

Series 2006-2007
Circular Letter: C-5

To: Superintendents of Schools

From: George A. Coleman, Interim Commissioner of Education

Date: September 8, 2006

Subject: Improving School Climate and Anti-Bullying Legislation

On January 8, 2002, Commissioner Theodore Sergi issued 2001-2002 Circular Letter C-14: *Taking Action to Make Schools Free from Discrimination and Harm*, which was based on the attached State Board of Education position statement on “*Creating a Healthy School Environment*.” In this Circular Letter, the Commissioner urged school leaders to take positive action to improve the school learning environment for all students. Over the past few years, school leaders throughout the state have made many positive efforts to make schools emotionally and physically safe for students, including the implementation of character education, anti-bullying programs and positive school climate initiatives.

As part of this continuous effort to improve the school learning environment and thus impact academic learning, the State Department of Education will sponsor regional professional development opportunities that will focus on improving school climate, reviewing the bullying policy legislation, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222d as amended by Public Act 06-115, and revising bullying policies and procedures to satisfy such legislation. There will also be opportunities to learn about “best practices” as well as principles, practices and strategies critical to improving school climate and diminishing bullying behaviors in our schools.

As noted above, the legislation concerning bullying policies in schools has been amended by Public Act 06-115. The statute, as amended:

1. specifies that the policies must require that students be **notified annually** of the process by which they may make anonymous reports of bullying to teachers and school administrators;
2. directs the development of **case-by-case interventions**, such as counseling and discipline, to address repeated incidents of bullying;
3. amends the definition of bullying to include “overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, **harass**, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds, at a school-sponsored activity **or on a school bus**, which acts are repeated against the same student over time;” and

4. provides that bullying policies may **include provisions addressing bullying outside of the school setting** if it has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in school. (Effective July 1, 2006).

Thank you for your efforts to create safe learning environments for all students. Closing the achievement gap and realizing the highest levels of academic achievement for all of Connecticut's children cannot be done without maintaining positive school climates.

For further information, please contact Jo Ann Freiberg, Associate Education Consultant by email at joannfreiberg@ct.gov or by telephone at (860) 807-2041.

GAC:lla
Attachment

Position Statement On Creating a Healthy School Environment

Adopted February 7, 2001

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes that schools are among the most important vehicles, together with families, for providing all children with an effective educational opportunity and supporting the growth and development of every child. Schools must seek to enhance student learning by addressing the intellectual, emotional and physical safety needs of students and staff. All students deserve a quality education that incorporates the teaching of respect for others and self, integrity, citizenship and sense of commitment and obligation to the school and community. These responsibilities are critical components for developing a safe and productive environment in which all students can learn and for contributing to the vitality of modern society. Educators, therefore, are charged not only with providing a sound education in multiple content areas, but also with helping all students understand the necessity of ethical and legal conduct and balancing individual rights with the common good.

All school personnel, board members, parents, students and community agencies share a role in creating a safe and nurturing learning environment for all students and helping to raise a generation of youth who are respectful and responsible not only to themselves, but to others within their school and community.

Schools' Role in Developing a Healthy School Environment

Each school should provide opportunities for students to engage in activities (e.g., clubs, leadership activities, service learning and peer mentoring) that promote a positive school climate and benefit the greater community.

- Each school must ensure that the physical environment is healthy, safe and conducive to learning.
- Each school must appropriately monitor and supervise all areas of the school (e.g., classrooms, hallways and stairwells, cafeterias, playgrounds, shop areas, lavatories and locker rooms) to ensure the safety of all students at all times.
- All members of the school community must identify acts of name-calling, teasing, bullying, exclusion and harassment and take immediate action to intervene in those situations that are detrimental to students and the learning environment.
- Each school must work with and support families to identify and address their critical role to assist in providing a safe and productive learning environment.
- Each school must ensure that all students share a caring relationship with at least one adult in the school, in which regular, ongoing interactions occur.
- Each adult must send a clear and consistent message to students that each has a duty to behave responsibly and respectfully toward others.
- Each adult must model the positive behaviors they hope to instill in their students.
- All school personnel must consistently enforce rules and provide opportunities to develop and foster ethical reasoning, self-control and a generalized respect for others.
- Academic subjects should be used as vehicles for examining and reflecting upon ethical issues.
- Conflict resolution skills should be taught to provide students with the capacity and commitment to solve conflicts in fair, nonviolent ways.

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Local Boards' Role in Developing a Healthy School Environment

Local boards of education must be vigilant in developing policies and procedures that assist teachers and administrators in creating a safe learning environment that addresses every child's needs, and that embody the belief that schools are designed to educate all young people.

- Boards of education must value school climate as a critical component for effective learning.
- Boards of education must review all disciplinary policies to ensure that they encourage children to stay in school rather than excluding them from school.
- Boards of education must provide appropriate resources for a broad array of after-school activities to maximize the number of students involved in constructive, adult-supervised activities.
- Boards of education must ensure compliance with all health and safety standards pertaining to the school building and outdoor facilities so that every student has the maximum opportunity to learn in a healthy, safe school environment.

Families' Role in Developing a Healthy School Environment

Families are a child's first and most important teacher; therefore, family involvement is crucial in developing a child's sense of personal responsibility to others. Schools must work with families to instill a sense of responsibility and empathy in every young person.

- Families must model and integrate ethical behavior into the everyday lives of their children.
- Families must provide consistent care and model pro-social behaviors, set strong examples and correct inappropriate actions (e.g., resolving conflicts peacefully, demonstrating tolerance and respect for individual differences, and encouraging lifelong learning).
- Families must become involved in school, community and state events and take an interest in national and world events.

Students' Role in Developing a Healthy School Environment

Students have the responsibility to observe the laws of the nation and state, the policies and procedures of the district, and the rules of the school and classroom.

- Students must take advantage of the teaching that is provided them.
- Students must appreciate differences and respect all other persons.
- Students must contribute to a safe, productive school climate.
- Students must serve as positive role models to other students and in their communities.