



Bullying Within the County School Districts: A Survey of Policy within San Mateo County School Districts

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Issue

Do the school districts in San Mateo County have a bullying policy and an enforcement process?

Summary

Of the twenty three SMC school districts, results showed that two districts have a bullying policy separate and distinct from harassment. A total of eighteen districts, including the two with separate bullying policies, have a harassment policy with inclusion of bullying, but not in detail; five districts have no bullying or harassment policy that include bullying. The Grand Jury recommends that all the school districts in San Mateo County establish and enforce a bullying policy and clearly communicate that policy to the student bodies, staff and parents of their respective schools.

Background

An article in *USA Weekend Magazine* pointed out that recent studies have shown that from 15 to 25 percent students in the USA are bullied with some frequency¹. As late as October 21, 2010, President Obama was quoted on a White House YouTube video about bullying, stating that “bullying is not a normal part of growing up.”² The President stated in the interview that he knew what it was like to be different and made fun of as a child, basically “a painful and unnecessary act.”

The abundance of recent publicity sparked the interest of the 2010-2011 San Mateo Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury). The Grand Jury decided to survey the San Mateo County School Districts to ascertain whether each has a specific policy regarding bullying and how it is formulated and whether it is enforced.

Bullying is defined as aggressive behavior that is intentional, repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting or punching, teasing or name-calling, intimidation through gestures, social exclusion and sending or posting insulting messages or pictures by cell phone or online (also known as cyber-bullying).³

¹ *San Mateo County Times, USA Weekend Magazine*, February 4-6, 2011. Pg.6-7

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DggyAFbSDPVk>

³ *San Mateo County Times, USA Weekend Magazine*, February 4-6, 2011. Pg. 6

According to Professor Dan Olweus, a Norwegian researcher:

“A person is being bullied when he/she is *exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons*. Negative action is when a person *intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical contact, through words or in other ways*. Note that bullying is both overt and covert behaviors. The following are examples of bullying behaviors. Bullying is a pattern of behavior that is repeated over time against the same person(s) with a noted power differential.

1. Saying hurtful and unpleasant things
2. Making fun of others
3. Using mean and hurtful nicknames
4. Completely overlooking someone
5. Deliberately excluding someone from a group of friends
6. Hitting, kicking, pulling hair, pushing or shutting a person inside
7. Telling lies
8. Spreading false rumors
9. Sending mean notes
10. Trying to get other students to dislike another person

NOTE: The literature suggests not labeling a student as a bully or victim. Instead, call it bullying and/or victim behavior that the student is exhibiting. Direct bullying behaviors (overt) involve behaviors that are observable and that are usually expressed by physical and verbal means. Usually direct bullying involves relatively open attacks on a victim and are “in front of your face” behaviors. However, bullying behavior is not always hitting, kicking, teasing, or name calling. Children who bully others may use subversive acts that hurt just as much, but are harder to detect. Examples of indirect bullying are leaving others out on purpose, spreading rumors to destroy another’s reputation or getting others to dislike another person. This is covert bullying or ‘behind your face’ behaviors.”⁴

In 2003, the California Department of Education published a document entitled *Bullying at School*. The document is designed to assist school communities in recognizing, understanding, defining, and responding to bullying behaviors. It provides an excellent overview of bullying including how it occurs and what can be done to prevent it. It also provides sample school district policies for prevention of bullying.⁵

California Education Code, Section 32280, provides information and recommendations for a comprehensive school safety plan, including bullying. California Education Code, Sections 48900 and 32261 provide information on sexual harassment and sexual discrimination in the past, but now enlists a discussion and policy on bullying as defined in Sections 48900.2, 48900.3, or 48900.4.

⁴ <http://www.cobbk12.org/preventionintervention/Bully/Definition%20of%20Bullying.pdf>

⁵ *Bullying at School*, 2003 Document. California Department of Education, www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/documents/bullyingatschool.pdf

Harassment itself covers a wide range of behaviors similar to bullying. While the terms harassment and bullying are often used interchangeably, this report differentiates bullying as a particularly virulent form of harassment and concentrates on school district policies specifically against bullying.

School districts are autonomous with respect to making their own policies. The County Office of Education has no jurisdiction or authority to require that each school district have a specific policy on bullying, or in what form that policy should take to cover all the issues around bullying and harassment. However, the California Education Code section 48900 (r) does permit suspension or expulsion based on bullying. This report addresses the need for policies at the school district level.

