Learning, Teaching and Leading in a Healthy School Community

The systemic efforts of the Suffield Public Schools to maintain safe, supportive, and engaging school learning environments for all children.

Building a Positive School Climate

Information for parents regarding Suffield Public School's response to Connecticut General Statute Section 10-222d – *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws*

The Law

The new legislation, which took effect on July 1, 2011, effectively shifts the focus of the "bullying law" from simply implementing consequences for mean behavior to pro-actively building a positive school climate. In addition, it expands the definition of "bullying," as well as the scope of the school's response to it.

Definition

The new legislation defines bullying as:

"The repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic communication, such as cyber bullying, or a physical act or gesture directed at another student attending school in that same school district that:

- *Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student's property;*
- *Places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his property;*
- *Creates a hostile environment (a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the condition of the school climate) at school for such student;*
- *Infringes on the rights of such student at school;*
- *Substantially disrupts the education process or orderly operation of a school."*

Expanded School Role

Schools may now respond to many forms of mean behavior or bullying, including off-campus behavior and cyber-bullying if such behavior:

- creates a hostile school environment for the victim;
- infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
- substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.
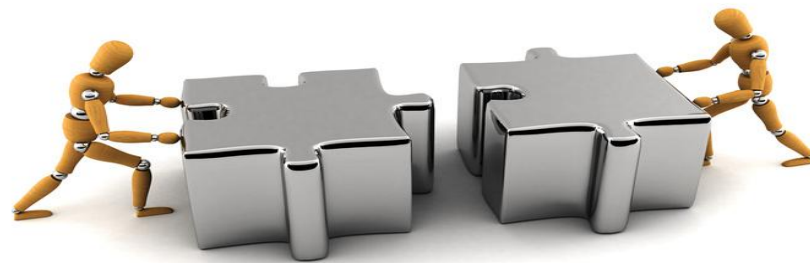
The New Law Specifies Requirements All Schools and Our Employees Must Follow, Including:

- Defined timelines for responding to a complaint of bullying;
- Identifying personnel to address the issue, including a "Safe School Climate Specialist";
- Forming a committee, including parent participation, to develop and foster a safe school climate;
- Allowing for anonymous reporting of bullying;
- Developing a Safe School Climate Plan

Suffield Public Schools Welcomes This New Focus

- It aligns with our concentrated efforts and systemic work to date to build safe and welcoming learning environments for all our children.

- In this presentation, we highlight our efforts to date – which reflect our shared philosophy that children learn best when they feel safe, welcomed, and heard.

Efforts to Date in Our Schools Include:

Spaulding Elementary School

Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate

- Staff training in "Responsive Classroom"
- C.A.R.E.S. program to promote a school culture where everyone is caring, accepting, responsible, empathetic and has self control
- School-wide Behavioral Expectations using Common Language
- Staff training on Positive Behavioral Support Process
- Grade level Mini-team structure
- Classroom-based Social Skills lessons
- Student Support Programs: Friendship Club, Job Corps, BEAMS
- School-wide community service projects
- School Resource Officer
- Utilization of School-Family Liaison
- PALS (Promoting Adjustment and Learning Skills) program
- Increase of supervision at recess
- Training of all faculty and staff in the new legislation
- Faculty training by JoAnn Freiberg, expert in the field

New Initiatives to Improve School Climate

- Creation of School Climate Committee representing administration, certified and non-certified staff, parents and community members
- Assignment of School Climate Coordinator
- Ongoing professional development on Positive Behavior Supports and Safe School Climate
- Professional development in Responsive Classroom
- Ongoing review and revision of bullying reporting and documentation procedures to align with new state legislation

McAlister Intermediate School

Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate

- Character education and school behavior code based on the Six Pillars of Character
- Daily morning meetings using Responsive Classroom (Grades 3-4)
- Student-led, daily, morning announcements with a closing "Thought of the Day"
- Grade Five Student Leadership Training
- Creation of Student Council
- Job Corps opportunities
- Student-led, school-wide service projects
- Assignment of School-Family Liaison
- PALS (Promoting Adjustment and Learning Skills) program
- Development and use of student problem solving form with focus on teaching problem solving strategies
- School-wide student survey on climate/bullying at MIS
- Development of school-wide bullying behavior documentation form and bullying behavior documentation flow chart
- Training of all faculty and staff in the new legislation
- Increase of supervision at recess
- Annual, grade-level PowerPoint presentations from administration on our collective power to stop bullying behavior
- Involvement, cooperation and partnership with law enforcement through our School Resource Officer

New Initiatives to Improve School Climate

- Creation of School Climate Committee representing administration, certified and non-certified staff, parents and community members
- Assignment of School Climate Coordinator
- Student Council review and revision of school behavior code and plan to increase awareness
- Ongoing professional development on Positive Behavior Supports and Safe School Climate
- Professional development in Responsive Classroom (Grade 5)
- Ongoing review and revision of bullying reporting and documentation procedures to align with new state legislation

Suffield Middle School

Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate

- Staff training in "Don't Laugh at Me"
- Partnership with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)
- ADL staff training
- ADL trained "Student Ambassadors"
- Student Advisory Program
- Annual assembly programs and student surveys
- Positive School Climate Student Committee
- Connecticut Association of Schools award for positive school climate
- Middle School team structure
- Student Council activities and social events
- Student clubs, activities, and opportunities
- Student Job Corps
- Training of all faculty and staff in the new legislation
- Weekly Student Assistance Team meetings
- Transition services from our Family Liaison
- Involvement, cooperation and partnership with law enforcement through our School Resource Officer

