

**121A.031 SCHOOL STUDENT BULLYING POLICY.**

Subdivision 1. **Student bullying policy; scope and application.** (a) This section applies to bullying by a student against another student enrolled in a public school and which occurs:

(1) on the school premises, at the school functions or activities, or on the school transportation;

(2) by use of electronic technology and communications on the school premises, during the school functions or activities, on the school transportation, or on the school computers, networks, forums, and mailing lists; or

(3) by use of electronic technology and communications off the school premises to the extent such use substantially and materially disrupts student learning or the school environment.

(b) A nonpublic school under section 123B.41, subdivision 9, consistent with its school accreditation cycle, is encouraged to electronically transmit to the commissioner its antibullying policy, if any, and any summary data on its bullying incidents.

(c) This section does not apply to a home school under sections 120A.22, subdivision 4, and 120A.24, or a nonpublic school under section 123B.41, subdivision 9.

(d) A school-aged child who voluntarily participates in a public school activity, such as a cocurricular or extracurricular activity, is subject to the same student bullying policy provisions applicable to the public school students participating in the activity.

Subd. 2. **Definitions.** (a) For purposes of this section, the following terms have the meanings given them.

(b) "District" means a district under section 120A.05, subdivision 8.

(c) "Public school" or "school" means a public school under section 120A.05, subdivisions 9, 11, 13, and 17, and a charter school under chapter 124E.

(d) "Student" means a student enrolled in a school under paragraph (c).

(e) "Bullying" means intimidating, threatening, abusive, or harming conduct that is objectively offensive and:

(1) there is an actual or perceived imbalance of power between the student engaging in prohibited conduct and the target of the behavior and the conduct is repeated or forms a pattern; or

(2) materially and substantially interferes with a student's educational opportunities or performance or ability to participate in school functions or activities or receive school benefits, services, or privileges.

(f) "Cyberbullying" means bullying using technology or other electronic communication, including but not limited to a transfer of a sign, signal, writing, image, sound, or data, including a post on a social network Internet website or forum, transmitted through a computer, cell phone, or other electronic device.

(g) Intimidating, threatening, abusive, or harming conduct may involve, but is not limited to, conduct that causes physical harm to a student or a student's property or causes a student to be in reasonable fear of harm to person or property; under Minnesota common law, violates a student's reasonable expectation of privacy, defames a student, or constitutes intentional infliction of emotional distress against a student; is directed at any student or students, including those based on a person's actual or perceived race, ethnicity, color, creed, religion, national origin, immigration status, sex, marital status, familial status, socioeconomic

status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, including gender identity and expression, academic status related to student performance, disability, or status with regard to public assistance, age, or any additional characteristic defined in chapter 363A. However, prohibited conduct need not be based on any particular characteristic defined in this paragraph or chapter 363A.

(h) "Prohibited conduct" means bullying or cyberbullying as defined under this subdivision or retaliation for asserting, alleging, reporting, or providing information about such conduct or knowingly making a false report about bullying.

(i) "Remedial response" means a measure to stop and correct prohibited conduct, prevent prohibited conduct from recurring, and protect, support, and intervene on behalf of the student who is the target of the prohibited conduct. Districts and schools may seek the assistance of the school safety technical assistance center under section 127A.052 to develop and implement remedial responses on behalf of a student who is the target of prohibited conduct, to stop and correct a student engaging in prohibited conduct, and for use with students and adults in the school community.

**Subd. 3. Local district and school policy.** (a) Districts and schools, in consultation with students, parents, and community organizations, to the extent practicable, shall adopt, implement, and, on a cycle consistent with other district policies, review, and revise where appropriate, a written policy to prevent and prohibit student bullying consistent with this section. The policy must conform with sections 121A.41 to 121A.56. A district or school must adopt and implement a local policy under subdivisions 3 to 5 or comply with the provisions of the state model policy in subdivision 6.

(b) Each local district and school policy must establish research-based, developmentally appropriate best practices that include preventive and remedial measures and effective discipline for deterring policy violations; apply throughout the school or district; and foster active student, parent, and community participation. A district or school may request assistance from the school safety technical assistance center under section 127A.052 in complying with local policy requirements. The policy shall:

- (1) define the roles and responsibilities of students, school personnel, and volunteers under the policy;
- (2) specifically list the characteristics contained in subdivision 2, paragraph (g);
- (3) emphasize remedial responses;
- (4) be conspicuously posted in the administrative offices of the school and school district in summary form;
- (5) be given to each school employee and independent contractor, if a contractor regularly interacts with students, at the time of employment with the district or school;
- (6) be included in the student handbook on school policies; and
- (7) be available to all parents and other school community members in an electronic format in the languages appearing on the district or school website, consistent with the district policies and practices.

(c) Consistent with its applicable policies and practices, each district and school under this subdivision must discuss its policy with students, school personnel, and volunteers and provide appropriate training for all school personnel to prevent, identify, and respond to prohibited conduct. Districts and schools must establish a training cycle, not to exceed a period of three school years, for school personnel under this paragraph. Newly employed school personnel must receive the training within the first year of their

employment with the district or school. A district or school administrator may accelerate the training cycle or provide additional training based on a particular need or circumstance.

(d) Each district and school under this subdivision must submit an electronic copy of its prohibited conduct policy to the commissioner.

