



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Commissioner

Rhode Island Safe Schools Act - Statewide Bullying Policy

Effective June 30, 2012

The [Statewide Bullying Policy](#), known as the Safe Schools Act, was promulgated pursuant to the authority set forth in §16-21-34 of the General Laws of Rhode Island. **The purpose of the Policy is to ensure a consistent and unified statewide approach to the prohibition of bullying at school.**

Summary of the new RI Statewide Bullying Policy:

- Applies to all schools approved by the RI Department of Education (school districts, charter schools, career and technical schools, approved private day or residential schools and collaborative schools).
- Definition and descriptions expanded
 - Bullying expanded to include cyber-bullying.
 - Enumeration of classes (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).
 - Language aligned with US Department of Justice definition
 - Expanded definition of “at school.”
- School Climate: Provides measures that schools have to take to prevent bullying.
 - May include professional development, prevention activities, parental workshops, student assemblies.
 - Staff, students, and families model courteous behavior at school and school sponsored events.
- Clear policy guidelines on oversight and responsibility
 - The school principal, director, or head of school shall be responsible for the implementation and oversight of this bullying policy.
 - 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).

- Expansion of information dissemination of the statewide policy
 - Distributed annually to students, staff, volunteers, and parents/legal guardians.
 - Included in student codes of conduct, disciplinary policies, and student handbooks.
 - Prominently posted link on the home page of the school / district website.
- Clear requirements and procedures for students, staff, parents and guardians to report bullying, retaliation, and anonymous reporting.
- Investigation/ Response:
 - Prompt investigation of allegations.
 - When appropriate, assessment by school psychologist/ social worker for victim and/or perpetrator.
 - Mandates immediate interventions in serious situations.
- Disciplinary Action – provides a range of disciplinary actions that may be taken.
 - Determined by the school/ district appropriate authority.
 - Shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior.
 - Severity of the disciplinary action shall be aligned to the severity of the bullying behavior.
 - No student shall be suspended from school unless it is deemed to be a necessary consequence of the violation of this Policy.
- Social Networking - Students prohibited from accessing social networking sites in school, except for educational or instructional purposes and with the prior approval from school administration.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: When does the new statewide bullying policy take effect?

A: The RI Statewide Bullying Policy is effective June 30, 2012.

Q: Are residential schools required to adopt the Statewide Bullying Policy?

A: Yes. All school districts, charter schools, career and technical schools, approved private day or residential schools and collaborative schools are required to adopt the Statewide Bullying Policy.

Q: Can we use our existing district bullying policy?

A: All RI schools approved by the RI Department of Education must adopt the RI Statewide Bullying Policy. School districts or schools may use an existing bullying policy **ONLY** if your district/school policy includes all sections and language of the Statewide Bullying Policy.

- Q: Do we need to adopt this policy in addition to any other school/district policies regarding bullying and harassment?
- A: Yes, all school districts and schools must adopt the Statewide Bullying Policy by June 30, 2012. Section 16-21-26 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-21 entitled "Health and Safety of Pupils" was repealed upon passage of the Safe Schools Act.
- Q: Is there any funding associated with this law in terms of paying teachers etc. to work on teams to make safety plans etc.?
- A: No. The Safe Schools Act has no provisions for funding school safety plans. See [§ 16-21-24](#) *Requirements of school safety plans, school emergency response plans, and school crisis response plans* for additional information.
- Q: Are school districts and schools required to provide professional development and training to students, faculty, and staff on the Statewide Bullying Policy and Internet Safety?
- A: No. All school districts and schools are encouraged to provide in-service training.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Midge Sabatini, Manager, Coordinated School Health, Office of School, Community and Academic Supports, at 401-222-8952 or at Midge.Sabatini@ride.ri.gov.