There are 23 school districts encompassing grades K-12 within the confines of San Mateo County. Each district differs in its geographical size, the number of students and the types of policies covering conduct, harassment and bullying.

It is important to point out that some individual schools within a district, even in the absence of a specific district policy, have taken an aggressive approach in developing school policies, enforcing them, and educating all students about what bullying is, what corrective behavior will be administered, and what the responsibilities are for all students to intervene and report such conduct. Our report only covers policies set at the district level.

Investigation

The Grand Jury pursued the following questions:

- Do you have a specific Bullying Policy?
- Did you use the state template or do you use your own?
- Do you have a specific enforcement policy for bullying?

The Grand Jury reviewed all available policies given to it with respect to harassment and bullying. A “Summary of Results” table was prepared to show how each district responded. The Grand Jury believes that this information will be helpful to the districts to compare policies and benchmark best practices

Findings

1. Under the California Education Code, a student can be suspended or expelled for bullying or cyber-bullying. In addition to the Education Code, certain schools have policies that address bullying.
2. Two districts out of 23 (Cabrillo Unified and San Mateo Union High School District) have a bullying policy and an enforcement process separate and distinct from harassment. (See Table “Survey Results”)

3. Five districts, (Bayshore, Hillsborough, La Honda-Pescadero, San Carlos and Woodside) do not have either a bullying policy or a harassment policy that includes bullying nor do they have an enforcement process in place. (See Table “Survey Results”)
4. Eighteen districts, including the two districts with separate bullying policies, have harassment or conduct policies that include bullying in some form but not necessarily cyber-bullying. (See Table “Survey Results”)
5. Thirteen districts have a specific enforcement process that covers bullying either separately or as a part of a harassment policy. (See Table “Survey Results”).
6. Ten districts responded that they have no enforcement process with respect to either bullying or harassment. (See Table “Survey Results”)
7. Many districts work through either a good conduct code or rely on administrative recourse for acts of harassment. (See Table “Survey Results”)

Conclusions

1. The majority of school districts within the County of San Mateo have no independent or stand-alone bullying policy. A majority of districts do not have an enforcement process specific for bullying.
2. Bullying is a public issue and should not be tolerated to any extent in the schools on the Internet or in the public outside of schools. There should be policies in force within each district identifying the problem and how it can be eliminated.

Recommendations

The 2010-2011 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury recommends to the San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools, that she:

1. Facilitate a meeting, before the commencement of the next school year, of the representatives of every school district within the county in order to develop school policies that standardize bullying and enforcement processes across all schools (grades K-12) in San Mateo County.

The 2010-2011 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury recommends that all K-12 School Districts:

2. Send a representative to the meeting referenced in recommendation #1 to participate in the goal of county wide standardized policies on bullying and the enforcement processes.
3. The bullying policy and its enforcement process should be summarized and communicated to students, parents/guardians and school staff.

Survey Results

School District	Bullying Policy		Used Template			Conduct or Harassment Policy		Enforcement Process			Student Handbook	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	N/A	Includes Bullying	Does Not Include Bullying	Yes	No	N/A	Includes Bullying	Does Not Include Bullying
Bayshore		X			X		X		X			X
Belmont-Redwood Shores		X	X			X		X				
Brisbane		X	X			X			X			
Burlingame		X	X			X		X				
Cabrillo Unified	X		X			X		X			X	
Hillsborough		X			X		X		X			
Jefferson Elementary		X	X			X		X				
Jefferson Union High		X	X			X		X				
La Honda-Pescadero		X		X			X			X		
Las Lomas		X		X		X		X			X	
Menlo Park City		X			X	X				X		X
Millbrae		X	X			X		X			X	
Pacifica		X		X		X			X			
Portola Valley		X		X		X		X				
Ravenswood City		X	X			X		X				
Redwood City		X	X			X		X				
San Bruno Park		X	X			X		X				
San Carlos		X			X		X			X		
San Mateo Union High	X		X			X		X				
San Mateo-Foster City		X		X		X			X			
Sequoia Union		X	X			X		X				
South San Francisco		X	X			X			X			
Woodside		X			X		X			X		

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June 14, 2011

Hon. Joseph E. Bergeron
Judge of the Superior Court
Hall of Justice
400 County Center; 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

Dear Judge Bergeron,

At the Regular meeting of the Governing Board of the Bayshore School District on June 14, 2011, the Board approved the following response to the Grand Jury Report on Bullying with the County School Districts.

