

Bullying Prevention Plan



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Our vision has always been to provide a high quality education to our students at a reasonable cost to our taxpayers. GMU prides itself on innovative courses, a high level of technological resources, and its knowledgeable teaching staff.

Overview of Harassment, Hazing & Bullying

The Gilbertsville-Mount Upton Central School District (GMUCSD) is committed to providing an educational and working environment that promotes respect, dignity and equality. The Board of Education recognizes harassment, hazing and bullying are detrimental to student learning and achievement. Such behaviors affect not only the students who are targeted, but also those individuals who participate and witness such acts. Therefore, all forms of harassment, discrimination, hazing and bullying are prohibited on school grounds, school busses and at all school-sponsored activities, programs and events including those that take place at alternate locations.

Definitions

Harassment

For purposes of this policy, the term “harassment” is defined as the creation of a hostile environment by conduct or by verbal threats, intimidation or abuse that has or would have the effect of unreasonably and substantially interfering with a student’s educational performance, opportunities or benefits, or mental, emotional or physical well-being; or conduct, verbal threats, intimidation or abuse that reasonably causes or would reasonably be expected to cause a student to fear for his or her physical safety. The harassing behavior may be based on a person’s actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sex, sexual orientation, or gender (identity or expression).

Bullying

For purposes of this policy, the term "bullying" (which is subsumed under the term “harassment”) is defined, in general, as a variety of hostile activities which harms or induces fear through the threat of further aggression and/or creates terror. “Bullying” is a form of harassment that consists of inappropriate and often persistent behavior including threats or intimidation of others, treating others cruelly, terrorizing, coercing, or habitual put-downs and/or badgering of others. Bullying can take at least three forms:

- ◆ *Physical* (including, but not limited to, hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, taking personal belongings);
- ◆ *Verbal* (including, but not limited to, taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, making threats); and
- ◆ *Psychological* (including, but not limited to, spreading rumors; manipulating social relationships; or engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation).

Bullying is characterized by

1. *Power Imbalance* – occurs when a bully uses his/her physical or social power over a target
2. *Intent to Harm* – the bully seeks to inflict physical or emotional harm and/or takes pleasure in this activity
3. *Threat of Further Aggression* – the bully and the target believe the bullying will continue
4. *Terror* – when the bullying increases it becomes “systematic violence or harassment used to intimidate and maintain dominance.”

Barbara Coloroso, *The Bully, The Bullied & The Bystander*

Hazing

“Hazing” is a form of harassment which involves committing an act against a student or coercing a student into committing an act that creates a risk of emotional, physical or psychological harm to a person, in order for the student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student or other organization, or for any other purpose. The fact that a victim may consent to the act does not excuse the behavior or lessen the offense.

Cyberbullying

As with other forms of bullying, cyberbullying is an attempt to display power and control over someone perceived as weaker. Cyberbullying involving District students may occur both on campus and off school grounds and may involve student use of the District Internet system or student use of electronic devices while at school, such as cell phones, digital cameras, and personal computers to engage in bullying.

Cyberbullying includes, but is not limited to, the following misuses of technology: harassing, teasing, intimidating, threatening, or terrorizing another student or staff member by way of any technological tool, such as sending or posting inappropriate or derogatory e-mail messages, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or Web site postings (including blogs).

Cyberbullying has the effect of:

- a) Physically, emotionally or mentally harming a student;
- b) Placing a student in reasonable fear of physical, emotional or mental harm;
- c) Placing a student in reasonable fear of damage to or loss of personal property; and
- d) Creating an intimidating or hostile environment that substantially interferes with a student's educational opportunities.

Also, cyberbullying that occurs off-campus, which endangers the health and safety of students or staff within the school or can be reasonably forecast to cause a material or substantial disruption to the educational process, is prohibited. Such conduct could also be subject to appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with the *District Code of Conduct* and possible referral to local law enforcement authorities.

