

Pinellas County Policy against Bullying and Harassment
Policy #5517.01
Questions and Answers

The Pinellas County School Board has established a policy that prohibits bullying and harassment to ensure that all students, employees, and volunteers learn and work in an environment that is safe, secure, and free from harassment and bullying of any kind.

How much bullying happens in Pinellas County Schools?

In 2012, Pinellas County received just over 3,000 reports of bullying and harassment and approximately 577 were found to be substantiated. What does this tell us? Most of what is happening is not bullying or harassment, but more importantly, schools are addressing the behaviors.

Is the Policy against Bullying and harassment just for students in grades K-12?

No. The policy is also for employees and volunteers too.

What is bullying?

The policy defines bullying, including cyber-bullying, as systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on one or more students or employees and may involve but is not limited to:

1. Teasing;
2. Social Exclusion;
3. Threat;
4. Intimidation;
5. Stalking, including cyberstalking
6. Physical violence;
7. Theft;
8. Sexual, religious, or racial harassment;
9. Public or private humiliation;
10. Destruction of property.

An easy way to determine if something is bullying is to look for three things that are generally present in a bullying situation:

1. Repeated behavior (although it may be the first time you heard about or witnessed the behavior)
2. Imbalance of power between the person who is bullying and the victim of bullying (could be a physical imbalance or a difference in status)
3. Intent to harm (either physically or emotionally)

What is harassment?

The policy defines harassment as any threatening, insulting, or dehumanizing gesture, use of data or computer software, or written, verbal or physical conduct directed against a student or employee that:

1. Places a student or employee in reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property.
2. Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's educational performance, opportunities, or benefits.
3. Has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of a school.

In 2010, The Office of Civil Rights sent out a letter now known as the Dear Colleague Letter regarding **Discriminatory Harassment** and that it can create a hostile environment when the conduct is sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent so as to interfere with or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school. When such harassment is based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability, as well as to include such bases as sexual orientation and religion, it violates the civil rights laws that OCR enforces. (See the Dear Colleague Letter for more information).

What is cyber-bullying?

“Cyber-bullying” means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which includes, but is not limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic system, photoelectronic system, or photooptical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. Cyber-bullying includes the creation of a webpage or weblog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person, or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

What activities does the policy apply to?

The policy prohibits bullying or harassment of any student or employee:

1. During any education program or activity conducted by a district school
2. During any school-related or school-sponsored program or activity
3. On a school bus or at a school bus stop
4. Through the use of data or computer software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, or computer network within the scope of the school system.
5. Through the use of data or computer software that is accessed at a non-school-related location, activity, function, or program or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the bullying substantially interferes with or limits the victim's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school or substantially disrupts the education

process or orderly operation of a school. This paragraph does not require a school to staff or monitor any non-school-related activity, function, or program.

How does a student, parent, or staff report bullying or harassment?

- Bullying or harassment can be reported verbally or in writing to the principal or the principal's designees.
- Bullying and harassment can be reported via the *Online Reporting Form* by going to: <http://bullying.pcsb.org> or <http://harassment.pcsb.org>. (Both will take you to the same reporting form). The *Online Reporting Form* can also be found by going to www.pcsb.org.
- **Anonymous reports** can also be made using the designated anonymous reporting procedure at each school, or by calling the Campus Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-873-8477 or Text keyword TIP144 plus your message to CRIMES (274637).

What process does the classroom teacher, administrator, school counselor, front office staff, (any adult) at the school or site receiving a written or verbal report of bullying or harassment take?

Any staff member receiving a report must enter the report into the *Online Reporting Form*. <http://bullying.pcsb.org> or <http://harassment.pcsb.org> (Both will take you to the same reporting form) or direct the student or parent to a school computer and assist them in completing the report. **If the report requires immediate assistance due to safety reasons, the person receiving the report will contact administration immediately, in addition to the above procedures.**

Who investigates an adult report of bullying or harassment?

Reports involving adults will go to the principal at the school or to the supervisor at the work site.

Are employees required to report bullying?

All school employees are required to report alleged violations of this policy to the principal or the principal's designees or by going to one of the Online Reporting forms. Non-school employees are required to report alleged violations of this policy to their supervisor, who will enter the report into the *Online Reporting Form*.

What is the procedure when a report of bullying or harassment is received by the designees at the school or site?

All reports of bullying/harassment must be investigated. The procedures for initiating an investigation of alleged bullying or harassment vary depending on how and where the report was received and whether the incident involves students or adults. Please refer to the *Report of Bullying/Harassment Received* flowchart for specific steps.

What is the process for investigating a report of bullying or harassment?

