

Model School-Based Anti-Bullying Policy

School anti-bullying policies that clearly describe rules and expectations can help prevent bullying and encourage earlier reporting of bullying incidents by teachers, staff, and students.

This document presents a comprehensive model policy to address school-based bullying, including key components that can help protect students with overweight or obesity who are at heightened risk for bullying in the school setting.



Key Components of Anti-Bullying Policy

1

Prohibition against Bullying and Harassment

An anti-bullying policy should include a statement that acknowledges the harmful impact of bullying and harassment on students' health and well-being, as well as the broader school climate. This statement should include language indicating that the school explicitly prohibits such forms of conduct.

Example:

(Your school name) is committed to ensuring all students the opportunity and support to learn within a safe and respectful school environment. Bullying and harassment have harmful physical, emotional, social, and academic consequences for victims, bystanders, and bullies, and disrupts students' learning and development process. Thus, in (your school name), bullying and harassment is prohibited, and related incidents will be consistently addressed.

2

Definition of Bullying¹

Providing a clear definition of bullying can help teachers, students, staff, and parents recognize specific behaviors that require intervention when youth are bullied in school.

Example:

*"Bullying" means unwanted, aggressive behavior among students that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying behaviors may be physical (e.g., hitting or spitting), verbal (e.g., teasing or name-calling), or social (e.g., exclusion from activities or spreading of false rumors), and is intentional and repetitive in nature. Bullying can occur based on students' specific characteristics such as, but not limited to, gender, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or **body weight**.*



¹US Department of Health & Human Services. (2014). What is Bullying. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/index.html>. Accessed February 20, 2015.

3

Definition of Harassment³

Although there is no federal law prohibiting school-based bullying, the Office for Civil Rights and the Department of Justice have stated that bullying may be considered discriminatory harassment when it is based on particular characteristics such as race, color, national origin, sex, or disability. In such cases, students are protected by state and federal civil rights laws and schools are required to take action.

Example:

*“Harassment” means written, verbal, or physical conduct that significantly interferes with a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from programs, activities, or opportunities offered by the school. The conduct is severe, persistent or pervasive, and may be based on students’ specific characteristics such as, but not limited to, race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or **body weight**.*

Learn more about schools’ obligation to address harassment through [this guidance letter](#) released by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights in 2010.



Research Highlight

In a national study, over 1000 adults were asked whether they would support different types of state anti-bullying laws according to what kinds of characteristics were enumerated in the law, such as race, sexual orientation, and body weight.²

Findings show that,

About **2 of 3** parents and adults support

Anti-bullying state laws that *enumerate* distinguishing characteristics such as race, sexual orientation, disability, and gender.

Anti-bullying state laws that **include characteristics of physical appearance or body weight** in addition to other typically specified characteristics.

4 Scope

The statement of scope identifies who the policy applies to, and specifies that bullying occurring on or around school property is prohibited, as is cyberbullying that disrupts the school environment.

Example:

This policy applies to the entire school community including teachers, staff, administrators, students, and volunteers. This policy pertains to behaviors occurring in school, on school property, at school-sponsored activities, at functions supervised by school personnel, on school buses or other school-owned or leased vehicles, and during electronic communication occurring on- or off-campus, and on school networks, forums, and mailing lists.

5 Reporting and Investigation of Bullying

This statement includes clear procedures for students, teachers, staff, and parents to report incidents of bullying, and designates specific school personnel(s) to promptly investigate and respond to such reports. This statement may include information about anonymous reporting, protection from retaliation, and notification of the families of students who are involved in the incident.

Example:

Students, teachers, school staff, and parents who are involved in, observe, or become aware of bullying behavior are encouraged to report the incident to the principal (or another designated school staff). Reports may be made verbally, in writing, or electronically. Reports may be filed anonymously and will be investigated adhering to the same procedure as all other reports. The designated individual will review and thoroughly investigate all allegations of bullying. Proper disciplinary action will follow immediately.

As written records are particularly helpful in resolving bullying incidents, schools might consider using standardized forms for reporting or filing complaints, and documenting the investigation process, disciplinary actions, and support and counseling service referrals.

²Puhl RM, Luedicke J, King KM. Public attitudes about different types of anti-bullying laws: Results from a national survey. *J Public Health Policy*. 2015;36(1):95-109.

³US Department of Health & Human Services. (2014). Federal Laws. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/federal/>. Accessed March 2, 2015.

6

Discipline and Counseling

Disciplinary actions should match the severity of the bullying incident, and be age-appropriate, consistent, and fair. Additionally, providing support and counseling services to students may protect victims from psychological consequences and discourage future bullying behaviors from perpetrators.

Example:

Disciplinary actions for bullying may include, but are not limited to: warnings, loss of opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, school social events, community service, suspension, or school transfer. If appropriate, the school may recommend that counseling, support services, intervention services, and other mental health care options be provided to victims and/or perpetrators.

Additional Resources:

- 1) Enumeration of Weight in Anti-Bullying Policies handout
- 2) GLSEN: The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is a national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Although the following model policies address sexual orientation (rather than body weight), the recommendations and guidelines for developing enumerated anti-bullying policies can be applied for protecting students of higher weight.
 - [Model School Anti-Bullying & Harassment Policy](#)
 - [Model District Anti-Bullying & Harassment Policy](#)
 - [Model State Anti-Bullying & Harassment Legislation](#)
- 3) [Prevention at School \(stopbullying.gov\)](#) provides resources for parent and school staff advocates to prevent bullying including tips on how to assess bullying in your school, engaging parents and youth, and building a safe environment.

Importance of Enumerating Body Weight in Anti-Bullying Policies

- 1) Weight-based bullying is one of the *most frequent* forms of bullying at school. Despite reports from students, teachers, and parents that weight-based bullying is a prevalent problem, it is often overlooked or absent in anti-bullying policies.
- 2) Adding “body weight” to anti-bullying policies encourages protection of students with overweight or obesity who are among the most vulnerable to bullying and teasing, but least likely to be protected by generic anti-bullying policies in school.
- 3) Including body weight as a characteristic that places students at risk for bullying helps to explicitly convey that bullying and teasing based on body weight is as legitimate as other reasons for bullying and will not be tolerated.
- 4) Including body weight in anti-bullying policies provides clear language for school staff to enforce school policies and for both students and teachers to report bullying incidents targeting students with overweight or obesity.

The examples presented above can help parents, teachers, or other student advocates begin drafting (or improving) anti-bullying policies in schools that enumerate specific characteristics including body weight. In tailoring the policy to the specific needs of your school, be sure to consider the language in existing policies, state legislative requirements, and the potential impact in the school and community.