Prevention and Intervention

The school learning environment provides an opportunity for both students and staff to gain an appreciation in a key district value: the importance of respect and working positively with others. The District recognizes that by requiring the implementation of an anti-bullying program, through both direct student instruction and professional development for staff, both students and staff will learn key elements about bullying prevention: the warning signs of bullying and everyone's responsibility to take an active role in preventing bullying before overt acts of bullying happen. Personnel at all levels are responsible for taking corrective action to prevent bullying behavior of which they have been made aware at School District sites or activities and/or reporting such behavior to their immediate supervisor. The District recognizes the importance of eliminating unacceptable student conduct and works proactively to prevent these behaviors. School personnel who become aware of harassment shall act promptly to address the harassment, with the goal of preventing it from recurring. Where appropriate, school personnel will address the effects on the student who was harassed. Remedial measures will generally include counseling of persons(s) who have been harmed by harassment and person(s) who have been responsible for the harassment of others and implementing monitoring programs to follow up on addressed issues of harassment.

Prevention and intervention techniques within the District to prevent against bullying behavior and to support and protect victims shall include building-level and classroom-level strategies and activities as determined by administration. Individual intervention will be provided by appropriate staff members to bullies/participants, victims and their parents to help ensure that the bullying stops.

Although the focus of this policy is prevention, it is recognized that acts of bullying and harassment may still transpire. In such instances, disciplinary action may occur in accordance with the District's Code of Conduct. Consequences shall depend upon the specific circumstances surrounding the incident, the developmental level of the student, their disciplinary history, and must be consistent with the District's Code of Conduct.

Rules against bullying shall be publicized District-wide and shall be disseminated as appropriate to staff, students and parents.

Gilbertsville-Mount Upton Central School District Bully Prevention Rules:

Rule 1: We will not bully others.

Rule 2: We will try to help students who are bullied.

Rule 3: We will try to include students who are left out.

Rule 4: If we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

Olweus Bully Prevention Program

Training

Staff training shall be provided to raise awareness of the problem of bullying within the schools and to facilitate staff identification of and response to such bullying behavior among students. Training will be provided to employees in conjunction with the District's existing professional development in order to:

1. raise awareness and understanding of the school district's Code of Conduct;
2. raise awareness and sensitivity to potential acts of discrimination or harassment directed at students that are committed by students or school employees on school property or at school functions; including, but not limited to, discrimination or harassment based on a person's actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practices, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex;
3. enable employees to prevent and respond to incidents of discrimination and harassment.

The Gilbertsville-Mount Upton Central School District is implementing the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* (OBPP). OBPP is a comprehensive, school-wide program designed and evaluated for use in elementary, middle, or junior high schools. The *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* is designed to improve peer relations and make schools safer, more positive places for students to learn and develop. Goals of the program include:

1. reducing existing bullying problems among students
2. preventing the development of new bullying problems
3. achieving better peer relations at school

The program has been found to reduce bullying among children, improve the social climate of classrooms, and reduce related antisocial behaviors, such as vandalism and truancy. Schools are also gathering data about OBPP implementation at the High School level. The Olweus Program has been implemented in more than a dozen countries around the world, and in thousands of schools in the United States.

Dignity Act Coordinator

At least one employee in every school shall be designated as a Dignity Act Coordinator and instructed in the provisions of the proposed rule and thoroughly trained in methods to respond to human relations in the areas of race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender and sex. The designation of each Dignity Act Coordinator shall be approved by the board of education annually. The name(s) and contact information for the Dignity Act Coordinator(s) shall be shared with all school personnel, students, and persons in parental relation. This shall be done by:

1. including in District Code of Conduct
2. posting on District website
3. included in at least one district or school mailing per school year
4. posted in highly-visible areas of school buildings
5. made available at the district and school level administrative offices

In the event a Dignity Act Coordinator vacates his or her position, another school employee shall be immediately designated for an interim appointment as Coordinator, pending approval of a successor Coordinator by the Board of Education within 30 days of the date the position was vacated. In the event a Dignity Act Coordinator is unable to perform the duties of his or her position for an extended period of time, another school employee shall be immediately designated for an interim appointment as the Dignity Act Coordinator, pending return of the previous Dignity Act Coordinator to his or her duties as Dignity Act Coordinator.

Complaint Procedures

Students, or a parent(s) or legal guardian(s) who believe his/her student has been subjected to harassment by another student, teacher, administrator or other school personnel should report the incident(s) immediately to the Dignity Act Coordinator or another school administrator, teacher or counselor. If the student, parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) desires further assistance regarding the complaint, the Superintendent may be contacted.

