

The Dignity for All Students Act

New York State's Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) took effect on July 1, 2012. It seeks to provide the State's public elementary and secondary school students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function. It prohibits harassment and discrimination towards students based on categories including (but not limited to): race, skin color, national origin, ethnic group, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, weight, economic status, and being the child of an incarcerated parent. DASA covers harassment/discrimination towards students by other students and by school employees.

Cyberbullying is not specifically covered – DASA may or may not cover it, depending on the circumstances.

Although the word “bullying” doesn't appear in the law, bullying falls under the category of harassment. According to DASA criteria, harassment (bullying) consists of verbally or physically aggressive behavior which:

- Is intentional.
- Occurs between an individual who is more powerful (or perceived to be more powerful) and an individual who is less powerful (or perceived to be less powerful).
- Is part of a repeated pattern, or is seen as having the potential to be part of a repeated pattern. (For example, if it is a first incident for the victim but the offender has a reputation as a bully, the victim may reasonably believe that it could happen again).

Examples of bullying:

Verbal: Name-calling, teasing, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting and threatening to cause harm.

Social: Spreading rumors about someone, excluding others on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, and intentionally embarrassing someone in public.

Physical: Hitting, punching, shoving, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or destroying someone's possessions, rude hand gestures, unwanted sexual contact.

An additional requirement of DASA is that schools create an environment that encourages respect and discourages bullying. Programs at Helendale Road Primary School which meet this requirement include Second Step, the three R's, and the expectations created by last year's discipline committee. The counselors do presentations on sexual harassment and bullying, and teachers deliver this message to students in a variety of ways. PBIS will also fill this requirement.

HR Procedures for Addressing Bullying

- DASA requires that school staff report when they are aware of incidents of bullying.
- Report can be made to administrators, counselors, or Aimee Cox-Gibbs (Dignity Act Coordinator).
- One of these individuals and/or security staff will investigate the report.
- If it doesn't meet DASA criteria, the investigation will be documented.

- If it meets DASA criteria:
 - A DASA incident form is filled out,
 - Parents of all students involved are informed,
 - Appropriate consequences are applied,
 - Follow-up steps will be taken to so that the bullying doesn't continue,
 - Incident is reported to the state.
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Other than making a report, what else can I do to help a student who is being harassed and bullied?

When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior they send the message that it is not acceptable. Research shows this can stop bullying behavior over time. In addition to the steps and procedures outlined in the school, district or BOCES policy and/or code, the following are suggestions for steps adults can take to address bullying on the spot and to help keep students safe.

Do:

- Intervene immediately. It is okay to get another adult to help.
- Separate the children involved.
- Make sure everyone is safe.
- Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
- Stay calm. Reassure the children involved, including bystanders.
- Model respectful behavior when you intervene.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Don't ignore it. Don't think children can work it out without adult help.
- Don't immediately try to sort out the facts.
- Don't force other children to say publicly what they saw.
- Don't question the children involved in front of other children.
- Don't talk to the children involved together, only separately.
- Don't make the children involved apologize or patch up relations on the spot.

Websites for more information:

www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact

www.stopbullying.gov