New Initiatives to Improve School Climate

- Formation of a School Climate Task Force with student and parent representation
- Assignment of a School Climate Coordinator
- Development of a Professional Training Plan
- Implementation of an anonymous reporting system
- Providing assembly programs, class meeting and advisory activities targeting "mean behaviors"

Suffield High School

Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate

- Social/Civic expectations that all students must meet
- Creation of "A-Team" Student Advisory
- Our Advisor/Advisee program for all students
- Weekly Student Assistant Model meetings
- Assignment of School-Family Liaison
- Bridges leadership training – sponsored by the NCCJ
- School-Wide Names Assembly program – sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League in 2009-2010
- Rachel's Challenge Assembly program in 2010-2011
- Friends of Rachel club and pledge – ongoing
- Wildcat Pledge – signed by all incoming freshmen each year at freshman orientation
- Faculty training by Bill Howe and JoAnn Freiberg, experts in the field, in 2007-08, 2009-10, and 2010-11
- Training of all faculty and staff in the new legislation
- Common Ground training program offered each year from 2009-2010 to present
- Involvement, cooperation and partnership with law enforcement through our School Resource Officer

New Initiatives to Improve School Climate

- Creation of School Climate Committee representing administration, certified and non-certified staff, parents and community members
- Assignment of School Climate Coordinator
- Student Council and A-Team review and revision of school behavior code and plan to increase awareness
- Ongoing professional development on Safe School Climate
- Ongoing review and revision of bullying reporting and documentation procedures to align with new state legislation
- "Dirt" assembly program scheduled for October 2011 which addresses positive decision-making and other issues relevant for teens
- Cyber Bullying advisory assembly scheduled for November 2011 which addresses how to safely use the internet and manage social media

Helpful Information for Parents, Guardians and Friends

Why Don't Other Kids Stop Mean Behavior?

- Fear retaliation at a later time;

- Believe that adults will not be of help and may intervene and make the situation worse;

- Experience social pressure from their peer group not to intervene;

- Blame the victim;

- Believe that telling an adult about bullying is a form of "tattling" or "ratting;"

- Benefit in some way from the victimization of a student (e.g., gain a possession or social status or feel empowered)

- Fear getting caught in the middle and being bullied, as well.

Recommendations for Parents

- Communicate regularly with your child and their friends.

- Talk specifically about bullying and the consequence of mean behaviors.

- Monitor your child's use of the internet.

- Know all your child's digital accounts and passwords.

- Model and help reinforce digital citizenship and responsibility.

What to Look for (Bully)...

- Becomes violent with others.
- Gets into physical or verbal fights with others.
- Gets sent to the principal's office or detention a lot.
- Has extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained.
- Is quick to blame others.
- Will not accept responsibility for their actions.
- Has friends who are mean toward others.
- Needs to win or be best at everything.

What to Look for (Victim) . . .

Does your child-

- Have many school absences?
- Show increased anxiety over school attendance?
- Show withdrawal from peers or change in friendships?
- Show a decline in school performance?
- Avoid school activities and lack involvement?
- Have missing belongings or report losing them?
- Have frequent physical complaints?
- Have a change in eating or sleeping habits?
- Comes home from school unhappy or angry?
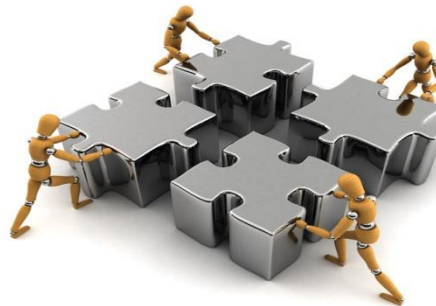
What to Do . . .

Please notify the school guidance counselor or administration if you suspect your child is experiencing bullying, harassment or mean behaviors.

The Safe School Climate Specialist in each school is:

- Spaulding - Angie Roman
- McAlister –Jack Ferraro
- Suffield Middle School –Ida Hickerson
- Suffield High School –Donna Hayward
- District-Wide School Climate Coordinator- Dianna Kolodziey

Our Commitment

Suffield Public School administration and staff are committed to continuing our efforts to eradicate mean behavior and bullying in all forms, as we strive to create a learning community that values respect and responsibility for all. As always, we will work in partnership with parents, our school resource officer and community members in reinforcing this message and communicating our collective intolerance for "mean behavior."

Online Resources for Parents

- **Officer Terri Antrim**, School Resource Officer: Suffield Public Schools
  - **tantrum@sps.suffield.org**

- **BullyingUK**
  - Covering a range of advice for parents including contacting the school and your rights
    - http://www.bullying.co.uk/

- **Committee for Children**
  - A nonprofit working globally to prevent bullying, violence, and child abuse
    - http://www.cfchildren.org/index.cfm

- **Education.com**
  - Bullying at school and online. Bullying affects ALL of our children-those who bully, those who are victimized, and those who are witnesses or assistants to interpersonal violence. We can and must reduce this age-old problem…
    - http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/

- **KidsHealth**
  - KidsHealth is the #1 most-visited website for children's health and development.
    - http://kidshealth.org/parent/

- **National Association of School Psychologist:** Helping children achieve their best. In school. At home. In life.
  - Bullies and Victims: Information for Parents
    - http://www.nasponline.org/

- **National PTA**: every child. one voice
  - By working together, educators, parents, concerned citizens, business leaders, advocates, and community members can support the implementation of bullying prevention programs, reinforce bullying prevention messages, and advocate for bullying policies to be implemented...
    - http://www.pta.org/bullying.asp

- **STOPBULLYING.gov**
  - Parents can play a key role in preventing and stopping bullying. But first they have to know if their children bully or are bullied by others...
    - http://www.stopbullying.gov/