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5517.01 - BULLYING

The Board of Managers is committed to providing a safe, positive, productive, and nurturing educational environment for all of its students. The Board encourages the promotion of positive interpersonal relations between members of the school community. Bullying behavior toward a student, whether by other students, staff, or third parties, is strictly prohibited and ~~will~~ shall not be tolerated. This prohibition includes physical, verbal, and psychological abuse as provided herein. The Board ~~will~~ shall not tolerate any gestures, comments, threats, or actions which cause or threaten to cause bodily harm or personal degradation. Engaging in "cyberbullying," which is bullying that occurs through the use of data or computer software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, computer network, or cellular telephone or other wireless or cellular communications device also is prohibited. This policy applies when a student is on school grounds immediately before or during school hours, immediately after school hours, or at any other time when the school is being used by a school group; off school grounds at a school activity, function, or event; traveling to or from school or a school activity, function, or event; or, using property or equipment provided by the school. Additionally, this policy applies regardless of the physical location when:

- A. the individual committing the bullying behavior and any of the intended targets of the bullying behavior are students attending a school within the Cooperative; and
- B. the bullying behavior results in a substantial interference with school discipline or an unreasonable threat to the rights of others to a safe and peaceful learning environment.

Bullying as defined in State law means overt, unwanted, repeated acts or gestures, including verbal or written communications or images transmitted in any manner (including digitally or electronically), physical acts committed, aggression, or any other behaviors committed by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the other student and create for the targeted student an objectively hostile school environment that:

- A. places the targeted student in reasonable fear of harm to the targeted student's person or property;
- B. has a substantially detrimental effect on the targeted student's physical or mental health;
- C. has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's academic performance; or
- D. has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, and privileges provided by the school.

This type of behavior is a form of harassment, although it need not be based on any of the legally protected characteristics, such as sex, race, color, national origin, marital status, or disability. It includes, but is not limited to, such behaviors as stalking, intimidation, menacing behavior, coercion, name-calling, taunting, making threats, and hazing. It also includes the use of digital or electronic communications to engage in such behaviors.

However, Indiana law exempts the following from the definition of "bullying":

- A. Participating in a religious event.

- B. Acting in an emergency involving the protection of a person or property from an imminent threat of serious bodily injury or substantial danger.
- C. Participating in an activity consisting of the exercise of a student's rights protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Article I, Section 31 of the Constitution of the State of Indiana, or both.
- D. Participating in an activity conducted by a nonprofit or governmental entity that provides recreation, education, training, or other care under the supervision of one or more adults.
- E. Participating in an activity undertaken at the prior written direction of the student's parent.
- F. Engaging in interstate or international travel from a location outside Indiana to another location outside Indiana.

Any student who believes ~~s/he~~ the student has been or is currently the victim of bullying ~~should~~ shall immediately report the situation to the building principal, facility administrator, assistant principal or the Director. The student also may report concerns to a teacher or counselor who ~~will~~ shall be responsible for notifying the appropriate administrator or Board official. This report may be made anonymously. Complaints against the building principal or facility administrator ~~should~~ shall be filed with the Director. Complaints against the Director ~~should~~ shall be filed with the Board President. A parent may file a complaint on behalf of a student in the same manner.

Every student is encouraged, and every staff member is required, to report any situation that they believe to be bullying behavior directed toward a student. Reports may be made to those identified above. Staff members who fail to report bullying or who fail to conduct an investigation when assigned that duty are subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.

All complaints about bullying behavior that may violate this policy shall be ~~promptly~~ investigated promptly according to the timeline established by the Director's administrative guidelines.

If, during an investigation of reported acts of bullying and/or harassment, the investigator believes that the reported misconduct may have created a hostile learning environment and may have constituted unlawful discriminatory harassment based on sex, race, color, national origin, religion, or disability, the investigator ~~will~~ shall report the act of bullying and/or harassment to one (1) of the Compliance Officers so that it may be investigated in accordance with the procedures set forth in Policy 5517 - Anti-Harassment or Policy 2266 - Discrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education.

If the investigator finds an instance of bullying behavior has occurred, prompt and appropriate action or responses shall be taken to address the behavior wherever it occurs, including, as appropriate, disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion for students, discharge for employees, exclusion for parents, guests, volunteers, and contractors, and removal from any official position and/or a request to resign for Board members. Bullying acts shall be reported to law enforcement officials immediately upon determining that a report to law enforcement is necessary.

The parents of the targeted student and the reported bully shall be notified of the alleged bullying incident at the beginning of the investigation, the findings of the investigation at the conclusion of the investigation, and, as appropriate, any remedial action that has been or ~~will~~ shall be taken to the extent disclosure is permitted by law. In addition to discipline, remedial action may include support services for the targeted student and bullying education for the bully, among other actions.

Retaliation against any person who reports, is thought to have reported, files a complaint, or otherwise participates in an investigation or inquiry concerning allegations of bullying is prohibited and ~~will~~ shall not be tolerated. Such retaliation shall be considered a serious violation of Board policy and independent of whether a complaint is substantiated. Suspected retaliation ~~should~~ shall be reported in the same manner as bullying. Making intentionally false reports about bullying for the purpose of getting someone in trouble is similarly prohibited and ~~will~~ shall not be tolerated. Retaliation and making intentionally false reports may result in disciplinary action as indicated above.

For a definition of and instances that could possibly be construed as hazing, consult Policy 5516 - Student Hazing.

The Cooperative ~~will~~ shall maintain a link on its internet website to the internet website resource page maintained by the Indiana Department of Education that provides parents and school officials with resources or best practices regarding the prevention and reporting ~~o~~ of bullying and cyberbullying.

Confidentiality

To the extent appropriate and/or legally permitted, confidentiality ~~will~~ shall be maintained during the investigation process. However, a proper investigation ~~will~~ shall, in some circumstances, require the disclosure of names and allegations.

Safe School Committee

In accordance with State law, there shall be a Safe School Committee in each school within this Cooperative (see Policy 8400 - School Safety).

The Director is directed to develop administrative guidelines to implement this policy. Guidelines shall include reporting and investigative procedures, as needed. The complaint procedure established by the Director shall be followed.

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I.C. 20-20-8-8

I.C. 20-30-5-5.5

I.C. 20-33-8-0.2

I.C. 20-33-8-13.5

I.C. 20-34-6-1