

I. General Statement of Policy

The School Board recognizes the negative impact that bullying can have on the health and safety of students and the learning environment. Bullying can create distress, anxiety, lower levels of self-esteem, and feelings of isolation. Bullying materially and substantially disrupts the rights of others to an education and is unacceptable in the educational environment.

Independent School District No. 4116 endeavors to maintain a learning and working environment that is free of bullying. Toward that end, bullying is prohibited on school grounds, at school-sponsored events and activities, on school buses and other school sponsored transportation and at school bus stops.

II. Definition of Bullying

“Bullying” means repeated behavior by an individual or group that is intended to cause the victim, or would cause a reasonable person of the same age as the victim, to feel frightened, threatened, intimidated, humiliated, shamed, disgraced, ostracized, harassed, or physically abused. Bullying can take place in several forms including but not limited to the following:

- A. written, verbal, or nonverbal threats;
- B. intimidating or threatening gestures;
- C. unwanted physical contact, violence, or assault;
- D. an intentional display of force that would give the victim reason to expect or fear physical contact or injury;
- E. jeering, taunting, or mocking;
- F. teasing;
- G. degrading, insulting, or derogatory comments;
- H. hazing;
- I. harassment;
- J. extortion;
- K. theft of money or possessions;
- L. vandalism of a student’s personal property or
- M. unauthorized exercise of control over a student’s personal property.

III. Preventative Measures

A copy of this policy will be provided to students on an annual basis. Staff will discuss bullying with students and will provide age appropriate examples to assist students in identifying bullying and understanding why it is inappropriate. Staff is encouraged to use role-playing to illustrate bullying for students. All students shall be informed that bullying will not be tolerated in any form. All students shall be encouraged to report any bullying regardless of whether they are the victim or an observer.

When an investigation substantiates that bullying has occurred, the Director shall inform the teachers who work with the offending student and the victim about the bullying so that those teachers can more closely monitor for future incidents of bullying. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken for bullying behavior. The primary purpose of such action is to protect the victim and deter such behavior in the future. The discipline imposed should match the severity of the offense.

As appropriate, administrators and teachers will make reasonable efforts to involve victims of bullying in groups and situations which will facilitate the victim's development of friendships, social skills, and confidence. Examples include but are not limited to friendship groups, peer support groups, new student orientation groups, and extracurricular activities and clubs.

The School Board will review this policy at appropriate intervals to ensure that it is effective in its aims. As part of its review, the Board may require that a survey be conducted to determine the scope and extent of bullying.

IV. Reporting Procedures

- A. Victims. All students who believe they have been the victim of bullying shall promptly report the bullying to a teacher or Director.
- B. Parents. All parents who become aware of any bullying are encouraged to report the bullying to the Director.
- C. Witnesses. All students who witness bullying shall immediately report the bullying to a teacher or Director. Any school district employee who witnesses bullying shall immediately intervene and take appropriate action to stop the bullying.
- D. Teachers. Any teacher who witnesses bullying or receives a report of bullying shall make a written referral to the Director for appropriate action.
- E. Administrators. An administrator who observes bullying or receives a verbal report of bullying shall document and promptly investigate the matter. Administrators shall seek to discuss bullying with the victim in a place where the victim feels secure. The initial discussion with the victim shall not take place in the presence of the offending student(s). If more than one student is involved in perpetrating the bullying, the administrator shall talk to each of the offending students separately. After the investigation has been completed, the Director shall take appropriate action consistent with this policy.

V. Disciplinary and Other Action

Disciplinary action involving dismissal shall be in accordance with the Pupil Fair Dismissal Act. Depending on the severity of the offense, disciplinary action for bullying may include loss of privileges, removal from class, suspension, and expulsion or exclusion. If the Director determines that the conduct rises to the level of a crime, disciplinary action may also include referral to law enforcement officials. In addition to imposing any disciplinary action, the Director is encouraged to discuss the bullying behavior with the offending student and to review the reason why the behavior is inappropriate.

The penalties and prohibitions in this policy are in addition to, and do not replace or supersede, any related provisions in district policy prohibiting conduct such as harassment, violence, assault, and hazing.

In some circumstances, mediation may be used as an alternative or in addition to discipline when addressing a first offense of bullying. The Director shall consider the nature and severity of the offense in determining whether mediation is appropriate. Mediation shall not be used without the consent of the victim, or where the Director has a concern about retaliation being perpetrated against the victim. Victims shall not be pressured into participating in mediation. The School Board recognizes that a power imbalance exists between the victim and the bully and that this imbalance can make mediation an intimidating situation for the victim.