**Subd. 4. Local policy components.** (a) Each district and school policy implemented under this section must, at a minimum:

(1) designate a staff member as the primary contact person in the school building to receive reports of prohibited conduct under clause (3), ensure the policy and its procedures including restorative practices, consequences, and sanctions are fairly and fully implemented, and serve as the primary contact on policy and procedural matters implicating both the district or school and the department;

(2) require school employees who witness prohibited conduct or possess reliable information that would lead a reasonable person to suspect that a student is a target of prohibited conduct to make reasonable efforts to address and resolve the prohibited conduct;

(3) provide a procedure to begin to investigate reports of prohibited conduct within three school days of the report, and make the primary contact person responsible for the investigation and any resulting record and for keeping and regulating access to any record;

(4) indicate how a school will respond to an identified incident of prohibited conduct, including immediately intervening to protect the target of the prohibited conduct; at the school administrator's discretion and consistent with state and federal data practices law governing access to data, including section 13.02, subdivision 8, a presumption that a district or school official will notify the parent of the reported target of the prohibited conduct and the parent of the actor engaged in the prohibited conduct; providing other remedial responses to the prohibited conduct; and ensuring that remedial responses are tailored to the particular incident and nature of the conduct and the student's developmental age and behavioral history;

(5) prohibit reprisals or retaliation against any person who asserts, alleges, or reports prohibited conduct or provides information about such conduct and establish appropriate consequences for a person who engages in reprisal or retaliation;

(6) allow anonymous reporting but do not rely solely on an anonymous report to determine discipline;

(7) provide information about available community resources to the target, actor, and other affected individuals, as appropriate;

(8) where appropriate for a child with a disability to prevent or respond to prohibited conduct, allow the child's individualized education program or section 504 plan to address the skills and proficiencies the child needs to respond to or not engage in prohibited conduct;

(9) use new employee training materials, the school publication on school rules, procedures, and standards of conduct, and the student handbook on school policies to publicize the policy;

(10) require ongoing professional development, consistent with section 122A.60, to build the skills of all school personnel who regularly interact with students, including but not limited to educators, administrators, school counselors, social workers, psychologists, other school mental health professionals, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, extracurricular activities advisors, and paraprofessionals to identify, prevent, and appropriately address prohibited conduct;

(11) allow the alleged actor in an investigation of prohibited conduct to present a defense; and

(12) inform affected students and their parents of their rights under state and federal data practices laws to obtain access to data related to the incident and their right to contest the accuracy or completeness of the data.

(b) Professional development under a local policy includes, but is not limited to, information about:

(1) developmentally appropriate strategies both to prevent and to immediately and effectively intervene to stop prohibited conduct;

(2) the complex dynamics affecting an actor, target, and witnesses to prohibited conduct;

(3) research on prohibited conduct, including specific categories of students at risk for prohibited conduct in school;

(4) the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and

(5) Internet safety and cyberbullying.

**Subd. 5. Safe and supportive schools programming.** (a) Districts and schools are encouraged to provide developmentally appropriate programmatic instruction to help students identify, prevent, and reduce prohibited conduct; value diversity in school and society; develop and improve students' knowledge and skills for solving problems, managing conflict, engaging in civil discourse, and recognizing, responding to, and reporting prohibited conduct; and make effective prevention and intervention programs available to students. Upon request, the school safety technical assistance center under section 127A.052 must assist a district or school in helping students understand social media and cyberbullying. Districts and schools must establish strategies for creating a positive school climate and use evidence-based social-emotional learning to prevent and reduce discrimination and other improper conduct.

(b) Districts and schools are encouraged to:

(1) engage all students in creating a safe and supportive school environment;

(2) partner with parents and other community members to develop and implement prevention and intervention programs;

(3) engage all students and adults in integrating education, intervention, and other remedial responses into the school environment;

(4) train student bystanders to intervene in and report incidents of prohibited conduct to the school's primary contact person;

(5) teach students to advocate for themselves and others;

(6) prevent inappropriate referrals to special education of students who may engage in prohibited conduct; and

(7) foster student collaborations that foster a safe and supportive school climate.

**Subd. 6. State model policy.** (a) The commissioner, in consultation with the commissioner of human rights, shall develop and maintain a state model policy. A district or school that does not adopt and implement a local policy under subdivisions 3 to 5 must implement and may supplement the provisions of the state model policy. The commissioner must assist districts and schools under this subdivision to implement the state policy. The state model policy must:

(1) define prohibited conduct, consistent with this section;

(2) apply the prohibited conduct policy components in this section;

(3) for a child with a disability, whenever an evaluation by an individualized education program team or a section 504 team indicates that the child's disability affects the child's social skills development or the child is vulnerable to prohibited conduct because of the child's disability, the child's individualized education program or section 504 plan may address the skills and proficiencies the child needs to not engage in and respond to such conduct; and

(4) encourage violence prevention and character development education programs under section 120B.232, subdivision 1.

(b) The commissioner shall develop and post departmental procedures for:

(1) periodically reviewing district and school programs and policies for compliance with this section;

(2) investigating, reporting, and responding to noncompliance with this section, which may include an annual review of plans to improve and provide a safe and supportive school climate; and

(3) allowing students, parents, and educators to file a complaint about noncompliance with the commissioner.

(c) The commissioner must post on the department's website information indicating that when districts and schools allow non-curriculum-related student groups access to school facilities, the district or school must give all student groups equal access to the school facilities regardless of the content of the group members' speech.

Subd. 7. **Relation to existing law.** This section does not:

(1) establish any private right of action;

(2) limit rights currently available to an individual under other civil or criminal law, including, but not limited to, chapter 363A; or

(3) interfere with a person's rights of religious expression and free speech and expression under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**History:** 2014 c 160 s 1; 1Sp2015 c 3 art 4 s 10