

NORTH PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS BULLYING & HARASSMENT POLICY	Approved: 10/24/2012 Updated: 4/29/2026

INTRODUCTION

This **Statewide Bullying Policy** is promulgated pursuant to the authority set forth in §16-21-34 of the General Laws of Rhode Island. Known as the Safe School Act, the statute recognizes that the bullying of a student creates a climate of fear and disrespect that can seriously impair the student's health and negatively affect learning. Bullying undermines the safe learning environment that students need to achieve their full potential. The purpose of the Policy is to ensure a consistent and unified statewide approach to the prohibition of bullying at school.

Nothing in this policy prohibits North Providence Public Schools from complying with federal antidiscrimination laws

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1. DEFINITIONS

BULLYING means the use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression **-including AI-generated or synthetic media** - or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof directed at a student that:

- a) Causes physical or emotional harm to the student or damage to the student's property;
- b) Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to himself/herself/them or of damage to his/her/their property;
- c) Creates an intimidating, threatening, hostile, or abusive educational environment for the student;
- d) Infringes on the rights of the student to participate in school activities; or
- e) Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

If the electronic expression or AI-generated media is created off-campus and without the use of District technology, it shall fall under this policy only if it creates a material and substantial disruption to the educational environment or the daily operations of the school.

The expression, physical act or gesture may include, but is not limited to, an incident or incidents that may be reasonably perceived as being motivated by characteristics such as:

Race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or mental, physical, or sensory disability, intellectual ability or by any other distinguishing characteristic.

Bullying most often occurs as repeated behavior and often is not a single incident between the bullying/cyber-bullying offender(s) and the bullying victim(s).

CYBER-BULLYING means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, texting or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications.

Forms of cyber-bullying may include but are not limited to:

- a) The creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;
- b) The knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages;
- c) The distribution by electronic means of communication to more than one person or the posting of materials on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the creation, impersonation, or distribution results in any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (a) to (e) of the definition of bullying.
- d) Synthetic Media (Deepfakes): The creation, distribution, or posting of AI-generated images, videos, or audio recordings that appear to be authentic

representations of a student or staff member but are fabricated, used for harassment or impersonation; or

- e) AI-Enabled Impersonation: Utilizing generative AI tools to mimic the writing style or voice of another individual to send messages or post content that causes emotional harm.

AT SCHOOL means:

- a) on school premises,
- b) at any school-sponsored activity or event whether or not it is held on school premises,
- c) on a school-transportation vehicle,
- d) at an official school bus stop,
- e) using property or equipment provided by the school, or
- f) acts which create a material and substantial disruption of the education process or the orderly operation of the school.

AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

Software applications that utilize artificial intelligence to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as understanding natural language (Generative AI) or recognizing patterns.

2. SCHOOL CLIMATE

Bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation against any person associated with a report of bullying or the investigation thereof is prohibited in all schools that are approved for the purpose of the compulsory attendance statute (§§16-19-1 and 16-19-2). School staff shall take all reasonable measures to prevent bullying at school. Such measures may include professional development and prevention activities, parental workshops, and student assemblies among other strategies. School faculty, administration and staff, at all times, will model courteous behavior to each other, to students, and to school visitors. Abusive or humiliating language or demeanor will not be accepted. Additionally, students and their families are expected to exhibit courteous behavior to all members of the learning community in school and at school sponsored events.

3. POLICY OVERSIGHT and RESPONSIBILITY

The school principal, director, or head of school shall be responsible for the implementation and oversight of this bullying policy.

The school principal, director, or head of school shall provide the superintendent, school committee and/or school governing board with a summary report of incidents, responses, and any other bullying-related issues at least twice annually.

For public schools, the prevention of bullying shall be part of the school district strategic plan (§ 16-7.1-2(e)) and school safety plan (§16-21-24).

4. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

4.1 General Notification

The school principal, director or head of school shall ensure that students, staff, volunteers, and parents/legal guardians are provided information regarding this Policy. This information shall include methods of discouraging and preventing this type of behavior, the procedure to file a complaint, and the disciplinary action that may be taken against those who commit acts in violation of this policy.

This policy shall be:

- a) Distributed annually to students, staff, volunteers, and parents/legal guardians
- b) Included in student codes of conduct, disciplinary policies, and student handbooks
- c) A prominently posted link on the home page of the school /district website

4.2 Notice of AI-Enabled Harassment

In alignment with state guidance on the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence, the district shall provide explicit notice regarding the intersection of AI and cyberbullying. This information, made available on the district website and referenced in the student handbook, shall include:

- a) **Synthetic Content Disclosure:** Notice that "electronic expression" includes the unauthorized creation or distribution of AI-generated images, audio, or video (Deepfakes) intended to harass or impersonate others.
- b) **Awareness of Heightened Risk:** Education for students and families on the "heightened risk" posed by AI tools which make it easier to create "fake information with the potential for significant harm".
- c) **Academic and Behavioral Expectations:** Clear communication that students are responsible for all digital content generated under their accounts, including synthetic media that causes a material disruption to the school environment.

4.3. Mandatory Distribution Channels

This policy, including the specific notices regarding AI and synthetic media, shall be:

- a) Distributed annually to students, staff, volunteers, and parents/legal guardians.
- b) Included in student codes of conduct, disciplinary policies, and student handbooks.
- c) A prominently posted link on the home page of the school/district website.

5. REPORTING

The school principal, director or head of school shall establish, and prominently publicize to students, staff, volunteers, and parents/guardians, how a report of bullying may be filed and how this report will be acted upon.

[Bullying and/or Cyberbullying Report Form](#)

The victim of bullying, anyone who witnesses an incidence of bullying, and anyone who has credible information that an act of bullying has taken place may file a report of bullying.