The Bayshore School District serves approximately 400 students on two campuses. Due to the small size and tight knit community, discipline referrals and suspensions due to bullying are few. Bullying is addressed in our Student and Parent Handbook under the section dealing with harassment.

The District will send a representative to a meeting facilitated by the San Mateo County Superintendent of schools to develop a county wide standardized policy on bullying and enforcement processes. Upon the adoption of a policy and enforcement processes on bullying, a summary of the policy and enforcement processes will be included in the Student and Parent Handbook as well as the Staff Handbook. A review of the policy and procedures will be conducted with staff.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 415-467-5443 until June 30, 2011. After July 1, please contact Toni Presta, new Bayshore Superintendent at 415-467-0550.

Sincerely,



Susan Larramendy
Co-Superintendent



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<http://www.brssd.org>

June 16, 2011

Honorable Joseph E. Bergeron
Judge of the Superior Court
Hall of Justice
400 County Center; 2nd Floor
Redwood City, California 94063-1655

Dear Judge Bergeron:

The Belmont-Redwood Shores School District Governing Board is in receipt of the Grand Jury's recommendations that all school districts in San Mateo County establish and enforce a bullying policy and clearly communicate that policy to the student bodies, staff and parents of their respective schools.

Response to Recommendations:

1. Facilitate a meeting, before the commencement of the next school year, of the representatives of every school district within the county in order to develop school policies that standardize bullying and enforcement processes across all schools (grades K-12) in San Mateo County.

This recommendation pertains to the San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools.

2. Send a representative to the meeting referenced in recommendation #1 to participate in the goal of county wide standardized policies on bullying and the enforcement processes.

The Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services and Personnel will be assigned to participate in the meeting facilitated by the San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools.

3. The bullying policy and its enforcement process should be summarized and communicated to students, parents/guardians and school staff.

The District publishes a notice to parents annually at the start of the school year. Following the county-wide meeting to develop standard policy language and enforcement processes, the new information will be published to parents/guardians, students and school staff as follows:

- a. *Parents will be informed of the new policy and enforcement procedures in the Notice to Parents publication distributed to each family in the District at the start of the school year. An information brief will also be disseminated through each school's PTA via email to individual parents/guardians. A link to both publications will be made available on the District's website as well.*

Honorable Joseph E. Bergeron
Judge of the Superior Court

Belmont-Redwood Shores School District
Response to Grand Jury Recommendations Regarding Bullying

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- b. Staff will be informed of the new policy and enforcement procedures in and through staff handbooks, staff meetings, staff bulletins, and information posted on the District and school websites. School leaders will continue to articulate the bullying policy and enforcement procedures with staff as situations are addressed throughout the year.*
- c. Students will be informed of the new policy and enforcement procedures in and through handbooks, opening week assemblies held the first week of school with presentations by principals and classroom discussions led by teachers. A variety of learning activities in the areas of character education, the District's Health Initiative and Safe and Drug Free Schools will be organized throughout the year as bullying prevention. Anti-bullying interventions including a focus on cyber-bullying are in place at schools through the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center and site programs that train peer facilitators and we plan for these to continue. Parents, students and staff will be engaged at the middle school level with planned assemblies and evening programs that alert parents about forms of bullying and strategies for dealing with this behavior. Further discussion with parents/guardians will also be encouraged.*

The safety of our students and staff are our first priority. We have been engaged with the work to update our Comprehensive School Safety Plans this year which address bullying as a component of the plan. We appreciate the opportunity to inform the Grand Jury and the larger community of our progress.

This response was approved by the Board of Trustees at its regular meeting on June 16, 2011.

Respectfully,



Dr. Emerita Orta-Camilleri,
Superintendent

Enclosure

Board of Trustees Meeting Agenda for June 16, 2011
Minutes for the Board Meeting of June 16, 2011

behavior reinforcement plan that 1) includes programs, strategies, and activities to support positive, solutions-oriented responses to minor bullying incidences and 2) reflects the development and implementation of appropriate social and emotional learning opportunities in a manner that is consistent throughout the District.

Recommendations

- 1. The San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools should facilitate a meeting of the representatives of every school district within the county to develop policies that standardize bullying and enforcement processes across all schools and districts.**

District Response: While this recommendation is directed specifically to the County Superintendent of Schools, the Cabrillo Unified School District concurs that such a meeting is desirable.

