

	POLICY NO: 5.2
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POLICY: BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS

PURPOSE:

Bullying, including cyber-bullying, is a serious issue that is **not acceptable and will not be tolerated** on or off school property (including virtual), in a Board or school-related activity, or in any other circumstances that will have an impact on the school climate (e.g., off school property). The intent of this policy is to prevent and intervene effectively when bullying occurs amongst students. The approach to responding to bullying is addressed in greater detail in the Student Behaviour and Discipline Policy.

Every student has a right to a safe and nurturing learning environment that is free from exploitation, exclusion, harassment, discrimination, bullying and violence. Bullying adversely affects a student's well-being, ability to learn, attendance, safety, sense of self-worth and may be a violation of their human rights. It adversely affects the school climate, including healthy relationships.

All Board employees have a responsibility to respond to and report behaviour that may lead to or be described as bullying. It is the responsibility of the individuals within a school, as part of a school community, to contribute to a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all students and staff and that promotes the prevention of bullying.

Note: This policy aligns with Ministry of Education PPM 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is committed to creating safe, inclusive and caring school environments through a focus on healthy relationships and development of positive school climates.

HWDSB is committed to:

- A relentless focus on building positive and inclusive cultures in all classrooms and schools (including virtual) so that students feel a sense of belonging and safety within the conditions to achieve their full potential.
- Creating student-centred learning environments where identity, voice and lived experience are affirmed and honoured as an essential part of learning.
- Listening and responding to student voice.
- Fostering relationships that are positive, supportive, caring and respectful.
- Proactively addressing bullying throughout the school year as part of daily practice.
- Protecting students from harm and peer victimization, including bullying.

- Informing and engaging students and parents/guardians/caregivers when incidents of bullying have occurred.
- Investigating and responding to incidents of bullying using a clear and transparent process.
- Working alongside students and families impacted by incidents of bullying and/or bullying-like behaviour.
- Providing support to students impacted by bullying and/or bullying-like behaviour.
- Building trust through our actions – listening, documenting, responding and being accountable at the school and system-level for improvement in student safety and well-being through the monitoring and review of school-based data and communicating outcomes to the community.

INTENDED OUTCOMES:

Through this policy, HWDSB will ensure effective prevention, intervention and response to bullying:

Prevention:

- Student-centred learning environments where identity, voice and lived experience are affirmed and honoured, contributing to belonging, safety and the development of positive, caring and respectful relationships.

Intervention:

- Consistent approaches to addressing bullying.
- Reducing the incidence of bullying.

Response:

- Working alongside students, families and staff impacted by incidents of bullying and/or bullying-like behaviour including considering the most appropriate supports.
- Accountability and transparency in communication and process when an incident of bullying is reported.

RESPONSIBILITY:

Chief Executive Officer

Bullying prevention, intervention and response require all members of the school community to have roles and responsibilities. The Director of Education and members of Executive Council are directly responsible for the operationalizing and monitoring of this policy.

TERMINOLOGY:

Bullying: Aggressive and **typically repeated** behaviour by a student where:

- a) The behaviour is **intended** by the student to have the effect of, or the student 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, 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 student 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.

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

For the purposes of the definition, "bullying" includes by **digital 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.
- c) Communicating material digitally to more than one individual or posting material on website that may be accessed by one or more individuals.

Types of Bullying:

Physical: May include hitting, pushing, slapping, tripping, kicking, shoving, beating up, stealing, damaging another person's property or physical intimidation.

Verbal: May include name-calling, mocking, insults, threats and/or teasing.

Social (or Relational)/Mental/Emotional/Psychological: Demeaning rolling of the eyes, excluding others from the group, gossiping, spreading rumours or images, humiliating others, making hurtful comments verbally or digitally, and/or damaging another person's friendships, treating someone badly based on their appearance.

Digital/Cyber: Includes (see definition of Bullying):

- a) Sending or sharing hateful, insulting, offensive, and/or intimidating digital communication or images via text messages, emails and/or direct messages.
- b) Revealing information considered to be personal, private and sensitive without consent.
- c) Making and/or engaging, and/or participating in fake accounts on social networking sites to

impersonate, humiliate and/or exclude others.

