

Policies

Dignity for All Students Act

*The Dignity Act emphasizes the importance of tolerance and respect for others by students and staff alike. Therefore, all members of the school community, including essential partners such as superintendents, school board members, parents, students, teachers, guidance counselors, principals/administrators, support staff and other school personnel have particularly important roles to play in its implementation. Students or a parent of a student who feels that they are a target of discrimination or harassment while on school property by any student/students or employee are encouraged to seek out assistance from whomever they feel most comfortable speaking with. Any staff member who witnesses students being the target of discrimination or harassment or is told of a student being a target of discrimination or harassment must fill out the Little Flower DASA Reporting Form and submit it to the Dignity Act Coordinator. This form is kept in the school's main office. **The Dignity Act Coordinator is William Glasshagel.***

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The following is a list of useful definitions provided by the **Dignity for All Students Act**:

School Property	means in or within any building, structure, athletic playing field, playground, parking lot, or land contained within the real property boundary line of a public elementary or secondary school; or in or on a school bus (Education Law §11[1]).
School Bus	means every motor vehicle owned by a public or governmental agency or private school and operated for the transportation of pupils, children of pupils, teachers and other persons acting in a supervisory capacity, to or from school or school activities, or, privately owned and operated for compensation for the transportation of pupils, children of pupils, teachers and other persons acting in a supervisory capacity to or from school or school activities (Education Law §11[1] and Vehicle and Traffic Law §142).
School Function	means a school sponsored extracurricular event or activity (Education §11[2]).
Disability	means (a) a physical, mental or medical impairment resulting from anatomical, physiological, genetic or neurological conditions which prevents the exercise of a normal bodily function or is demonstrable by medically accepted clinical or laboratory diagnostic techniques or (b) a record of such an impairment or (c) a condition regarded by others as such an impairment, provided, however, that in all provisions of this article dealing with employment, the term must be limited to disabilities which, upon the provision of reasonable accommodations, do not prevent the complainant from performing in a reasonable manner the activities involved in the job or occupation sought or held (Education Law §11[4] and Executive Law §292[21]).
Employee	means any person receiving compensation from a school district or employee of a contracted service provider or worker placed within the school under a public assistance employment program, pursuant to title nine B of article five of the Social Services Law, and consistent with the provisions of such title for the provision of services to such district, its students or employees, directly or through contract, whereby such services performed by such person involve direct student contact (Education Law §§11[4] and 1125[3]).

Sexual Orientation	means actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality (Education Law §11[5]).
Gender	means actual or perceived sex and includes a person's gender identity or expression (Education Law §11[6]).
Harassment	means the creation of a hostile environment by conduct or by verbal threats, intimidation or abuse that has or would have the effect of unreasonably and substantially interfering with a student's educational performance, opportunities or benefits, or mental, emotional or physical wellbeing; or conduct, verbal threats, intimidation or abuse that reasonably causes or would reasonably be expected to cause a student to fear for his or her physical safety; such conduct, verbal threats, intimidation or abuse includes but is not limited to conduct, verbal threats, intimidation or abuse based on a person's actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex (Education Law §11[7]).

The Dignity Act prohibits discrimination and harassment of students on school property, including at school functions, by any student and/or employee. However, harassment may include, among other things, the use, both on and off school property, of information technology, including, but not limited to, email, instant messaging, blogs, chat rooms, pagers, cell phones, gaming systems and social media websites, to deliberately harass or threaten others. This type of harassment is generally referred to as cyber bullying.

The following excerpt was taken directly from the **Dignity Act Guidance Document**, which explains the course of intervention schools need to explore when working with cases of discrimination and bullying:

SECTION V: RESTORATIVE APPROACHES

The Dignity Act's underlying premise is that preventive and non-punitive intervention, in response to incidents of discrimination and/or harassment, is the best way to achieve school environments free from harassment and discrimination. Schools are therefore encouraged to use a wide range of intervention measures to address discrimination and/or harassment, including, restorative practices, conflict resolution, peer-mediation, and counseling, rather than over-relying on exclusionary methods of discipline, such as suspension.

Understanding discipline as a "teachable moment" is fundamental to a positive approach to discipline. It has been in particular the experience of the New York City Department of Education that restorative approaches can help schools prevent or deal with conflict before it escalates; build relationships and empower community members to take responsibility for the well-being of others; increase the social skills of those who have harmed others; address underlying factors that lead youth to engage in inappropriate behavior and build resiliency; provide wrong doers with opportunities to be accountable to those they have harmed; and enable them to repair the harm to the extent possible.

Taking a restorative approach to discipline changes the fundamental questions that

are asked when a behavioral incident occurs. Instead of asking who is to blame and how will those engaged in the misbehavior be punished, the restorative approach asks four key questions:

- What happened?
- Who was harmed or affected by the behavior?
- What needs to be done to make things right?
- How can people behave differently in the future?

Restorative practices may include:

Red Flag Meetings: These meetings conducted as a part of our Sanctuary Model may be used as a regular practice in which a group of students, faculty or students and faculty participates. A Red Flag meeting can be used in response to a particular issue that affects the community. The meeting process utilizing SELF (Safety, Emotions, Loss & Future) can enable a group to get to know one another, build relationships, establish understanding and trust, create a sense of community, learn how to make decisions together, develop agreements for the mutual good, resolve difficult issues, etc. Red Flag meetings can be effective as both a prevention and intervention strategy.

Restorative Enquiry/Restorative Discussion: Uses active listening and other conflict resolution communication skills. Using a collaborative negotiation process enables an individual to talk through an issue or conflict directly with the person with whom s/he disagrees to arrive at a mutually satisfactory resolution.

Victim/Wrongdoer Mediation: when an individual acknowledges s/he has harmed another person and both the person who engaged in the behavior that harmed and the person who was harmed agree to see how the incident(s) can be put right by working with an impartial, third party mediator who has received specific training in victim/wrongdoer mediation. Regardless of the circumstances, the mental and physical health, safety and welfare of the individual who was harmed is of paramount importance when considering this option in a school setting and should not be used when the wrongdoer (individual who has caused harm) may intimidate or coerce or attempt to intimidate or coerce the person who has been harmed.

Formal Restorative Conference: A circle process in which individuals who have acknowledged causing harm are brought together with those who have been harmed. A formal restorative conference is facilitated by an individual who has received specific training in the process. In addition to the individuals who have been directly involved, both sides may bring supporters who have also been affected by the incident to the circle. The purpose of the conference is for both the harm doer and the harmed to understand each other's perspective and come to a mutual agreement, which will repair the harm as much as it is able to be repaired. Regardless of the circumstances, the mental and physical health, safety and welfare of the individual who was harmed is of paramount importance when considering this option in a school setting.