- 2. All school districts in San Mateo County should send a representative to the meeting reference in Recommendation #1 (above).**

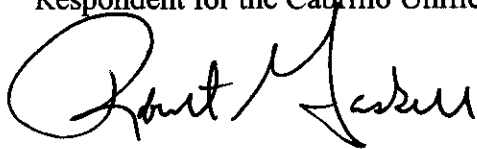
District Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented. The Cabrillo Unified School District stands ready to identify one or more representatives and fully participate in such a meeting.

- 3. The bullying policy and enforcement processes developed in the above process should be summarized and communicated to all students, parents/guardians, and school staff.**

District Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented. The Cabrillo Unified School District is open to the idea of adopting and disseminating a countywide policy and enforcement process so long as the new policy and process are judged to be equal or superior to those already in place in this district.

This response was approved by the Cabrillo Unified School District Board of Education in open session during the regularly scheduled meeting held on June 30, 2011.

Respondent for the Cabrillo Unified School District:



Robert B. Gaskill
District Superintendent

300 El Cerrito Avenue • Hillsborough, CA 94010

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June 6, 2011

Judge of the Superior Court
Hall of Justice
400 County Center; 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

The purpose of this letter is to respond to the Grand Jury Report "Bullying Within the County School Districts: A Survey of Policy within San Mateo County Districts" which was filed on May 24, 2011 and received by this district on May 25, 2011.

Your report directed districts to respond to each finding and each recommendation.

Finding 1: Under California Education Code, a student can be suspended or expelled for bullying or cyber-bullying. In addition to the Education Code, certain schools have policies that address bullying."

We agree with this finding.

Finding 2: Two districts out of 23 (Cabrillo Unified and San Mateo Union High School District) have a bullying policy and an enforcement process separate and distinct from harassment. (See Table "Survey Results")

Based on the information presented, we agree with this finding.

Finding 3: Five districts, (Bayshore, Hillsborough, La Honda-Pescadero, San Carlos and Woodside) do not have either a bullying policy or a harassment policy that includes bullying nor do they have an enforcement process in place. (See Table "Survey Results")

Based on the information presented, we agree with this finding.

Finding 4: Eighteen districts, including the two districts with separate bullying policies, have harassment or conduct policies that include bullying in some form but not necessarily cyberbullying. (See Table "Survey Results")

Based on the information presented, we agree with this finding.

Finding 5: "Thirteen districts have a specific enforcement process that covers bullying either separately or as a part of a harassment policy. (See Table "Survey Results").

Based on the information presented, we agree with this finding.

Finding 6: Ten districts responded that they have no enforcement process with respect to either bullying or harassment. (See Table "Survey Results")

Based on the information presented, we agree with this finding.

Finding 7: Many districts work through either a good conduct code or rely on administrative recourse for acts of harassment. (See Table "Survey Results")
Based on the information presented, we agree with this finding.

Recommendation 1: The 2010-2011 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury recommends to the San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools, that she:

Facilitate a meeting, before the commencement of the next school year, of the representatives of every school district within the county in order to develop school policies that standardize bullying and enforcement processes across all schools (grades K-12) in San Mateo County.

As this recommendation is addressed to the San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools, we will not respond to the recommendation.

Recommendation 2: The 2010-2011 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury recommends that all K-12 School Districts:

Send a representative to the meeting referenced in recommendation #1 to participate in the goal of county wide standardized policies on bullying and the enforcement processes.

If the County Superintendent of Schools convenes the meeting described in recommendation #1, the Hillsborough City School District will send a representative to participate in the meeting. The time frame for implementation of this recommendation would be dependent on when the meeting is convened.

Recommendation 3: The 2010-2011 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury recommends that all K-12 School Districts:

The bullying policy and its enforcement process should be summarized and communicated to students, parents/guardians and school staff.

If the meeting is convened, if a policy is proposed, and if a policy is enacted by the Board of Trustees of the Hillsborough City School District, the Hillsborough City School District will summarize and communicate the policy to students, parents/guardians, and school staff within 45 calendar days of the policy being enacted. As a policy has not yet been drafted, we are unable at this time to state whether or not the draft policy will be enacted as the issue requires further analysis. This analysis will take place after the policy is drafted. The analysis will not take longer than six months from May 24, 2011, providing that the county meeting is convened before the start of the next school year as recommended.

If you need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Anthony Ranii
Superintendent