

**MSD of Washington Township
Anti-Bullying
Parent/Volunteer FAQs**

The MSDWT School Board, as demonstrated by Anti-bullying Policy – 5517.01, firmly prohibits bullying within the District. This policy complies with the new legislative requirements. However, the more important question is: What does this policy and law change mean to me as a parent or volunteer? Below are some Frequently Asked Questions to assist with the explanation of the new policy and requirements.

As always, if more questions remain, parents and volunteers should approach his/her school principal for clarification or answers.

Q. What is the definition of bullying?

A. The entire definition (from the law) can be seen below:

"Bullying" means overt, unwanted, repeated acts or gestures, including (1) verbal or written communications or images transmitted in any manner (including digitally or electronically), (2) physical acts committed, aggression, or (3) any other behaviors, that are committed by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the other targeted student and create for the targeted student an objectively hostile school environment that:

- 1) places the targeted student in reasonable fear of harm to the targeted student's person or property;
- 2) has a substantially detrimental effect on the targeted student's physical or mental health;
- 3) has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's academic performance; or
- 4) has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, and privileges provided by the school.

Q. What are some of the key characteristics of a bullying situation?

A. While not inclusive, there are three components that are typically in play in a bullying situation and define bullying in simple terms:

- Unwanted aggressive behavior
- Repeated or potential for repeated behavior
- Real or perceived power imbalance

Q. How is this student behavior definition different than previous behavior definitions such as "inappropriate behavior," "classroom disruption," "insubordination," etc.?

A. This definition of "bullying" differs in a few specific ways:

- 1) The act(s) must be repeated
- 2) The act(s) must have the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's academic performance.
- 3) The act(s) must have the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's ability to participate or benefit from the services, activities and privileges provided by the school.

Q. How do I report an incident?

A. If you believe your child has been a target of bullying or if you are aware of possible bullying behaviors please contact your child's administration or guidance office. Contact can be made through phone, e-mail, or in person. In addition, the district will maintain a system that allows for the anonymous reporting of potential or alleged bullying behavior. This anonymous reporting system will be available on the district's website.

Below are some examples of behaviors to assist you in determining if an incident is a bullying incident:

EXAMPLE #1: A student strikes another student, knocking books out of the second student's hands, pushes the student, and begins shouting at the student, "I heard what you told them about me. It's not true and you know it!" The teacher/staff member intervenes, separates the students, calls for assistance if necessary, and reports the altercation to the administration.

Without additional information that would indicate bullying – such as knowledge of this being a repeated behavior, or knowledge of an imbalance of power, this incident would typically not be reported as an alleged bullying incident.

EXAMPLE #2: A student strikes another student, knocking books out of the second student's hands, pushes the student, and begins shouting at the student, "I heard what you told them about me. It's not true and you know it! I'm sick of all of you talking behind my back and spreading rumors about me. I've seen what you've said about me on Facebook!" The teacher/staff member intervenes, separates the students, calls for assistance if necessary, and reports the altercation to the administration.

This situation would typically be reported as alleged bullying. There is evidence that this might be a repeated behavior and evidence that perhaps multiple students have been involved with a concerted effort to harm a fellow student. The administrator will make the ultimate determination regarding the presence of the statutory definition of bullying but the person reporting has a duty to bring the allegation of bullying to the attention of the administrator.

EXAMPLE #3: You receive a phone call or e-mail from a parent stating that her child is a target of bullying at lunch by other students. She provides a couple examples of behavior and states that her daughter is having difficulty sleeping and is reluctant to return to school because of the situation.

This should be reported as a possible bullying situation.

Q. If I am aware of a possible bullying incident, how quickly must I report it?

A. Anyone who believes that a student has possibly been or is the victim of bullying must **immediately** report the situation to an appropriate staff member such as a teacher, school counselor, or administrator.

Q. What happens if I fail to report a bullying incident?

A. Failure to report an incident of bullying could result in a range of results including but not limited to additional training, consultation with a building or central office administrator or loss of volunteer status with the MSDWT. Additionally, if a volunteer does not report a bullying incident, the volunteer will not be indemnified under the district policy should the volunteer be named in any legal action.

Q. What happens if I falsely report a bullying incident?

A. Falsely reporting an incident of bullying could result in a range of results including but not limited to additional training, consultation with a building or central office administrator or loss of volunteer status with the MSDWT. Additionally, if a volunteer does not report a bullying incident, the volunteer will not be indemnified under the district policy should the volunteer be named in any legal action.

