

STUDENTS

Positive School Climate

1.0 Introduction

The school climate may be defined as the learning environment and the sum of all relationships found within a school and school community. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of bullying prevention (refer to Appendix A, B, C and F).

2.0 Bullying Prevention

A clearly articulated school-wide bullying prevention and intervention plan is the foundation of effective bullying prevention programming.

A school-wide bullying prevention and intervention plan should include the following:

- Early intervention for both the student who is a victim of bullying and the student who bullies. (Without support, students who bully appear to learn how to use power and aggression to dominate others).
- A safe and positive learning environment is essential for student success. The impact of bullying can be severe, and can include anxiety, physical ailments, absenteeism, diminished academic performance and depression.
- The development of relationships among staff, among students, and between staff and students to promote a safe environment and a positive school climate.
- Support for those who are bullied, who bully others, or who witness bullying to receive the necessary support to allow them to learn effective strategies for interacting positively with others and for promoting positive peer dynamics.

3.0 Definition of Bullying

“bullying” means aggressive and typically repeated behaviour by a pupil where,

- (a) the behaviour is intended by the pupil to have the effect of, or the pupil ought to know that the behaviour would be likely to have the effect of,
 - (i) causing harm, fear or distress to another individual, including physical, psychological, social or academic harm, harm to the individual’s reputation or harm to the individual’s property, or
 - (ii) creating a negative environment at a school for another individual, and
- (b) the behaviour occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the pupil and the individual based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education;

Bullying

For the purposes of the definition of “bullying”, behaviour includes the use of any physical, verbal, electronic, written or other means.

Cyber-bullying

For the purposes of the definition of “bullying”, bullying includes bullying by electronic means (commonly known as cyber-bullying), including,

- (a) creating a web page or a blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;
- (b) impersonating another person as the author of content or messages posted on the internet; and
- (c) communicating material electronically to more than one individual or posting material on a website that may be accessed by one or more individuals.

For the Durham District School Board’s (DDSB) student friendly definition of bullying refer to Appendix C.

Aggressive behaviour may be intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect. It can take many forms, including physical, verbal, and social. If aggressive behaviour is physical, it may include hitting, pushing, slapping, and tripping. If it is verbal, it may include name calling, mocking, insults, threats, and sexist, racist, homophobic, or transphobic comments. If it is social, or relational aggression, it is more subtle and may involve such behaviours as gossiping, spreading rumours, excluding others from a group, humiliating others with public gestures or graffiti, and shunning or ignoring. Social aggression may also occur through the use of technology (e.g., spreading rumours, images, or hurtful comments through the use of e-mail, cell phones, text messaging, Internet websites, social networking, or other technology).

Harm, can be experienced in a number of ways, including physical, mental, emotional, and psychological.

4.0 School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans

Every school must establish a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (BPIP) based on the Board’s plan. Schools must review their Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan based on data obtained from the School Climate Surveys and the School Violence Risk Assessment Tool (refer to Appendix A) at least once every year. Schools must post the school’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan on the school website.

Schools should draw upon evidence informed practices and School Climate data that promote positive student behaviour when they develop their Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. A Whole School Approach should be used to create and sustain a positive school climate.

The Ministry of Education states that;

A whole school approach engages all key learning areas, all grades and the wider community. This allows Students and adults in the school and the wider community develop awareness and understanding of the factors that contribute to safe, inclusive, caring and accepting school climates.

4.1 School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Implementation

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan should be a major component of the School’s Whole School Approach when sustaining a positive school climate. The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan must be reviewed annually with all stakeholders, including the School Community Council. The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan should be linked to the School’s Well-Being Goal.

The following components must be incorporated as part of each school’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Statement

School plans must include the following:

- A statement that bullying adversely affects a student's ability to learn and the school climate, including healthy relationships.
- A statement that bullying will not be accepted on school property, at school-related activities, on school buses, or in any other circumstances (e.g., online) where engaging in bullying will have a negative impact on the school climate.
- The definition of bullying as outlined in Section 3.0.
- Expectations for appropriate student behaviour. The School Code of Conduct sets the standards of behaviour.
- Teaching strategies that support the school-wide Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan focus should be on developing skills for healthy relationships by including bullying prevention strategies and highlighting equity and inclusive education principles throughout the curriculum in daily classroom instruction and school activities.
- Provide opportunities for all students to participate in equity and inclusive education, bullying prevention, and leadership initiatives within their own school.
- Schools must conduct anonymous school climate surveys of students, staff, and parents at least once every two years. These surveys will provide the data to assist in the creation of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. These surveys are voluntary and parents or guardians can choose not to have their child participate.