Complaints can be filed by completing a “Gilbertsville-Mount Upton Harassment/Bullying Complaint Form”. These forms are located in the school library, the Student Support Services Office and in the building’s Main Office. Forms can also be accessed and completed online on the District’s homepage: www.gmucsd.org. Forms can be deposited into any specified drop boxes in the building or turned into the Main Office. Online forms can be e-mailed directly to the appropriate building administrator. All inquiries and harassment complaints filed with the District are confidential to the extent possible as described below. Confidentiality also applies to the investigation process.

Investigation Procedures and Decision of Investigator

Upon receipt of a report or complaint alleging harassment, the appropriate building administrator shall undertake or authorize an investigation. The investigation may be conducted by school administrators or by the Office of Special Programs.

The investigation will be completed as soon as practicable. The investigation will, at a minimum, consist of personal interviews with the complainant, the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed, and others who may have knowledge of the alleged incident(s) or circumstances giving rise to the complaint.

Upon a finding that harassment has occurred, an appropriate response shall be fashioned by the appropriate administrator. Building principals addressing violations of this policy by students and the superintendent addressing violations of this policy by employees and/or students should consider the surrounding circumstances, the nature of the behavior, past incidents or continuing patterns of behavior, the relationships between the parties involved and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred.

Steps may be taken by the appropriate administrator to protect the complainant, pupils, teachers, administrators or other personnel participating in the investigation pending completion of an investigation of alleged harassment.

Disciplinary Consequences

Any individual who violates this policy by engaging in conduct defined throughout this policy that directly or indirectly causes intimidation, harassment, or physical harm to another student or employee may be subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to suspension from school.

- The Gilbertsville-Mount Upton CSD Board of Education expects students to conduct themselves in a manner in keeping with their levels of development, maturity, and demonstrated capabilities with a proper regard for the rights and welfare of other students, school staff, volunteers, and contractors.
- The Gilbertsville-Mount CSD Board of Education believes that standards for student behavior must be set cooperatively through interaction among the students, parents and guardians, staff, and community members of the school district, producing an atmosphere that encourages students to grow in self-discipline. The development of this atmosphere requires respect for self and others, as well as for district and community property on the part of students, staff, and community members.
- The Gilbertsville-Mount CSD Board of Education believes that the best discipline is self-imposed, and that it is the responsibility of staff to use disciplinary situations as opportunities for helping students learn to assume responsibility and the consequences of their behavior. Staff members who interact with students shall apply best practices designed to *prevent* discipline problems and encourage students’ abilities to develop self-discipline.
- Since bystander support of harassment or bullying can support these behaviors, the district prohibits both active and passive support for acts of harassment or bullying. The staff should encourage students to support students who walk away from these acts when they see them, constructively attempt to stop them, or report them to the designated authority.
- The Gilbertsville-Mount CSD Board of Education requires its school administrators to develop and implement procedures that ensure *both* the appropriate consequences *and* remedial responses to a student or staff member who commits one or more acts of harassment or bullying. The following factors, at a minimum, shall be given full consideration by school administrators in the development of the procedures for determining appropriate consequences and remedial measures for each act of harassment or bullying.

Factors for Determining Consequences

- ❖ Age, development, and maturity levels of the parties involved
- ❖ Degree of harm
- ❖ Surrounding circumstances
- ❖ Nature and severity of the behavior(s)
- ❖ Incidences of past or continuing pattern(s) of behavior
- ❖ Relationship between the parties involved
- ❖ Context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred

Factors for Determining Remedial Measures

- ❖ *Personal*
- ❖ Life skill competencies
- ❖ Experiential deficiencies
- ❖ Social relationships
- ❖ Strengths
- ❖ Talents
- ❖ Traits
- ❖ Interests
- ❖ Hobbies
- ❖ Extra-curricular activities
- ❖ Classroom participation
- ❖ Academic performance

Factors for Determining Environmental Culture

- ❖ School culture
- ❖ School climate
- ❖ Student-staff relationships and staff behavior toward student
- ❖ General staff management of classrooms or other educational environments
- ❖ Staff ability to prevent and de-escalate difficult or inflammatory situations
- ❖ Social-emotional and behavioral supports
- ❖ Social relationships
- ❖ Community activities
- ❖ Neighborhood culture
- ❖ Family situation

Consequences and appropriate remedial actions for a student or staff member who commits one or more acts of harassment or bullying may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension, in the case of a student, or suspension or termination in the case of an employee, as set forth in the board of education's approved code of student conduct or employee handbook.

