

DIGNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS ACT



The Board of Education recognizes that learning environments that are safe and supportive can increase student attendance and improve academic achievement. A student's ability to learn and achieve high academic standards, and a school's ability to educate students, is compromised by incidents of discrimination or harassment, including but not limited to bullying, taunting and intimidation. Therefore, in accordance with the Dignity for All Students Act, Education Law, Article 2, the District will strive to create an environment free of bullying, discrimination and/or harassment and will foster civility in the schools to prevent and prohibit conduct which is inconsistent with the District's educational mission. Since cyberbullying is a form of bullying, the term "bullying" as used in this policy will implicitly include cyberbullying even if it is not explicitly stated.

The District condemns and prohibits all forms of bullying, discrimination and/or harassment of students based on actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or sex by school employees or students on school property and at school-sponsored activities and events that take place at locations off school property. In addition, any act of bullying, discrimination and/or harassment, outside of school sponsored events, which can reasonably be expected to materially and substantially disrupt the education process may be subject to discipline.

Dignity Act Coordinator

At least one (1) employee at every school shall be designated as the Dignity Act Coordinator(s). The Dignity Act Coordinator(s) will be thoroughly trained to handle human relations in the areas of race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender (identity or expression) and sex. The Board of Education shall appoint the Dignity Act Coordinator(s) and share the name(s) and contact information with all school personnel, students, and parents/persons in parental relation, which shall include, but is not limited to, providing the name, designated school and contact information by:

- a) Listing such information in the Code of Conduct and updates posted on the Internet website, if available;
- b) Including such information in the plain language summary of the Code of Conduct provided to all persons in parental relation to students before the beginning of each school year;
- c) Providing such information to parents and persons of parental relation in at least one district or school mailing or other method of distribution including, but not limited to, sending such information home with each student and, if such information changes, in at least one subsequent district or school mailing or other such method of distribution as soon as practicable thereafter;
- d) Posting such information in highly visible areas of school buildings;
- e) Making such information available at the district and school-level administrative offices.

If a Dignity Act Coordinator vacates his/her position, another school employee shall immediately be designated for an interim appointment as Coordinator, pending approval from the Board of Education, within thirty (30) days of the date the position was vacated. In the event a Coordinator is unable to perform the duties of the position for an extended period of time, another school employee shall immediately be designated for an interim appointment as Coordinator, pending return of the previous Coordinator to the position.

The following is the list of Dignity Act Coordinators per school within the district:

Coordinators Number	Building/Location	Contact
Ms. Vivian Mott, (Social Worker)	High School	516-345-7200
Ms. Lynn Leach, (Psychologist)	Middle School	516-345-7700
Ms. Desrine Johnson, (Teacher)	Middle School	516-345-7700
Ms. Rose Sprufero, (Psychologist)	Centennial ES	516-345-7400
Mr. Joseph Fischetti, (Teacher)	Centennial ES	516-345-7400
Dr. Alexandra McGlashan (Psychologist)	Ulysses Byas ES	516-345-7500
Ms. Joi Emmanuel, (Social Worker)	Washington Rose ES	516-345-7600
Ms. Nicole Rivera, (Teacher)	Washington Rose ES	516-345-7600

Training and Awareness

Each District and Charter School shall establish guidelines for training which shall be approved by the Board of Education. Training will be provided each school year for all District employees in conjunction with existing professional development training to raise staff awareness and sensitivity of bullying, discrimination and/or harassment directed at students that are committed by students or school employees on school property or at a school function. Training will include ways to promote a supportive school environment that is free from bullying, discrimination and/or harassment, emphasize positive relationships, and demonstrate prevention and intervention techniques to assist employees in recognizing and responding to bullying, discrimination, and/or harassment as well as ensuring the safety of the victims.

Instruction in grades Kindergarten through 12 shall include a component on civility, citizenship and character education. Such component shall instruct students on the principles of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observance of laws and rules, courtesy, dignity and other traits which will enhance the quality of their experiences in, and contributions to, the community. For the purposes of this policy, "tolerance," "respect for others" and "dignity" shall include awareness and sensitivity to bullying, discrimination and/or harassment and civility in the relations of people of different races, weights, national origins, ethnic groups, religions, religious practices, mental or physical abilities, sexual orientations, genders and sexes.

