



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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Circular Letter C-13

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Mark K. McQuillan, Commissioner of Education

DATE: May 14, 2007

SUBJECT: Racial Profiling, Social Cruelty and Safe Learning Environments

Once again, the nation has been shaken and horrified by a school shooting. Although the Virginia Tech rampage directly affected a university community, the ramifications are significant for all schools and their community members. Immediately after 9-11, Arab individuals were at far greater risk for racial profiling and targeting. This time, the shooter was an Asian student. In both of these cases, it is important to remember that these were *individuals* who carried out violent acts; the ethnic, cultural or religious *group* should not and cannot be held responsible. Anecdotal stories have already surfaced about children in our schools who are being excluded, taunted and threatened merely because they are Asian.

Children learn best in schools that are physically, emotionally and intellectually safe. It is our collective obligation to provide safe learning environments for all students. It is incumbent upon all of us to look for signs that individuals are the targets of peer cruelty. Learning is difficult for students who are pushed, shoved, hit, slapped, teased, taunted, intimidated, threatened, excluded, made fun of, called names, and ridiculed. *No student should have to endure any level of mean-spirited words or deeds* whether it is from racial profiling, or merely because a student is viewed as being different.

Given the heightened awareness about school shootings, it is important to remind our school community members that our schools are the physically safest places children can be; safer than all other community locations. To make sure that everything possible is being done to maintain this very high level of safety, it is also important for every teacher, staff member and administrator to know the warning signs of students who are targeted. All adults in school must work tirelessly to identify students in distress and work to intervene on their behalf. We must all work together to prevent *any* form of peer cruelty. Some of the practical guidelines that will help in this effort are:

- When students or their parents/guardians share information about being targeted, *take the reports seriously.*
- Do not accept the notion that “kids will be kids” and they just “do this.”
- Do not permit *any* kind of name calling, especially directed toward race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.

- Speak vocally and proactively that racism, discrimination and peer cruelty will not be tolerated.
- Pay careful attention to apparent changes in individual students and intervene on their behalf. Be aware of:
  - students who previously have been happy and positive now appear sullen and sad;
  - students who have always had friends and a social network now seem isolated and alone;
  - students who have always participated in classes and engaged academically have “pulled back” and may be slipping with their grades;
  - students who have been attending school regularly are now absent regularly; and
  - students who visit the school nurse or guidance for what would be considered minor or undefined reasons.

In any of these situations, ignore nothing and work to find out what is causing these changes and then remedy them.

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