Consequences for a student who commits an act of harassment or bullying shall be unique to the individual incident and will vary in method and severity according to the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of problem behaviors and performance, and must be consistent with the board of education's approved code of conduct. Remedial measures shall be designed to: ***correct the problem behavior; prevent another occurrence of the behavior; and protect the target (victim) of the act.*** Effective discipline should employ a school-wide approach to adopt a rubric of bullying offenses and the associated consequences. The consequences and remedial measures may include, but are not limited to, the examples below:

Examples of Consequences

- ❖ Admonishment
- ❖ Temporary removal from the classroom
- ❖ Loss of privileges
- ❖ Classroom or administrative detention
- ❖ Referral to disciplinarian
- ❖ In-school suspension during the school week or the weekend, for students
- ❖ Out-of-school suspension
- ❖ Legal action

Examples of Remedial Measures

- ❖ Personal
- ❖ Framing the aggressive behavior as a failed attempt to solve a real problem or reach a goal. The adult assists the misbehaving student to find a better way to solve the problem or met the goal.
- ❖ Restitution and restoration
- ❖ Transformative conferencing/restorative justice
- ❖ Peer support group
- ❖ Corrective instruction or other relevant learning or service experience
- ❖ Supportive discipline to increase accountability for the bullying offense
- ❖ Supportive interventions, including participation of an Intervention and referral Services team, peer mediation, etc.
- ❖ Behavioral assessment or evaluation, including, but not limited to, a referral to a Child Study Team, as appropriate

The Gilbertsville-Mount CSD Board of Education requires the principal and/or the principal's designee to be responsible for determining whether an alleged act constitutes a violation of this policy. In doing so, the principal and/or the principal's designee shall conduct a prompt, thorough, and complete investigation of each alleged incident. The investigation is to be completed within three school days after the report or complaint is made.

The Gilbertsville-Mount CSD Board of Education prohibits reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of harassment or bullying. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who engages in reprisal or retaliation shall be determined by the administrator after consideration of the nature, severity, and circumstances of the act.

The Gilbertsville-Mount CSD Board of Education prohibits any person from falsely accusing another as a means of harassment or bullying. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person found to have falsely accused another as a means of harassment or bullying may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a *school employee* found to have falsely accused another as a means of harassment or bullying shall be disciplined in accordance with district policies, procedures, and agreements.

The Gilbertsville-Mount CSD Board of Education requires school officials to annually disseminate the policy to all school staff, students in plain language, and parents, along with a statement explaining that it applies to all applicable acts of harassment and bullying that occur on school property, at school-sponsored functions, or on a school bus.

The school district shall incorporate information regarding the policy against harassment or bullying into each school employee training program and handbook.

Retaliation

Retaliation means some type of adversarial or punitive action taken against an individual or individuals as a result of filing a complaint or participating in the complaint process.

No person will suffer retaliation or intimidation for participating in the complaint process. Retaliation against any student seeking assistance at their school, filing a complaint, or participating in the investigative process is grounds for a subsequent retaliation/harassment complaint.

Confidentiality

Gilbertsville-Mount CSD will respect the privacy of the complainant, the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed and the witnesses as much as possible, consistent with our legal obligations to investigate, take appropriate action, and conform to any legal discovery or disclosure obligations.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Dignity for All Students - Chapter 482 of the Laws of 2010

RESOURCES

- ◆ Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, <http://popcenter.org/Problems/problem-bullying.htm>
- ◆ National Education Association, www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullying.html
- ◆ National Resource Center for Safe Schools, www.safetyzone.org
- ◆ Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- ◆ School-wide Prevention of Bullying, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, www.nwrel.org
- ◆ Stop Bullying Now, Health Resources and Services Administration, www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov
- ◆ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, www.ed.gov
- ◆ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, www.cops.usdoj.gov