Q. What are appropriate responses to bullying behavior?

A. Volunteers should intervene when students are exhibiting behavior consistent with bullying. These behaviors can include teasing, excluding fellow students from activities, harassing behaviors, physical aggression toward others, writing mean spirited or derogatory notes to others, or sending harassing messages (either individually or as a group) to others using an electronic format (email, text message, Twitter, KIK, Instagram, etc.) Volunteers should not intervene physically if there is a reasonable chance of personal injury or there is a reasonable fear of personal safety. Informing an administrator, teacher or other District personnel is expected and required.

Q. How can I learn more about bullying prevention?

A. The school's counseling office or administration can provide information. In addition, there are many resources on the district Bullying Prevention Page as part of the District's website.

Q. If I suspect my child is being bullied, whom do I contact?

A. If parents or volunteers believe their child or any child is a target of bullying or any aggressive, unwanted, or unwarranted treatment, please contact your child's school administration.

Q. When is it appropriate to use the word "bullying"?

A. The term "bullying" has been used and perhaps overused recently in the media. The use of the term "bullying" is now further complicated due to legislation that more narrowly defines the term therefore making the statutory definition of bullying potentially inconsistent with the common use of the term.

As stated in an earlier answer, please let your principal know if there is inappropriate conduct taking place toward your child or anyone else's child. You may simply state "this is the behavior that is taking place." The principal and administration will be able to determine through questions whether they need to consider the action as an alleged or suspected act of "bullying." The most important issue at hand is the respectful treatment of others regardless of whether the person is a staff member, community member, or student.

Q. What steps will be taken by the school after a report is made?

A. The school administrator will investigate the reported student behaviors. The administration, counselors, or other appropriate school personnel will work with students and parents to resolve the conflict. The behaviors will be considered by comparing the action to the statutory definition of bullying. If the behavior is determined to be bullying, a few additional steps will be taken. First, the student that was the target of bullying will receive information and strategies that intended to assist the student in confronting, and dealing with unwanted behavior. The bully will receive similar strategies as well as consequences for the bullying behavior.

It is important to remind parents and volunteers, not all reported incidences of bullying actually meet the narrow legal definition of bullying. That does not mean that the behavior is acceptable. It may need to be addressed.

Q. What are the expectations for confidentiality?

A. Bullying situations will be handled in the same manner as all discipline situations. While student confidentiality is important in some cases, addressing student to student behaviors without both or all parties being involved with the resolution is difficult. The administration is under no obligation to share student consequences with other students, parents or volunteers.

A report of bullying or bullying behavior, however, may remain confidential. It is important that all members of the school community feel comfortable reporting instances of potential bullying or any inappropriate conduct to the school administration.

The important message to all in the school community is “If You See Something, Say Something.”

Q. What are the educational resources the district uses to provide information about how bullying is addressed?

A. A variety of resources are available to parents, volunteers, and students. A list of the resources in use at the various grade levels is available on the Bully Prevention page located on the district website. Grades K-8 provide students with programming in large and small groups and embed positive behavior supports within the curriculum through the use of grade appropriate texts and class discussion. Grades K-8 also partner with [BullySafe](#), a nonprofit company that works with schools to create positive learning environments by confronting the topic of bullying and other behaviors that can negatively impact people.

The high school uses a variety of resources to continually expose students to the detrimental effects of bullying, intimidation, harassment, and violence. Student groups produce communication through print and visual media. Pamphlets are distributed by administration and teachers. Bully Prevention Week is promoted and organized by student leaders.

Your child’s principal will be able to address specific questions regarding the unique ways each building addresses the topic of bullying.

Q. How will staff be educated on bullying?

A. The new Indiana Anti-Bullying Law as well as MSDWT District Policy requires that those staff and volunteers who have ongoing contact with students be provided a minimum level of training. The MSDWT has addressed this requirement in a variety of ways.

Faculty and staff, such as instructional assistants, will be required (beginning with the 14-15 school year) to complete an hour-long bullying prevention course. Staff members that have infrequent contact with students (custodians, kitchen staff, maintenance staff, etc.) will be required to view a separate presentation that outlines their responsibilities and makes them aware of signs that may indicate bullying behaviors how to respond. Volunteers will view a similar brief presentation prior to approval as a volunteer. Bus drivers will view a presentation and be provided in person discussion and facilitation on the topic of student bullying prevention.