Rules against bullying, discrimination and/or harassment will be included in the Code of Conduct, publicized District-wide and disseminated to all staff and parents. An age-appropriate summary shall be distributed to all students at a school assembly at the beginning of each school year.

Reports and Investigations of Bullying, Discrimination and/or Harassment

The District will investigate all complaints of bullying, discrimination, and/or harassment, either formal or informal, and take prompt corrective measures, as necessary. Complaints will be investigated in accordance with applicable policies and regulations. If, after an appropriate investigation, the District finds that this policy has been violated, corrective action will be taken in accordance with District policies and regulations, the Code of Conduct, and all appropriate federal or state laws.

The District will annually report material incidents of bullying, discrimination and/or harassment which occurred during the school year to the State Education Department. Such report shall be submitted in a manner prescribed by the Commissioner, on or before the basic educational data system (BEDS) reporting deadline or such other date as determined by the Commissioner.

Prohibition of Retaliatory Behavior (Commonly Known as "Whistle-Blower" Protection)

Any person who has reasonable cause to suspect that a student has been subjected to bullying, discrimination and/or harassment by an employee or student, on school grounds or at a school function, who acts reasonably and in good faith and reports such information to school officials or law enforcement authorities, shall have immunity from any civil liability that may arise from making such report. The Board prohibits any retaliatory behavior directed at complainants, victims, witnesses and/or any other individuals who participated in the investigation of a complaint of bullying, discrimination and/or harassment.

The Dignity Act is intended to give students in public schools an educational environment free from discrimination and harassment. It protects against all forms of harassment, particularly those based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex. The Dignity Act will create a framework for promoting a more positive school culture through sensitivity training and classroom curricula on diversity by:

- **Training all Staff on Bullying Issues:** All staff should be trained on identifying and addressing the causes of bullying (for example, intolerance, homophobia, racism); identifying early signs of bullying; intervention strategies; and talking with students about bullying. It is important that non-pedagogical staff receive training to be able to at least recognize and report bullying.
- **Incorporating Anti-Bullying and Tolerance Lessons into all Students' Core Curricula:** The Dignity Act requires that schools incorporate lessons on civility, tolerance and diversity into their core curricula starting with the 2012-2013 school year. Schools should use these lessons to discuss bullying and harassment, why sensitivity is important in the school and work environments, and how students should respond if they witness or experience bullying.
- **Understanding the Various Tactics Used by Bullies:** With students' increased access to technology, it is important for schools to understand the best ways to prevent and respond to "cyber bullying" (bullying via text, e-mail and web posting). Schools should treat cyber bullying like other forms of bullying—intervening when the conduct interferes with a student's ability to succeed in school but always protecting students' privacy and First Amendment rights. Schools should educate students on proper behavior on the Internet, yet refrain from using educational resources to monitor off-campus activities.
- **Designating a Staff Member to Become an Expert on Bullying:** The Dignity Act requires each school to have at least one staff member who acts as a point person on bullying issues and incidents. This person must receive comprehensive training on the causes of bullying, the psychology of bullying, and how to intervene when bullying occurs. Title IX requires every school to designate a staff person to handle complaints of sex discrimination; this same person can be responsible for responding to bullying.
- **Creating a Confidential Complaint Mechanism:** Students and parents should be provided with a confidential complaint mechanism that they can use to report incidents of bullying to the coordinator. Whenever possible, a form should be included on the school's website to enable members of the school community to report bullying online. In addition to responding to each complaint, the coordinator should regularly review all received complaints to determine whether there are patterns that warrant special attention.
- **Focusing on the Emotional and Psychological Needs of the Victim and the Bully:** Removing an aggressive student from school, through suspension or arrest, is *not* proven to address the causes of bullying or prevent further acts of bullying. In fact, removing a student from a structured environment can lead to increased frustration, fear and isolation, with potentially negative consequences for both the bully and victim.