



Personnel – Certified / Non-Certified

Rights, Responsibilities and Duties

Workplace Bullying (Congenial and Healthy Workplace)

The purpose of this policy is to promote a healthy, positive workplace climate so that every individual is able to contribute fully to our educational community. Every person has the right to dignity at work. The rights and responsibilities described in this policy apply to all employees, parents, and all who utilize or visit District facilities.

The District is committed to maintaining a congenial, healthy and supportive workplace. A congenial and healthy workplace can reduce staff turnover and absenteeism. A congenial and healthy workplace can increase the quality of the educational services provided to students. Also, a congenial and healthy workplace can lower stress levels.

The Board requires all of its employees to treat all other employees, as well as students, with dignity and respect. Building principals and supervisory staff need to be sensitive to signs of stress among staff. During periods of high stress, staff may be observed acting in an unprofessional manner with each other. Unprofessional behavior must be dealt with, and not ignored. Further, rudeness will not be tolerated among the staff.

Consequences of Bullying in the Workplace

The Board of Education (Board) does not condone bullying in the workplace. Workplace bullying is antithetical to maintaining a congenial and healthy workplace. The Board desires to provide a workplace that is free from violence, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior. The Board is concerned that bullying in the workplace can affect people in a number of serious ways that include conditions which are documented and substantiated with medical and psychological backup:

- High stress; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD);
- Loss of self-confidence;
- Deterioration in the quality of work;
- Increased absenteeism;
- Financial problems due to absence;
- Lack of communication and teamwork;
- Lack of confidence in the District leading to lack of commitment to the position;
- Reduced self-esteem;
- Musculoskeletal problems;
- Phobias;
- Sleep disturbances;
- Increased depression/self-blame; and/or
- Digestive problems

Workplace bullying is defined as the deliberate, hurtful, repeated mistreatment of an employee, driven by a desire to abuse or control that individual. Some of the most common bullying behaviors include yelling, shouting, and screaming; hostile glares and other intimidating gestures; “behind-the-back” put-downs, insults, and unfair criticism; and the deliberate sabotage and undermining of another individual’s work performance.

Workplace bullying is defined as conduct that a reasonable person would find hostile, intimidating, offensive, humiliating or an abuse of authority. It may be verbal, nonverbal, public or private. It is typically behavior repeated across multiple incidents; a single incident is rarely a violation. It may originate from any employee or from any individual to another. It is also bullying to continue policy-violating conduct when the targeted individual requests that it cease.

Mobbing is a particular type of bullying behavior carried out by a group rather than by an individual. Mobbing is the bullying or social isolation of a person through collective unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment or emotional abuse. Although it is group behavior, specific incidents such as an insult or a practical joke may be carried out by an individual as part of mobbing behavior.

Examples of Bullying in the Workplace

Inappropriate behavior includes actions that intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a worker, which at times can occur in the presence of co-workers, students, parents, contractors or visitors to the school or school activities. The Board believes that:

- Bullies can be supervisors, subordinates, co-workers, and colleagues;
- Bullies often operate within the established rules and policies of their organization; and
- The damage that such actions cause, both to the targeted employee and to workplace morale, is significant.

The Board believes it is necessary to maintain a congenial, healthy and supportive workplace in order to avoid institutional bullying. Institutional bullying is when bullying becomes entrenched in an organization and becomes accepted as part of the workplace culture.

In order to develop and maintain a congenial, healthy and supportive workplace that contributes in a positive manner to the educational services provided to the students of the District, the Board considers the following examples of bullying as a detriment in the educational workplace.

