

JOHNSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS DISCIPLINE POLICIES & PROCEDURES

BULLYING POLICY

Bullying disrupts a school's ability to educate students and threatens public safety by creating an atmosphere in which such behavior can escalate into violence. All students have a right to work and study in a safe, supportive environment that is free from harassment, intimidation, and bullying.

1. **Prohibition Against Bullying:** Bullying is prohibited in the public schools of Johnston, RI [RIGL §16-21-26]. The prevention of bullying is a part of Johnston school district's Strategic Plan [RIGL §16-7.1-2(e)] and school safety plan [RIGL §16-21-24].

It is the policy of Johnston Public Schools that all students be treated with respect. Neither sexual harassment nor harassment on the basis of race, religion, national origin, gender, ancestry, age, handicap, sexual orientation, or color will be tolerated and may also be punishable under our harassment policy, and that the victim also has the option of proceeding under that harassment policy.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued regulations under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 entitled Sexual Harassment and Title IX of the Education Act of 1972, Anti-discrimination Laws

2. **General Definitions:** Harassment, intimidation, or bullying means an intentional written, verbal, or physical act or threat of an act or threat of a physical act that a reasonable person should know will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or property or is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student.

Bullying occurs when a student, while at school, intentionally assaults, batters, threatens, harasses, stalks, menaces, intimidates, extorts, humiliates, or taunts another person. Bullying also occurs when a student or group of students organizes a campaign of shunning against another student or when a student or group of students maliciously spreads rumors about another student. It can also include any act to incite or encourage another to engage in bullying. In most circumstances, bullying does not include a mutual fight between students of roughly equal strength who are angry with each other. Such fights are subject to discipline as a violation of school rules prohibiting fighting.

3. **At School:** In the context of these regulations the phrase *at school* includes the following places and situations:

- ◆ In any location at the school (classroom, lavatory, locker room, gymnasium, etc.)
- ◆ Anywhere on school property
- ◆ Immediately adjacent to school property
- ◆ On a school bus or other school vehicle
- ◆ At school bus stops
- ◆ While students are walking to and/or from school
- ◆ At any school-sponsored activity or event, whether or not held on school premises

4. **Disciplinary Sanctions:** As a school community, we believe in progressive discipline to educate our students. Repeated offenses will result in more severe consequences. Disciplinary consequences will

be determined on a case-by-case basis and reflect the number and severity of disciplinary issues. Parents/guardians are important partners in the disciplinary process. Communication will be open and frequent as we work together to solve disciplinary issues for the safety and well being of our students.

Disciplinary sanctions for bullying may include:

- ◆ Warnings, and counseling
- ◆ Loss of the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities
- ◆ Loss of the opportunity to participate in school social activities
- ◆ Loss of the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises
- ◆ Loss of school bus transportation
- ◆ Transfer to another school
- ◆ Assignment of community/school service
- ◆ Classroom exclusion
- ◆ Short term school suspension (10 or fewer days of suspension) or long term suspension (suspension of more than 10 days)

5. **Reporting Bullying:** Johnston Public Schools shall establish a procedure for reporting, filing, and acting upon reports of incidents of bullying. It will be publicized to staff, parents/guardians, students, and volunteers. The person(s) responsible for reporting bullying are:
 - ◆ The victim of the bullying;
 - ◆ Anyone who witnessed the bullying; and/or
 - ◆ Anyone who has credible information that an act of bullying is taking place.

6. **Responsibility of Staff:** School staff shall take all reasonable measures to prevent bullying and shall report all aspects of bullying that may come to their attention. All reports should be made to the principal. Such reporting should be documented. In this context, the staff includes volunteers working in the school. A school employee who promptly reports the incident of harassment, intimidation, or bullying to the appropriate school official designated by the school district's policy, and who makes this report in compliance with the procedures in the policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation, or bullying is not liable for damages arising from any failure to remedy the reported incident [RIGL §16-21-26 (8)].

7. **Instruction in the Prevention of Bullying:** Students and staff shall be given instruction in the District's Policy and Regulations against bullying. This instruction shall include discouraging and preventing bullying, how to file a complaint, and how to take disciplinary actions against those who commit acts of bullying.

8. **Responsibility of Students:** Students who observe the act of bullying or who have reasonable grounds to believe that bullying is taking place are obligated to report the bullying to school authorities. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. The victim of the bullying shall, however, not be subject to discipline for failure to report the bullying.

9. **Investigation of Bullying:** The principal or his/her designee shall investigate all allegations of bullying. If the allegation is found to be credible, appropriate disciplinary sanctions, subject to appropriate due process procedures, will be imposed. The investigation will include an assessment of the effect the bullying has had on the victim.

10. **Help for the Victim of the Bullying:** If the assessment determines the victim's mental health has been placed at risk, appropriate referrals will be made. If the bullying included a violent criminal offense, the victim will be informed of any school transfer rights he or she may have under the Federal *No Child Left Behind Act*.
11. **Prohibiting Against Retaliation:** Retaliation or threats of retaliation in any form designed to intimidate the victim of bullying, those who are witnesses to bullying, or those investigating the incident of bullying shall not be tolerated. In most cases retaliation or threat of retaliation will result in imposition of a short or long-term school suspension, and in appropriate cases, referrals to the police [RIGL §11-42-2. Extortion and Blackmail] [RIGL §-59-2 Stalking Prohibited].
12. **Prohibiting Against False Reporting of Bullying:** False reports concerning bullying will be subject to appropriate school discipline, including short and long term suspension from school.
13. **Individualized School Safety Plan:** If a student is the victim of serious or persistent bullying, the principal of the school will prepare a written school safety plan outlining what steps will be taken to provide the student with a safe educational environment. This plan will be developed, if possible, with input from the parents of the student. Staff members who are to implement the plan will help formulate it.
14. **Police Notification:** When the bullying involves conduct that involves criminal law, the police will be notified.
15. **Mediation Board:** The principal of each school in the district of Johnston may establish a Mediation Board to resolve complaints of bullying in circumstances where mediation may provide an appropriate remedy. The Mediation Board may, when appropriate, include students.
16. **Voluntary Participation in Mediation:** No student who is the victim of bullying shall be required to participate in mediation or to accept any apology tendered by the bullying student. The decision of a victim of bullying not to participate in a mediation program shall not diminish the obligation of the school to impose discipline against the student who has committed the act of bullying.
17. **Bullying Prevention Task Force:** The principal in each school in this district shall establish a Bullying Prevention Task Force. This Task Force may include parents/guardians, school staff, and law enforcement officers, as well as community members and, if age allows, students. The purpose of this Task Force will be to develop policies and programs to educate students and staff about the harm caused by bullying. The Task Force may also create programs to prevent or diminish bullying. The program recommendations of the Task Force shall be subject to review by the School Committee before programs are implemented. The duties of the Bullying Prevention Task Force may be assigned to the school's student intervention team [RIGL §16-7.1-2] or the school's School Improvement Team [RIGL §16-53.1-2].
18. **School Atmosphere:** School staff, at all times, should model correct and courteous behavior to each other, to students, and to visitors to the school. Abusive or humiliating language or demeanor will not be accepted. An effort will be made to ensure that each student is well known by at least one certified teacher so that the student will have someone to turn to if a bullying situation develops. To the extent possible the influence of cliques and other exclusive school groupings will be diminished by the

creation of a range of inclusive school activities in which students will be encouraged to participate [RIGL §16-38-4. Exclusive clubs].

19. **Social Skills Training**: The school health program and school counseling services will include appropriate social skills training to help students avoid isolation and to help them interact in a healthy manner.