4.2 Programs, Intervention, and Other Supports

- Schools are required to provide programs, interventions, and other supports for students who have been bullied, students who have witnessed incidents of bullying, and students who have engaged in bullying. The programs, intervention, and other supports may be supported by social workers and/or psychologists.
- School plans must include strategies to address incidents of bullying, including appropriate and timely responses. Programs, intervention, and other supports should be curriculum-linked and consistent with a progressive discipline approach.
- Schools can develop a Safe Schools Safety Plan in conjunction with parents to support students involved in a bullying incident (refer to Appendix G).
- School plans should include a range of supports from early prevention to more intensive interventions in cases of persistent bullying, with possible referral to community-based service providers.
- For a student with special education needs, interventions, supports, and consequences must be consistent with the student's strengths and needs, as well as with the program goals and learning expectations documented in his or her Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Staff must take seriously all allegations of bullying behaviour and act in a timely, sensitive, and supportive manner when responding to students who disclose or report bullying incidents.
- Employees who work directly with students, including administrators, teachers, and other school staff, must respond to any student behaviour that is likely to have a negative impact on the school climate. Such behaviour includes all inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour at any time at school and at any school-related event if, in the employee's opinion, it is safe to respond to it. Such inappropriate behaviour includes bullying.
- Schools must put in place procedures to allow students to report bullying incidents safely and in a way that will minimize the possibility of reprisal.
- Schools must outline in their plans the procedures regarding bullying that are in place to support students and their parents.
- School plans must outline what the schools will do to support students who are bullied and/or bully, including the development of specific plans to protect students who have been harmed

5.0 Bias-Aware Progressive Discipline

- 5.1 The Durham District School Board expects the use of Bias-Aware Progressive Discipline as the means to support the Code of Conduct. Bias-Aware Progressive Discipline incorporates a Whole-School Approach that utilizes a continuum of prevention programs, interventions, supports and consequences to address inappropriate student behaviour and to build upon strategies that promote and foster positive behaviours. When inappropriate behaviour occurs, disciplinary measures should be applied within a framework that shifts the focus from one that is solely punitive to one that is both corrective and supportive.

Schools should utilize a range of interventions, supports, and consequences that are developmentally and socio-emotionally appropriate and include learning opportunities for reinforcing positive behaviour while helping students to make better choices (refer to Appendix E.)

- 5.2 In some circumstances, short-term suspension may be a useful tool. In the case of a serious student incident, long-term suspension or expulsion, which is further along the continuum of progressive discipline, may be the response that is required. The safe schools provisions of the Education Act require school boards to provide programs for students who have been expelled or who are on a long-term suspension, so that they can continue their education. For students with special needs, interventions, supports, and consequences must be consistent with the student's strengths and needs, as well as program goals and learning expectations documented in their Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- 5.3 Both school boards and schools are expected to actively engage parents in the Bias-Aware Progressive Discipline approach. Boards and schools should also recognize and respect the diversity of their parent communities and reach out to parents to partner with them in addressing complex and challenging issues.
- 5.4 A Bias-Aware Progressive Discipline approach promotes positive student behaviour through strategies that include using prevention programs and early and ongoing interventions and supports, reporting serious student incidents, and responding to incidents of inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour when they occur.
- 5.5 Boards and schools should focus on prevention and early intervention as the key to maintaining a positive school environment in which students can learn. Early intervention strategies will help prevent unsafe or inappropriate behaviours in a school and in school-related activities. Intervention strategies should provide students with appropriate supports that address inappropriate behaviour and that would result in an improved school climate.
- 5.6 Progressively more serious consequences should be considered for inappropriate behaviour that is repeated or for progressively more serious inappropriate behaviour, taking into account Mitigating, Other Factors and Human Rights Factors.
- 5.7 Ongoing interventions may be necessary to address underlying causes of inappropriate behaviour. Some examples of ongoing interventions are meeting with the parent(s), requiring the student to perform volunteer service in the school community, conflict mediation, peer mentoring, and/or a referral to counselling.