The illustrative examples of bullying include, but are not limited to:

- Provocative or dehumanizing name calling;
- Belittling the person;
- Discounting or humiliating people at meetings;
- Deliberate exclusion from job-critical decision-making opportunities;
- Preventing an employee from meeting students’ academic potential;
- Unwarranted or invalid criticism;
- Blame without factual justification;
- Being treated differently than the rest of a person’s work group;
- Being sworn at;

- Exclusion or social or physical isolation;
- Rumors (or failing to stop them) and gossip about a person or school's reputation;
- Being shouted at or being humiliated;
- Being the target of practical jokes;
- Subjected to excessive monitoring; and
- Other inappropriate behavior includes actions that intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a co-worker, including occurrences in front of other co-workers, students, parents, contractors or visitors.

Reporting of Workplace Bullying / Procedures

Employees who believe they have been subjected to workplace bullying should report to the Building Principal / Superintendent of Schools in writing*. The report should include details of the date, time, place and the specific conduct which occurred. The Building Principal / Superintendent or his/her designee will seek to maintain confidentiality while investigating the incident(s) but may discuss the situation with other supervisors/administrators or, if deemed necessary, with the Chairperson of the Board, via the Superintendent of Schools. The District will implement appropriate remedial measures. Disciplinary action may be taken if the severity of the workplace bullying makes that intervention appropriate. While investigating and responding to the prohibited misconduct, the Principal / Superintendent, or his/her designee, will give priority to avoiding possible retaliation or reprisals, while restoring and maintaining a congenial and healthy workplace.

**Employees may also go to Human Resources*

(cf. 0521 – Nondiscrimination)
 (cf. 1316 – Conduct on School Property)
 (cf. 4118.11 / 4218.11 – Nondiscrimination)
 (cf. 4118.112 / 4218.112 – Sexual Harassment)
 (cf. 4118.13 / 4218.13 – Conflict of Interest)
 (cf. 4118.211 – Retaliation and Whistle-Blowing)
 (cf. 4118.24 / 4218.24 – Staff/Student Relations)
 (cf. 5131.911 – Bullying)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes
 10-221 Boards of education to prescribe rule(s), policies, and procedures.
 10-238 Petition for hearing by board of education

Administrative Procedures for Dealing with Workplace Bullying

There are two stages for dealing with cases of alleged bullying: Stage One: Informal and Stage 2: Formal.

Sometimes individuals may be unaware of the negative effects of their behavior on other adults in the workplace. Such individuals may simply need to be told. Thus, at times incidents of bullying can be handled effectively in an informal way under Stage One. If an incident occurs that is offensive, it may be sufficient to explain clearly to the offender that the behavior is unacceptable. If the circumstances are too difficult or embarrassing for an individual, support may be sought from another colleague, a contact person, staff representative, Principal, or other administrator.

A complainant may decide, for whatever reason, to bypass the informal procedure and proceed to State Two.

The following section outlines the procedures to be followed with respect to a complaint. The procedure for dealing with bullying in the workplace is as follows:

1. Informal Procedure

While in no way diminishing the issue or the effects on individuals, an informal approach can often resolve matters. As a general rule therefore, an attempt should be made to address an allegation of bullying as informally as possible by means of an agreed informal procedure. The objective of this approach is to resolve the difficulty with the minimum of conflict and stress for the individuals involved.

- (a) Any employee who believes he or she is being bullied should explain clearly to the alleged perpetrator(s) that the behavior in question is unacceptable. In circumstances where the complainant finds it difficult to approach the alleged perpetrator(s) directly, he or she should seek help and advice on a strictly confidential basis, from a contact person. A contact person in the school environment could, for example, be a work colleague, a member of the administration or a bargaining unit representative.
- (b) Having consulted with the contact person, the complainant may request the assistance of the contact person in raising the issue with the alleged perpetrator(s). In this situation the approach of the contact

person should be by way of a confidential, non-confrontational discussion with a view to resolving the issue in an informal low-key manner.

- (c) A complainant may decide, for whatever reason, to bypass the informal procedure. Choosing not to use the informal procedure should not reflect negatively on a complainant in the formal procedure.

