

570 Prevention and Response to Bullying, Harassment, and Hateful Speech

570.1 Anti-Bullying and Prevention Programming

Each school must maintain an environment that reflects the values of dignity, respect, and the inherent worth of every person created in the image and likeness of God. In accordance with the *Jack Reid Law: Protect All Students Act*, Catholic schools are required to adopt and implement a written, plain-language, age-appropriate anti-bullying and harassment policy that applies to all students. This policy must be published on the school website or internal parent/student portal and be shared annually with employees, parents, and students. All principals shall implement an **anti-bullying and prevention program** designed to:

- Promote awareness among staff, students, and families.
- Provide training and resources for recognizing, reporting, and responding to bullying and harassment.
- Establish a safe and inclusive environment that supports the ongoing mission of preventing and eliminating bullying behavior.
- Offer ongoing opportunities for education and restorative practices.

Annual staff training is required on recognizing, reporting, and responding to bullying and harassment.

570.2 Anti-Bullying and Harassment Statement

Catholic schools strive to provide a safe environment for all individuals. All students and employees are to be treated with dignity and respect. Bullying or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated on school property or at school functions.

Definitions:

- **Bullying** is defined as repeated or systematic abuse and/or harassment of another person or group that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. A person is being bullied when they are exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions by one or more persons.
- **Harassment** is the creation of a hostile environment by conduct or by threats, intimidation or abuse, including cyberbullying, that (a) 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; (b) reasonably causes or would reasonably be expected to cause a student to fear for their physical safety; (c) reasonably causes or would reasonably be expected to cause physical injury or emotional harm to a student; or (d) occurs off school property and creates, or would foreseeably create, a risk of substantial disruption within the school environment, where it is foreseeable that the conduct, threats, intimidation or abuse might reach school property. For purposes of this definition, the term "threats, intimidation or abuse" shall include verbal and non-verbal actions.

Bullying and harassment include **physical, emotional, social, or cyber** forms of harm, such as:

- Physical: intentional harm to another's body or property
- Emotional: intentional harm to another's emotional well-being
- Social: intentional harm to another's group acceptance or relationships
- Cyber: bullying or harassment that occurs through any form of electronic communication

Examples may include, but are not limited to: teasing, using derogatory nicknames or slurs, spreading rumors or demeaning stories, social exclusion, intentional destruction of property, or sharing demeaning content online.

570.3 Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Bullying or Harassment

All reports of bullying or harassment will be taken seriously and addressed promptly.

Reporting:

- Any student who believes they are being bullied or harassed should immediately tell a teacher, counselor, or administrator. Student concerns may be relayed to a school employee verbally, by email, or in writing.
 - If an online form or other program is used (Ex. "Stop It"), describe how it is accessed.
- Parents or guardians may also report suspected incidents directly to a school employee.
- School employees who witness bullying/harassment or receive an oral/written report must orally notify the principal (or designee) no later than one school day after the report/knowledge. This employee must then file a written report with the principal (or designee) no later than two school days after the oral report.

Investigation:

- Upon receiving a report of bullying, harassment, or retaliation, the principal (or designee) will promptly initiate a timely and thorough investigation.
- Both the reporting student and the alleged offender will be interviewed separately, and all relevant facts will be reviewed.
 - Other students or school employees may also be interviewed.
- The principal (or designee) will also review video footage, online content, voicemails, or text messages, if available.
- The principal will communicate the outcome of the investigation to the affected student(s) and their parents in an age-appropriate manner, respecting confidentiality requirements. This may be done in person, in writing, or in an email.

Protection and Enforcement:

- Appropriate actions will be taken to protect the victim's safety and to ensure that the bullying or harassment stops.
- Retaliation against any person who reports or participates in an investigation is strictly prohibited.
- Documentation of all reported incidents, investigations, and responses must be maintained by the school.
- Counseling and student support services will be made available to victims, witnesses, and students who engage in bullying behavior to promote restoration and community well-being.

Consequences:

The principal (or designee) will take immediate steps and provide appropriate follow-up action reasonably calculated to ensure that such conduct has stopped and ensure the safety of the student or students, including retaliation against any individual who in good faith reports such bullying or assists in the investigation.

Disciplinary actions will be consistent with Catholic values and the school's code of conduct. Possible consequences may include:

- Parent meetings and behavior modification plans
- Counseling or restorative interventions
- In-school or out-of-school suspension
- Isolation from peers or restricted privileges
- Expulsion in severe or repeated cases

False Reports:

Any student who falsely reports bullying or harassment may be subject to disciplinary action, which may include suspension or expulsion, and, if warranted, referral to local authorities.

570.4 Hateful Speech and Inclusion Statement

Catholic schools are committed to fostering an inclusive community in which all individuals are treated with dignity, integrity, and respect. Harassment, hateful speech, or discrimination of any kind interferes with this mission and will not be tolerated.

Harassment is conduct that creates a hostile environment, interferes with a student's educational performance or well-being, causes fear for safety, or risks substantial disruption, including off-property behavior if it foreseeably reaches school property. Harassment may be verbal, physical, visual, online, or sexual in nature, and may be based on, but not limited to, a person's race, ethnicity, culture, religion, age, gender, physical appearance, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, academic ability, disability, or language.

All allegations will be reviewed and investigated promptly, confidentially, and thoroughly. Counseling and support services will be made available to both victims and perpetrators as part of a restorative approach to healing and accountability.