- d) Excluding or disrupting access to a student on purpose from online chat groups, access to accounts and during digital gaming sessions.

Bullying, including cyber-bullying, may intersect with other forms of sexual exploitation including, but not limited to, sextortion and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Traffickers and other sexual predators are increasingly using fake accounts to pose as acquaintances or friends of children and youth to lure, groom and recruit them into engaging in sexual acts or services. Children and youth who experience bullying are at increased risk of being sexually exploited.

Bullying, including cyberbullying, may include intentional aggression, exclusion, saying negative things, telling a joke that may cause harm, treating someone badly or name calling directed to a person or persons because of one or more of the protected areas under the Ontario Human Rights Code (i.e., race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or any other similar factor). In these situations, bullying might also be considered an act of discrimination or harassment based on a protected human rights ground and an act motivated by bias, prejudice or hate requiring a response under section 310 of the Education Act (suspension pending expulsion process).

Intervention: The strategies and approaches used when children and youth experience bullying.

Prevention: The strategies used to promote healthy relationships and working together for a safe, inclusive and accepting school.

Response: The expectations of the school when investigating and applying progressive discipline in situations of bullying. This includes student and family supports.

ACTION REQUIRED:

The Board shall establish, maintain and review a comprehensive Bullying Prevention and Intervention Strategy and a Bullying Prevention Plan (updated every two years) which includes:

Engaging Students, Parents/Guardians/Caregivers and Families

Student engagement is a necessary condition for learning and achievement. Through student voice and engagement, students and adults collaborate to ensure their schools become a place where everyone is safe, inclusive and caring.

Parents/guardians/caregivers play a critical role in the lives of their children and as partners in the education of their children. It is vital that parents/guardians/caregivers are confident in the measures in place to protect students from harm. Parents/guardians/caregivers of students involved in bullying must be notified of the incident and be engaged in discussion of supports.

The Board and/or schools will develop communication and outreach/engagement strategies for students and parents/guardians/caregivers as part of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Strategy that:

- Communicate the policy, including who to contact with questions or concerns, where

information is available and how to report bullying.

- Establish ongoing processes to meaningfully engage as partners in education.
- Support an understanding of roles and responsibilities with respect to policies and practices related to bullying prevention, including cyber-bullying prevention.
- Adjust practices as necessary to address any barriers that might prevent understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- Provide access to appropriate board supports, resources and publications.

Prevention and Awareness Raising

Bullying prevention and awareness raising is a critical responsibility of the Board and schools which includes:

- A school-wide approach with a focus on healthy relationships, equity, inclusion and Indigenous Cultural Safety principles.
- A safe, inclusive and accepting school climate through a school team in every school which includes students and parents/guardians/caregivers.
- Safe supports available in schools (e.g., affinity groups, clubs, chillout spaces) which reflect the identities of students who access them.
- Daily awareness-raising practices, which include expectations for appropriate student behavior and make supports for students more visible and accessible.
- Recognition of Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week on the third Sunday in November of each year.
- Student and staff learning, engagement and leadership related to bullying, particularly its connections to identity, systems of oppression and discrimination.
- Engaging with community partners to support bullying prevention and awareness raising.

Programs, Interventions and Other Supports

All allegations of bullying will be taken seriously. The process of responding and providing support will be transparent and follow the progressive discipline process (see Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour Procedure). Programs, interventions and supports developed will include:

- A clear and accessible process when incidents of bullying occur including appropriate and timely responses and ways to report safely and in a way that will minimize the possibility of reprisal.

- A plan to protect students who have been harmed and a process for parents/guardians/caregivers to follow up if they are not satisfied with the supports.
- Programs, interventions and other supports for students who have experienced bullying behaviour, witnessed incidents of bullying or engaged in bullying behaviour.
- Consequences and learning for students who engage in bullying, based on progressive discipline.
- Students with special education needs are considered in the development of interventions, supports and consequences are consistent with the child's strengths and needs, as well as with the program goals and learning expectations documented in their Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for staff, students, parent/guardian/caregivers and community partners.

Reporting to the Principal

While the principal is responsible for school operations and must respond to all reports of bullying, students and families are encouraged to report bullying concerns to a trusted adult within the school as soon as possible.

