

Bullying and Cyberbullying in Schools

The Board believes that bullying, including cyberbullying, is detrimental to student well-being and to student learning and achievement. It interferes with the mission of the schools to educate their students and disrupts the operations of the schools. Bullying affects not only students who are targets but also those who participate in and witness such behavior.

Bullying Prohibited

Bullying, including “cyberbullying,” harassment and sexual harassment are not acceptable conduct in RSU 40 and are prohibited.

Retaliation for the reporting of incidents of such behavior is also prohibited.

In adopting this policy, it is not the Board’s intent to prohibit students from expressing their ideas, including religious, political and philosophical views that may offend the sensibilities of others, or from engaging in civil debate. However, the Board does not condone and will take action in response to conduct that directly interferes with students’ rights at school under applicable laws or with the educational mission, operations, discipline or general welfare of the schools.

Definitions

“Bullying” and “cyberbullying” have the same meaning in this policy as in Maine law:

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 their 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:

1. A student's actual or perceived characteristics identified in 5 M.R.S. §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
2. A student's association with a person with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics or any other distinguishing characteristics;
3. 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.

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.

Application of Policy

This policy applies to bullying that:

- A. Takes place at school or on school grounds, at any school-sponsored or school-related activity or event or while students are being transported to or from school or school-sponsored activities or events; or
- B. Takes place elsewhere or through the use of technology, but only if the bullying also infringes on the rights of the student at school as set forth in the definition of "bullying."

Consequences for Policy Violations

Students

Students who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action which may include suspension, expulsion or a series of graduated consequences including alternative

discipline or other behavioral interventions.

The Board retains the right to impose disciplinary consequences for bullying and other conduct that occurs at any time or place that substantially disrupts the instructional program, operations of the schools or welfare of students.

Any student violating this policy may also be subject to civil or criminal penalties.

School Employees and Others

Administrators, professional staff and all other employees who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, and in accordance with any applicable collective bargaining agreements.

Volunteers, contractors and visitors who violate this policy will be barred from school property until the Superintendent is satisfied that the person will comply with Maine's bullying law and this policy.

Any person violating this policy may also be subject to civil or criminal penalties.

Any school-affiliated organization that authorizes or engages in bullying or retaliation is subject to forfeiture of Board approval, sanctioning, suspension or revocation of its permission to operate on school grounds.

Staff Training

RSU 40 will provide professional development and staff training in bullying prevention and response.

Delegation of Responsibility

The Superintendent/designee will be responsible for developing and implementing procedures in accordance with applicable law to implement this policy.

The Superintendent will designate the school principal or other school personnel to be responsible for implementation/enforcement of this policy and associated procedures on the school level.

A student or their parent/guardian who is dissatisfied with a decision of the Superintendent/designee related to the taking or not taking of disciplinary action in the course of implementing this policy may appeal, in writing, to the Superintendent within 10 school days of notice of the decision.

The Superintendent's decision will be final.

Dissemination of Policy

The Superintendent will be responsible for providing this policy, any associated administrative procedures and the names of the person(s) responsible for implementing the policy/procedure at the school level in writing to students, parents, school employees and volunteers in handbooks, on the school unit's website and by such other means (if any) as may be determined by the Superintendent.

Legal Reference: 20-A M.R.S. §1001(15), 6554

Cross Reference: AC - Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
ACAA - Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students
ACAA-R - Student Discrimination/Harassment and Title IX Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedure
ACAD - Hazing
AD - Educational Philosophy/Mission
ADF - School Unit Commitment to Learning Results
GCI - Professional Staff Development
IJNDB - Student Digital Device and Internet Use
IJNDB-R - Student Digital Device and Internet Use Procedure
JIC - System Wide Code of Conduct
JICIA - Weapons, Violence and School Safety
JK - Student Discipline
JKD - Suspension of Students
JKE - Expulsion of Students
KLGA - Relations with School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement Authorities
KLGA-R - School Resource Officer and Law Enforcement Procedure

This is a required policy.

Adopted: January 3, 2013

Revised: February 2, 2017
Reviewed: February 4, 2021