6.0 Notifying Parents

When principals notify the parents of students who have been harmed as the result of a serious student incident, Principals shall disclose the following information:

- The nature of the activity that resulted in harm to the student
- The nature of the harm to the student
- The steps taken to protect the student's safety, including the nature of any disciplinary measures taken in response to the activity
- The supports that will be provided for the student in response to the harm that resulted from the activity

Principals are also required to notify the parents of students who have engaged in serious student incidents. Principals shall disclose the following information:

- The nature of the activity that resulted in harm to the other student
- The nature of the harm to the other student
- The nature of any disciplinary measures taken in response to the activity
- The supports that will be provided for the student in response to his or her engagement in the activity
- When notifying parents of these incidents, the principal must invite parents to have a discussion with them about the supports that will be provided for their child.
- A principal shall not notify a parent of a student if, in the opinion of the principal, doing so would put the student at risk of harm from a parent of the student, such that notification is not in the student's best interest. When principals have decided not to notify the parents that their child was involved in a serious student incident, as described above, they must document the rationale for this decision and notify both the teacher who reported the incident and the appropriate supervisory officer of this decision. In addition, principals should refer students to board resources or to a community-based service provider that can provide the appropriate type of confidential support when his or her parents are not called (e.g., counselling; a sexual assault centre; Kids Help Phone; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Youth Line).
- In circumstances where employees have reason to believe that a student may be in need of protection, board employees must call the Children's Aid Society according to the requirements of the Child and Family Services Act.

7.0 REPORTING TO THE PRINCIPAL

- Employees who become aware that a student at a school of the board may have engaged in a serious student incident shall report the matter to the principal as soon as reasonably possible. The employee must consider the safety of others and the urgency of the situation in reporting the incident, but, in any case, must report it to the principal no later than the end of the school day. (Refer to Appendix D)
- In cases where an immediate action is required, a verbal report to the principal may be made. An online report must be made when it is safe to do so.
- All employee reports made to the principal, including those made verbally, must be confirmed online, using the "Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form – Part I" (refer to Appendix D). Where the principal is the sole witness to an incident, the principal is similarly required to use the reporting form to confirm in writing what they witnessed.
- The principal must investigate all reports submitted by employees. Once the investigation is complete, the principal must communicate the results of the investigation to the teacher who made the report. If a board employee who is not a teacher made the report, the principal will communicate the results of the investigation to that employee if the principal considers it appropriate.
- The principal must not disclose more personal information than is reasonably necessary for the purpose of communicating the results of the investigation. This information must be provided in a timely manner so that school staff can work with the principal to best meet the needs of students, support a positive school climate, and help prevent future inappropriate behaviour from taking place.

- In all cases, the principal must provide the employee who reported the incident with an online acknowledgement, using the “Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form – Part II” (refer to Appendix D). If no further action is taken by the principal, the principal is not required to retain the report. Information that could identify the student(s) involved must not be part of the acknowledgement.
- If the principal has decided that action must be taken as a result of an incident of bullying, he or she will file a copy of the reporting form with documentation indicating the action taken in the OSR of the student whose behaviour was inappropriate. The names of all other students that appear on the form – both students who have engaged in bullying and students who have been harmed – must be removed from the form before it is filed in the student’s OSR.
- Where the principal has taken action in the case of more than one student, a copy of the reporting form with documentation indicating the action taken must be filed in the OSR of each student whose behaviour was inappropriate. The names of all other students that appear on the form – both students who have engaged in bullying and students who have been harmed – must be removed from the form before it is filed.
- In the case of the student who has been harmed, no information about the incident must be placed in their OSR, unless that student’s parents expressly request that it be placed in the OSR.
- In situations where the student who has been bullied has also engaged in a serious student incident, information regarding the incident and the action taken will be placed in the student’s OSR.
- The form and documentation must be kept in the OSR for a minimum of one year.

8.0 Communications

- To support a Whole School Approach, schools must actively communicate their Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan to staff, students, parents, and school councils.

Appendix:

Appendix A – CF Memorandum School Climate Survey, Violence Risk Assessment Tool

Appendix B – CF Memorandum Expectations for Safe Schools

Appendix C – Definition of Bullying

Appendix D – CF Memorandum Incident Reporting

Appendix E – An Equitable Framework for Progressive Discipline

Appendix F – Guidelines for the Development of BPIP

Appendix G – Safe Schools Student Safety Plan

Appendix H – Safe Schools Standards

Effective Date

2013-04-15

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