The principal/designees or appropriate district administrator will initiate an investigation of all complaints of bullying or harassment. The investigator will interview the victim, alleged perpetrator, and witnesses separately to gather information including, but not limited to:

- a. Description of incident including nature of the behavior; context in which the alleged incident occurred, etc.
- b. How often the conduct occurred
- c. Whether there were past incidents or past continuing patterns of behavior
- d. The relationship between the parties involved
- e. The characteristics of parties involved (i.e., grade, age, etc.)
- f. The identity of the perpetrator, including whether the perpetrator was in a position of power over the student allegedly subjected to bullying or harassment
- g. The number of alleged bullies/harassers
- h. The age(s) of the alleged bullies/harassers
- i. Where the bullying and/or harassment occurred
- j. Whether the conduct adversely affected the student's education or educational environment

The parent/legal guardian of all students involved will be notified on the same day an investigation has been initiated and again at the end of the investigation. Investigators at each school/site will use the Sugar CRM process for all reports of bullying and harassment. (For more information, please refer to the *Investigating Reports of Bullying and Harassment Investigation, Guidelines and Checklist*.)

How can it be determined whether a reported act of bullying or harassments is within the scope of the district school system?

Guidelines that indicate an incident is within the scope of the school district include:

- Incident occurred on school campus, at school sponsored event, or using school equipment
- Incident causes or threatens to cause substantial and material disruption at school (must be documented)
- There is a relationship between the off campus incident and on campus bullying.

Refer to the PCS Legal Office for additional guidance. Although an incident may not be within the scope of the school district for investigation or discipline, resources can be provided to students, parents, and staff. Referring a parent to law enforcement may be needed.

Is there a time limit for completing the investigation?

Yes, the investigation must be completed within 10 working days, unless circumstances require a longer period, in which case it shall be completed within a reasonable time.

If requested, can a parent/legal guardian get a copy of the completed report?

Yes. A copy of the completed report can be given to the parents/legal guardian, but all other student names and any identifiable information must be redacted to ensure student confidentiality.

What are the consequences if a student or adult engages in bullying or harassment?

Consequences and appropriate remedial action for confirmed acts of bullying or harassment may range from behavioral interventions, referrals, suspension, and/or disciplinary action as outlined in the Code of Student Conduct, district policies, procedures, and agreements.

What happens if there is a false report of bullying?

The same consequences that apply if engaging in bullying or harassment also apply to students and adults who wrongfully and intentionally accuse another as a means of bullying or harassment.

What help is available for victims or perpetrators of bullying or harassment?

A teacher or parent/legal guardian can request an informal consultation with school staff (e.g., school counselor, social worker, psychologist, etc.) or refer a student to the school intervention team for consideration of appropriate services. Assistance for school personnel is available through the Employee Assistance Program.

Note: If a formal discipline report or formal complaint is made, the principal or designees must refer both the student who was victimized and the student who used bullying or harassing behaviors to the school intervention team for determination of counseling support and interventions.

What is a Safety Plan and when should one be created?

A Safety Plan is a specific written plan designed to ensure that a victim remains physically and emotionally safe at school. This may be done for both substantiated and unsubstantiated reports. Plans can be created at any time during the investigation or as part of the follow-up recommendations. They can be written for both students and adults; be sure to include parents if it involves a student. A Safety Plan can also be created for the accused as well, so that he or she knows what to do and what not to do in a situation.

Can school personnel share safety plans with before and aftercare program personnel?

Yes. Safety plans are put in place to ensure a student's physical and emotional safety while on campus. The plan can and should be shared with all adults who work with the student.

What if bullying or harassment is reported while the student is in the school's before or aftercare program?

The report must be taken to ensure that the bullying or harassment is not happening during school time as well. Please contact the personnel overseeing the aftercare program to work in helping to complete the report and make sure safeties are put in place.

What training will be provided?

Training is an integral part of the bullying prevention and intervention process. The Policy against Bullying and Harassment requires training for students, parents/legal guardians, teachers, school administrators, counseling staff, and school volunteers to ensure that everyone knows the policy against bullying and harassment and procedures, as well as how to intervene when issues of bullying arise. At a minimum, this must occur on an annual basis. Training must include evidence-based methods of preventing bullying and harassment, as well as how to effectively identify and respond to bullying in schools. Training will be coordinated through the Prevention Office.

How will students, staff, and parents be informed about the policy?

- The information will be published annually in the *Student Code of Conduct* and all employee handbooks.
- The principal shall develop an annual process for discussing the Policy against Bullying and Harassment with students.
- Reminders of the policy and bullying prevention messages such as district posters and/or posters that the school creates and signs must be displayed around each school and on school buses.

Where can I get more information about bullying and the policy against bullying and harassment?

The policy against bullying and harassment as well as prevention and intervention information for bullying and harassment can be found at www.pcsb.org under the Prevention Office. Additional resources can also be found at the Stop Bullying Now website by going to www.stopbullying.gov.