Any student or staff member who believes he/she/they is/are being bullied should immediately report such circumstances to an appropriate staff member, teacher or administrator.

Parents/Guardians of the victim of bullying and parents/ guardians of the alleged perpetrator of the bullying shall be notified within twenty-four (24) hours of the incident report. When there is a reasonable suspicion that a child is either a bully or a victim of bullying, the parents/guardians of the child will be notified immediately by the principal, director or head of school.

Responsibility of Staff: School staff, including volunteers, who observe an act of bullying or who have reasonable grounds to believe that bullying is taking place must report the bullying to school authorities. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

Responsibility of Students: Students who observe an act of bullying or who have reasonable grounds to believe that bullying is taking place must report the bullying to school authorities. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. The victim of bullying, however, shall not be subject to discipline for failing to report the bullying. Student reports of bullying or retaliation may be made anonymously, provided, however, that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Prohibition against Retaliation: Retaliation or threats of retaliation in any form designed to intimidate the victim of bullying, those who are witnesses to bullying, or those investigating an incident of bullying shall not be tolerated. Retaliation or threat of retaliation will result in the imposition of discipline in accordance with the school behavior code.

False Reporting/Accusations: A school employee, school volunteer or student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be disciplined in accordance with the school behavior code.

Reports in Good Faith: A school employee, school volunteer, student, parent/ legal guardian, or caregiver who promptly reports, in good faith, an act of bullying to the appropriate school

official designated in the school's policy shall be immune from a cause of action for damages arising from reporting bullying.

6. INVESTIGATION/RESPONSE

6.1. General Investigation Protocol The school principal, director or head of school shall promptly investigate all allegations of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. If the allegation is found to be credible, appropriate disciplinary actions, subject to applicable due process requirements, will be imposed.

6.2. AI-Generated Evidence and Technical Literacy When an investigation involves electronic expression, administrators must evaluate the authenticity of the evidence to account for the potential for significant harm from AI-generated fake information.

- a) **Authentication Standards:** Administrators shall take reasonable steps to verify if digital evidence (images, audio, or text) has been altered or created using generative AI tools.
- b) **Administrative Training:** Building administrators shall receive training to recognize the markers of synthetic media and evaluate AI-generated evidence to ensure fair judgment and avoid "arbitrary and capricious" findings.

6.3. Verified Human Oversight To mitigate the risks of emerging and not yet fully understood technology, human judgment must remain the central authority in all bullying determinations.

- a) **Mandatory Review:** No disciplinary action shall be taken based solely on the output of an AI detection tool or automated software.
- b) **Contextual Evaluation:** Investigators must consider the intent and the material and substantial disruption caused to the school environment, regardless of whether the content was human or AI-authored.

6.4. Clinical Assessment The investigation will include an assessment by the school psychologist and/or social worker of what effect the bullying, harassment or intimidation - including harm from synthetic media - has had on the victim. A student who engages in continuous and/or serious acts of bullying will also be referred to the school psychologist and/or social worker.

6.5. Police Notification Immediate notification of the local law enforcement agency will be made when circumstances warrant the pursuit of criminal charges against the perpetrator.

6.6. Protection If a student is the victim of serious or persistent bullying:

- a) The school principal, director or head of school will intervene immediately to provide the student with a safe educational environment.

- b) The interventions will be developed, if possible, with input from the student, his/her/their parent/guardian, and staff.
- c) The parents/guardians of a victim shall also be notified of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation.

7. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

7.1. Authority and Intent The disciplinary actions for violations of the bullying policy shall be determined by the school/district appropriate authority. Disciplinary actions for violations of the bullying policy shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior, ensuring the severity of the disciplinary action shall be aligned to the severity of the bullying behavior.

7.2. AI-Related Disciplinary Considerations When bullying involves the use of Artificial Intelligence or synthetic media, the district shall consider the following factors in determining discipline:

- a) **Content Impact:** The degree to which the AI-generated content (e.g., deepfakes or impersonations) caused a "material and substantial disruption" to the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.
- b) **Intent and Scope:** Whether the AI was used to intentionally bypass safety protocols or to amplify harassment through automated means.
- c) **Mandatory Remediation:** In cases of AI misuse, disciplinary action should include a mandatory "AI Literacy" restorative component to ensure the student understands the legal and ethical implications of synthetic media.

7.3. Range of Disciplinary Actions The range of disciplinary actions that may be taken against a perpetrator for bullying, cyberbullying - including AI-enabled infractions - or retaliation shall include, but not be limited to:

- a) Admonitions and warnings
- b) Parental/ Guardian notification and meetings
- c) Detention
- d) In-school suspension
- e) Loss of school-provided transportation or loss of student parking pass
- f) Loss of the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities
- g) Loss of the opportunity to participate in school social activities
- h) Loss of the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises or middle school promotional activities
- i) Police contact
- j) School suspension: No student shall be suspended from school unless it is deemed to be a necessary consequence of the violation of this Policy.

8. SOCIAL SERVICES/COUNSELING

Referral to appropriate counseling and/or social services currently being offered by schools or communities shall be provided for bullying victims, perpetrators and appropriate family members of said students.

9. SOCIAL NETWORKING

Students shall be prohibited from accessing social networking sites in school, except for educational or instructional purposes and with the prior approval from school administration.

10. OTHER REDRESS

This section does not prevent a victim of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation from seeking redress under any other available law, either civil or criminal. This section does not create or alter any tort liability.

11. ADOPTION OF POLICY

The North Providence School Committee hereby adopts this policy, in its entirety effective immediately.

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