Bullying
JRA-R – Student Education Records and Student Information

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