

Frequently Asked Questions

Bullying, Physical Violence and Safety Policies

Q. What is the extent of District's responsibility to protect students from bullying and violent behavior?

A. The District is directly responsible for student safety while the student is on school property, on a bus, or at a designated school bus stop. The District is also responsible if a student is attending a school-sponsored event, such as an athletic contest, concert or field trip. Once a student leaves these specific areas, the District is no longer legally responsible for the student's safety. The District may become involved in incidents that fall outside its area of responsibility, and stands ready to provide counseling and assistance with conflict resolution to its students as needed.

Q. There may be situations in which a District employee has reason to believe that bullying and/or violent behavior may occur against a particular student outside of school hours. What steps are taken in these situations?

A. The specific response will depend on the circumstances, but the most likely course of action would be for the District to contact the student's parent or guardian and arrange for the student to be sent home with that person. The school's police liaison may also be notified.

Q. If an altercation between two students occurs during the school day, are teachers, lunch supervisors, bus drivers, etc. alerted to the possibility of a continuation (and escalation) of the problem?

A. If the initial altercation is serious enough to involve intervention by building administration, steps will be taken to ensure

that the problem does not escalate. Bus drivers frequently communicate to building administrators regarding potential trouble based on what they observe.

Q. What is the responsibility of a bus driver when he or she becomes aware of bullying or potentially violent behavior on the bus?

A. The first priority for drivers is the safe operation of a large, crowded motor vehicle. If a disturbance occurs while the bus is in motion, the driver should stop the bus (as soon as safety permits), and quiet the disturbance. If the driver deems it appropriate, the bus will be returned to the school where building administration will deal with the altercation. The driver is also empowered to assign seating to separate individuals involved in an altercation.

Q. If a bus driver observes a fight at a bus stop, or believes that a fight is imminent, what procedures should he or she follow?

A. The driver should call the dispatcher immediately and request police assistance. Under no circumstances should a driver leave the bus while students are still aboard.

Q. Can the District initiate disciplinary action against students for acts of bullying or violence committed after school hours and off school property?

A. The District's disciplinary policy applies only to acts that occur on school property (including buses), at designated bus stops, and at school-sponsored events. The District does not have authority to discipline for incidents which occur off school property and which do not occur at school events.

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Q. Does the District have a mechanism for tracking the number of fights and similar behavior?

A. Yes, the District is required to file incident reports with the State. During the 2008-2009 school year, 79 high school students and 58 middle school students were suspended for fighting. (The actual number of fights is less than half these numbers, depending on how many students were involved). This works out to about one fight every three weeks for each of the high schools and one fight every six weeks for each of the middle schools. Although any level of student violence is unacceptable, these numbers are relatively low in comparison to other districts.

Q. Is any attempt made to identify patterns of violent behavior based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.?

A. All suspensions are being reviewed for appropriateness and consistency. Based on these reviews, it appears that most (if not all) the incidents are the result of personal antagonism between students, and there has been no finding that any specific group is being targeted throughout the District.

Q. Under what circumstances are bus privileges revoked?

A. Bus riding is considered a privilege, not a right (except for special education students for whom there is a State mandate to provide transportation) and bus privileges can be taken away, even when no other disciplinary measures are taken against a student. Bus privileges can be revoked for any form of disorderly behavior that occurs on the bus. The driver files a report with the building

principal who makes the decision to revoke privileges. Severity of the penalty can range from one day to the entire school year.

Q. When a serious incident (such as an act of violence) occurs, how is this communicated to the general school community?

A. Generally, a fight between two students is not the occasion for communication with the entire school community. These matters are handled between school administration, the students involved, and their parents. If an incident is significant enough to raise concerns for the entire school community (e.g. there was a weapon, serious injury occurred, or a large number of students were involved) the building administrator will communicate with the teachers, students and parents, typically by e-mail or letter. The communication will provide a brief description of the incident, and will indicate that appropriate disciplinary action has been taken (no specifics are given for reasons of confidentiality). The communication will indicate what measures, if any, are being taken to protect the student population. Normally, these communications are sent only to parents of the school where the incident occurred. Only in extraordinary instances will a communication be sent to all district parents.

We take pride in our continuous effort to be pro-active in our approach and remain student-focused to ensure a school climate that nurtures learning and assures the safety and welfare of all students and staff.

As we strive to provide the very best education for all of our students, we must work together to address the challenges we face and to embrace opportunities to ensure that each student is prepared academically, socially and emotionally.