2. Formal Procedure

If an informal approach is inappropriate or if after the informal stage, the bullying persists, the following formal procedures should be invoked:

- (a) The Complainant should make a formal complaint in writing to his/her Principal. If the Principal/Assistant Principal is the subject of the complaint, the formal complaint should be made to the Superintendent of Schools.
- (b) The alleged perpetrator(s) should be notified in writing that an allegation of bullying has been made against them. They should be given a copy of the complainant's statement and advised that they shall be afforded a fair opportunity to respond to the allegations(s).
- (c) The complaint should be subject to an initial examination by a designated member of the administration, who can be considered impartial, with a view to determining an appropriate course of action. An appropriate course of action at this stage, for example, could be exploring a mediated solution which would require the agreement of all parties, or a view that the issue can be resolved informally. Should either of these approaches be deemed inappropriate or inconclusive, a formal investigation of the complaint should take place with a view to determining the facts and the validity or otherwise of the allegation(s).
- (d) The investigation should be conducted by either a designated member or members of the administration or, if deemed appropriate, an agreed third party. The investigation should be conducted thoroughly, objectively, with sensitivity, utmost confidentiality, and with due respect for the rights of both the complainant and the alleged perpetrator(s).
- (e) The investigation should be governed by terms of reference, preferably agreed between the parties in advanced.
- (f) The investigator(s) should meet with the complainant and alleged perpetrator(s) and any witness or relevant persons on an individual confidential basis with a view to establishing the facts surrounding the allegations(s). Both the complainant and alleged perpetrator(s) may be accompanied by a work colleague or employee/trade union representative if so desired.
- (g) Every effort should be made to carry out and complete the investigation as quickly as possible and preferably within an agreed timeframe. On completion of the investigation, the investigator(s) should submit a written report to the Principal/Superintendent of schools containing the findings of the investigation.

- (h) The complainant and the alleged perpetrator(s) should be informed in writing of the findings of the investigation.
- (i) Both parties should be given the opportunity to comment on the findings before any action is decided upon by the Principal/Superintendent. The method of communicating the commentary shall be in writing.
- (j) Should the Principal/Superintendent decide that the complaint is well founded; the alleged perpetrator(s) should be given a formal interview to determine an appropriate course of action. Such action could, for example, involve counseling and/or monitoring or processing the issue through the disciplinary and grievance procedure of the employment.

3. Confidentiality

All individuals involved in the procedures referred to above should maintain absolute confidentiality on the subject.

4. Record Keeping

At all stages of the process a clear record should be kept of:

- The investigation undertaken
- All communications to/by the complainant
- The subject of the complaint
- The steps and all decisions taken

The above records should be held by the Principal/Superintendent in a confidential manner in a secure place.

Where a complaint has been rejected or has not been upheld, a statement to that effect shall conclude the record in the personnel file of the complainant. All records in relation to a rejected/not upheld complaint shall be removed from the personnel file of the subject of the complaint. A statement of the outcome of the investigation will conclude all other files. Where a statement of the outcome of the investigation confirms the allegation to be true then the statement of outcome shall be placed on the file/record of the person against whom the investigation upheld the complaint.

5. Protection and Support

Staff shall be protected from intimidation, victimization or discrimination for filing a complaint or assisting in an investigation. Retaliation against a member of staff for complaining about bullying / harassment is considered a disciplinary offense. A malicious complaint made by a staff member will be treated as misconduct under the disciplinary procedure.

6. Assistance in the Event of Harassment

Every effort will be made to assist if they so wish, persons who are victims of bullying/harassment to deal with the problem and where it is requested, the services of a counselor will be made available by the Board of Education. Persons who bully/harass others may be requested to attend counseling to prevent further incidences of harassment occurring. Access to such counseling may be made available by the Board of Education.

It is considered that all personnel who have a role in either the informal or formal procedure – e.g. designated members of administration, worker representatives, union representatives, etc. – should be made aware of appropriate policies and procedures which should, if possible, include appropriate training.