

Refresher on the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA)

Superintendent's Conference Day

August 27, 2014

What is the Goal of the Dignity Act?

- The goal of the Dignity Act is to create a **safe and supportive school climate** where students can learn and focus, rather than fear being discriminated against and/or verbally and/or physically harassed.
- All public elementary and secondary students have the right to attend school in a **safe, welcoming, considerate, and caring environment**.

No student shall be subjected to discrimination based on their:

Actual or perceived

- Race
- Color
- Weight
- National origin
- Ethnic group
- Religion
- Religious practice
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity, or
- Sex

What sites and events are covered by the Dignity Act?

- DASA applies to **all** public schools, BOCES, and charter schools
- DASA applies to incidents on **school property** including a school building, athletic playing field, playground, parking lot, school bus
- DASA applies to public **sponsored functions** (school-sponsored extra curricular events or activities)

DASA requires:

Districts and schools to prevent, monitor, and address bullying through:

- Staff trainings
- Designation of an anti-bullying coordinator
- Sensitivity and tolerance curricula for all students (K-12)
- Enhanced transparency
- Code of conduct language explaining policies and consequences

How does DASA define 'bullying'?

Threats, intimidating behavior or abuse on school property that interferes with a student's safety and learning experience or causes a student to be afraid for his or her safety through the expectation of bodily or emotional harm.

Bullying is a form of Harassment

“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 well being; 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.”

N.Y. Educ § 11(7)(2010)

Bullying generally involves the following characteristics:

- **An Imbalance of Power (real or perceived):** Children who bully use their power, such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, popularity, *loquaciousness*, to control or harm others.
- **The Intent to Cause Harm:** The person bullying has a goal to cause *emotional* or physical harm.
- **Repetition:** Bullying behaviors generally happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

What is the difference between peer conflict and bullying?

Conflict	Bullying
Equal power between the students	Imbalance of power
Happens occasionally	Repetitive
Shows remorse	No remorse or blames victim
Modifies their behavior when they have hurt someone	Does not modify hurtful behavior
Demonstrates ability to self-monitor	Does not self-monitor
Equal emotional reactions	Emotional reaction from victim, little or none from the bully

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- **Verbal:** Name-calling, teasing, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting and threatening to cause harm.
- **Social:** Gossiping or spreading rumors, excluding others on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, and embarrassing someone in public.
- **Physical:** Hitting, punching, shoving, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking someone's things and making mean or rude hand gestures.
- **Cyberbullying:** Harassment or bullying that occurs through any form of electronic communication.

Cyberbullying

- June 22, 2012: NYS Assembly passed legislation requiring cyberbullying reporting
- Expands on the Dignity For All Students Act, signed by Gov. Cuomo on July 9, 2012
- Goes into effect July 1, 2013
- Requires **ALL** school staff to report any incident of bullying AND cyberbullying to the school principal or superintendent

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyber bullying is bullying that occurs through the use of electronic technology, such as cell phones, computers, and tablets. It can also involve the use of communication tools, such as social media sites, text messages, chat and websites.

Examples of Cyberbullying include, but are not limited to:

- Sending hurtful, rude, or mean text messages or e-mails to others.
- Spreading rumors or lies about others by text message or e-mail or posting on social networking sites.
- Creating or sharing pictures, websites, videos or social media profiles, including fake profiles that embarrass, extort, humiliate, or make fun of others.

What is the impact of bullying on students?

Students being bullied tend to report:

- Feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation
- Low self esteem
- Poor school performance
- Thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts
- Physical symptoms, avoidance, school phobia
- Losing personal items such as books, electronics, clothing or jewelry
- Want to sit with the same 'safe' student or group of students all of the time

What is the impact of bullying on students?

Students who bully tend to:

- Exhibit defiant and delinquent behavior
- Have a criminal record by age 24
- Be more likely to drop out of school
- Have extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained
- Are quick to blame others
- Will not accept responsibility for their actions
- Be more likely to bring weapons to school
- Vie for attention, talk loudly, wave at the bus driver in the mirror, or move from seat to seat

**The single most effective
deterrent to bullying is
the intervention of an
adult authority**

When to Report

- Oral report to the principal within **1** day
 - Written report of incident to the principal within **2** days

Does DASA affect Instruction?

Educators in grades K-12 are required to teach students civility, citizenship and character education, including but not limited to, awareness and sensitivity to discrimination or harassment and civility in the relations of people of different races, weights, national origins, ethnic groups, religions, religious practices, mental or physical abilities, sexual orientations, genders and sexes.

Educators' Role

As primary agents in their classroom, teachers, teacher assistants, aides and monitors have a significant opportunity to affect positive youth development through

- the content of their instruction
- the quality of their social interactions and relationships with students
- how they manage behavior and model social-emotional processes

How does DASA relate to APPR?

- As part of a teacher's Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), all teaching standards must be assessed at least once a year. One of these teaching standards is ***New York State Teaching Standard #4: The Learning Environment***, which addresses the critical importance of creating a respectful, safe and supportive environment; creating an intellectually stimulating environment; managing the learning environment; and organizing and utilizing available resources. These benefits are also key to the effective implementation of the Dignity Act. Performance indicators associated with ***Standard #4*** include, but are not limited to:
 - Teachers are caring and respectful in their interactions with students.
 - Teachers embrace student diversity as an asset in the classroom.
 - Students exhibit respectful classroom interactions.
 - Teachers know and implement policies and procedures to ensure student safety.

<http://engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-teaching-standards>

So What Can We Do?:

1. Be a role model
2. If you see any bullying, stop it right away and refer to school rules against bullying
3. If appropriate, impose immediate consequences to the bully
4. If you suspect bullying is happening talk individually with students to gain more information, provide a constant adult presence and scan, move and interact
5. Establish positive, safe, trusting relationships
6. Talk to the bystanders individually, give them guidance about intervening
7. Support the victim in a way that allows him or her to regain self-control, “save-face” and to feel supported and safe from retaliation
8. Facilitate discussions, share what you see
9. Do not require the students to meet to “work things out”

Some Best Practices...

- Educators share **commitment to fostering an environment of respect** in their schools. This work is **not done in isolation** – it is part of a continuum.
- Focus on the **development of the whole child**, consistent with social and emotional development.
- Create a **dynamic learning environment** for all students that support achievement and growth.
- **Integrate the Dignity Act into all Common Core Learning Standards.** Many of the standards address communication skills, problem solving, decision-making skills, citizenship, and choosing healthy behaviors.
- **Collaborate** with other school personnel to formulate consistent and specific school and classroom rules against discrimination and harassment.
- Discuss with students and colleagues ways to **encourage and support positive behaviors** and the positive actions of bystanders.
- **Invite experts in the field of bullying/harassment prevention** to work with both adults and youth at your school. Use presentations that are designed to lead to action rather than just awareness.
- Use a variety of **mentoring strategies** to build staff connections for all students.
- **Attend training and learn to recognize signs** that a student may be harassed or bullied.