

## **BULLYING – ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE**

This procedure is intended as guidance for school administrators in carrying out their responsibilities when bullying is alleged to have occurred. It provides important definitions as well as steps for reporting, investigating and responding to allegations of bullying.

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 Student Harassment and Sexual Harassment procedure, ACAA-R, rather than under this procedure.

### **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.

Students alleging bullying based on one or more of these protected categories should follow the procedures set forth in the Student Harassment and Sexual Harassment procedure (ACAA-R) and also have the right to report complaints to the Maine Human Rights Commission, 51 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333 (telephone: 207-624-6050) and/or to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights/ED, 5 Post Office Square, Suite 900, Boston, MA 02109-3921 (telephone: 617-223-9622; TDD: 877-521-2172; fax: 617-289-0150).

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### **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 to report this behavior to the Director or Bullying Prevention Officer of another trusted adult.

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.

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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 Director or Designee 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 Director or Designee.

### **Form of Reports**

Complaints or reports of bullying may be made orally or in writing, but all reports will be documented in writing by Northern Penobscot Tech Region III 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 Director or Designee 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.

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### **Interim Measures**

The Director 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.

School personnel should 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.

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### **Investigation**

The Director or Designee will ensure that all reports of bullying and retaliation are investigated promptly and that documentation of the investigation, including the substance of the complaint or report and the outcome of the investigation is prepared and forwarded to the Director within a reasonable period of time.

### **Response to Bullying by Students**

If bullying has been substantiated, the Director or designee as appropriate under the circumstances 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.

Items A-J are listed as examples of alternative discipline in 20-A § 6554(2)(A).

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

If bullying has been substantiated, the Director or Designee 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 building principal's decisions in regard to consequences for bullying must be submitted, in writing, within 14 calendar days of the parental notification. The Director will review the investigation report and actions taken and decide whether to sustain or deny the appeal. The Director's decision shall be final.

Legal Reference: 20-A § 6554(2)(A).

Cross Reference: ACAA-R – Student Harassment and Sexual Harassment Procedure

JICK – Bullying

JRA-R – Student Education Records and Student Information

Adopted: January 23, 2013