HWDSB will maintain a clear and transparent process that allows for:

- Various pathways and timelines to report bullying, particularly for Indigenous, Black, Racilized, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ students and students with disabilities.
- Students and parents to report incidents of bullying to a caring adult or the principal.
- Staff report incidents of bullying to the principal immediately when they witness it or have it reported to them.
- The principal to adjust practices as necessary to address barriers that might prevent students, parents and staff from understanding their reporting roles and responsibilities.
- The principal to respond to reports of bullying in ways that honour and support the unique identities and lived experiences of students and families.
- The principal to provide access to appropriate board resources/publications for students, parents and staff.

Suspensions and Expulsions for Bullying

HWDSB is committed to sharing with students, families and staff a clearly defined process aligned with the Education Act and related Regulations (e.g., Reg. 440/20) for incidents of bullying as defined within this policy. This process will consider a progressive discipline approach, including mitigating factors, interventions, suspension and expulsion. Communication with families will be timely and transparent.

Progressive discipline, as outlined in Ministry of Education PPM 145, is a whole-school approach that utilizes a continuum of prevention and intervention strategies to provide support in teaching appropriate behaviours as well as consequences to address inappropriate behaviour. This approach is meant to shift the focus from one that is solely punitive to one that is both corrective and supportive.

Professional Development for School Staff

To support awareness and understanding by those who have regular contact with students, HWDSB will:

- Establish and provide annual professional development programs to educate educators and other staff about bullying prevention and strategies for promoting a positive school climate.
- Put in place curriculum-linked culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy strategies on bullying prevention and intervention to provide administrators, educators and other school staff the resources and support they need to disrupt and dismantle systemic barriers and to address all forms of bullying.
- Make learning resources available to other adults who have significant contact with students (e.g., parents, volunteers, early learning and childcare, partners).

Communication and Outreach

Communication and outreach are critical components of bullying prevention and intervention. HWDSB will:

- Actively communicate policies and procedures on bullying prevention and intervention to principals, educators, and other school staff, students, parents, Special Education Advisory Committee, Indigenous Education Circle, school councils, Parent Involvement Committee, other Board advisory committees, early learning and childcare partners and school bus operators and drivers.
- Articulate roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community (i.e., principals, educators, other school staff, students, parents).

Monitor and Review

Monitoring and reviewing the policy will occur on a regular basis including:

- Establishing indicators to support monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of the Policy and Procedure, using an anti-racist, anti-oppressive framework.

- Tracking of all incidents of bullying including regularly reviewing all bullying related suspensions and expulsions to identify and mitigate patterns related to identity, discrimination and systems of oppression.
- Establishing approaches in addition to surveys to gather student, parent/guardian/caregiver and staff voice.
- Surveys administered to students, parents/guardians/caregivers and staff every two years.

PROGRESS INDICATORS:

Intended Outcome	Assessment
Student-centred learning environments where identity, voice and lived experience are affirmed and honoured, contributing to belonging, safety and the development of positive, caring and respectful relationships.	School climate surveys or other youth engagement approaches
Consistent approaches to addressing bullying.	Recorded and monitored through data collection of school climate surveys or other youth engagement approaches, parent/guardian/caregiver surveys or other engagement methods.
Reducing the incidence of bullying.	Student Information System data, including suspension and expulsion data.
Accountability and transparency in communication and process when an incident of bullying is reported.	Recorded and monitored through data collection of school climate survey or other youth engagement approaches, parent/guardian/caregiver surveys or other engagement methods, staff voice/engagement

REFERENCES:

Government Documents

Part XIII of the Education Act Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13), 2012
 An Act to Amend the Education Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety), 2007 Policy/Program Memorandum 144 (Nov. 25, 2021)
 Safe Schools: Creating a Positive School Climate
 Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario: Supporting Students with Special Education Needs Through Progressive Discipline K-12
 Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009
 Ontario First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, 2007 English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and Services, 2007 Ontario Regulation 472/07
 Access to School Premises -Trespass Act OCT Standards of Teaching Practice
 Ontario Human Rights Code

Ontario Criminal Code
Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
All applicable curriculum guidelines