

Northeast (Webutuck) Central School District Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) Parent's Guide

New York State's Dignity for All Students Act (The Dignity Act, DASA) seeks to provide the State's public elementary and secondary school students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function.

Dignity Act Coordinators		
School	Principal/ Admin. Designee	Staff Member
Webutuck Elementary School	Jennifer Hengen	Janice Mcspiritt
Eugene Brooks Intermediate School	Matthew Pascale	Tara Hart
Webutuck High School	Robert Knuschke	Carrie Havranek
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What is the Dignity Act?

Since July 2012, New York State has provided an official framework for how schools respond to negative behavior, such as bullying, harassment, intimidation, taunting, or discrimination. The Dignity for All Students Act, or DASA, outlines requirements for reporting and investigation, requires staff training on prevention and intervention, and identifies related communications for notifying parents and students about DASA-related topics. DASA specifically calls for the protection of students from harassment, bullying (including cyberbullying), or discrimination by employees or other students. According to the New York State Education Department, the aim of DASA is not to increase punishment, but rather to foster social interaction among students as a way to maintain a safe learning environment that results in less bullying, an increased ability to identify individual students who are being bullied, and an instilled responsibility to inform the necessary authorities when a peer is a victim of bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

Who is Protected Under the Dignity Act?

DASA specifies that students should not be subject to discrimination, bullying, or harassment, either actual or perceived, based on, but not limited to, the following:

- Race
- Color
- Ethnic Group
- National Origin
- Disability
- Religious Practice
- Religion
- Weight
- Sexual Orientation (person's emotional and sexual attraction to others)
- Gender (socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people)
- Sex (physical/biological characteristics that define male versus female)

What Constitutes a DASA-Level Incident?

An incident can be either a single or series of related verifiable occurrences. Other forms of discrimination that are not specifically named may also be prohibited, but not all misbehavior that takes place in school settings falls under the umbrella of DASA. The behavior in question may be accidental, for example, involving no real intent to harm. Or the incident may be a reflection of the student's immaturity, rather than of any malicious intent. These behaviors are no less serious than actual bullying, however, they do require different prevention and response

strategies. DASA coordinators are trained to identify whether a particular behavior or situation constitutes a DASA-level incident.

What Should I Do if I Think My Child is a Victim of a DASA-Level Incident?

If you think your child is being harassed, bullied, or discriminated against, speak with them immediately. If they indicate that they have been victimized, find out important details such as when, where, why, how, by whom, etc. Based on their responses, if you believe that your child may be a victim, report it to your student's teacher, principal, or a DASA coordinator immediately. Students should also be encouraged to directly report incidents of bullying, harassment, and discrimination if they are a victim or witness to such behavior. Students and parents can report a suspected incident either verbally or in writing to teachers or principals (who will notify a DASA coordinator) or they may notify a DASA coordinator directly. Although it is not necessary for parents and/or students to complete an official DASA Reporting Form to report an incident, this document is available on the District's website and may be completed if desired. The DASA coordinator can also assist parents and/or students in completing the form.

Key Terms

What is bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

What is discrimination?

The unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person based on race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender (including gender identity or expression), or sex.

What is harassment?

Harassment is defined as conduct which annoys, threatens, intimidates, or causes fear in another person. It is unwanted behavior that offends, demeans, or threatens another person. The behavior causes a hostile environment. It can include derogatory comments, slurs, improper propositions, assault, physically impeding or blocking behavior, as well as visual insults.

As seen above all three issues are very close in definition and all can have similar impact of students. Any of these behaviors can have serious, and lasting, consequences on both the aggressor and the victim.

Conflict vs Bullying?

Conflict is a struggle between two or more people who perceive they have incompatible goals or desires.

Conflict occurs naturally as we interact with one another. It is a normal part of life that we will not always agree with other people about the things we want, what we think, or what we want to do. Bullying behavior is very different from conflict. It is behavior that is intended to cause some kind of harm. Conflict is not bullying.

Teasing Vs. Bullying?

Teasing is a social exchange that can be friendly, neutral or negative. Done in the right spirit, it can actually be positive. When kids tease each other about clothes, musical tastes or behavior, it helps them learn to deal with constructive criticism. It's part of how they relate.

There are two main types of teasing—endearment teasing and influence teasing. Endearment teasing is a way to bond or form a relationship. When a kid misses a dunk in basketball, and a teammate says, “Hey Magic, nice shot,” it's endearment teasing. Teasing is not bullying.

The above has been adapted from understood.org, nobully.com, and USLegal

Who Are the DASA Coordinators?

At least one employee in each of our school buildings is designated as a DASA coordinator. The coordinators, who are trained in accordance with the New York State Education Department (NYSED), are charged with investigating reports of harassment, bullying, or discrimination in their respective buildings. Contact information for each **DASA coordinator in the District is listed on page 1** and also can be found in the Code of Conduct, which is posted on the website.

Each DASA coordinator is trained to handle human relations and the social patterns of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. They are a valuable resource for parents or children dealing with a DASA-level situation. With regard to reports which may have violated a student's Civil Rights or which may rise to the level of sexual harassment or assault a investigation will be conducted. In some instances, an outside appointed trained designee may also conduct an investigation.

Conducting an Investigation

Upon notification of a DASA complaint, the district assigned DASA coordinators may lead or supervise a thorough and timely investigation. Both the accused and the complainants, along with any witnesses, will be interviewed. When necessary, the District will take immediate steps to protect complainants pending the final outcome of an investigation. These steps may include (but are not limited to) academic accommodations, altering academic or bus schedules for either the complainant or accused, changing locker locations, allowing complainant to withdraw from or retake a class without penalty, and/ or providing an escort to ensure that the complainant can move safely between classes or other activities. While there is no legal timeline as to how long any one investigation should take to complete, we believe it is in the best interest of all parties that an investigation be prompt, thorough, and accurate.

Notification of Outcome

Both the complainants and the accused will receive a report outlining the outcome of the investigation, including a description of the alleged incident, an overview of the investigative process, and any action taken. If disciplinary action is taken against the accused, specifics may not be shared with the complainant or community at large. New York State Education Law protects the confidentiality of all students, including those found guilty of wrongdoing.

Disputing Results

Either the complainant or the accused may appeal the findings of an investigation, in writing, within 10 days of receipt of the decision. Appeals should be directed to the superintendent. If the superintendent upholds the decision, a written appeal may then be made to the Board of Education within 10 days. The Board's findings may be appealed to the Commissioner of Education within 30 days of receipt of their findings.

District Reporting Responsibilities

The DASA coordinator, superintendent, or principal will promptly notify law enforcement when it is believed that any harassment, bullying, or discrimination constitutes criminal conduct. These procedures are outlined in the Code of Conduct. Annually, the principal must report data and trends related to harassment, bullying, or discrimination to the superintendent, who in turn reports all material incidents annually to the New York State Commissioner of Education. These reports include:

- the type of harassment, bullying, or discrimination;
- the location of the incident (on school property, at a school function, off of school property);
- the involved parties; and
- the type of bias involved.

Prohibition of Retaliatory Behavior (Whistle-Blower Protection)

The District strictly prohibits any retaliatory behavior directed at any complainant, victim, witness, or any other individual who participates in the reporting or investigation of an incident of alleged harassment, bullying, or discrimination. In addition, any person who acts reasonably and in good faith in reporting bullying, harassment, or discrimination to school officials, the Commissioner, or law enforcement authorities, or who otherwise initiates, testifies, participates, or assists in any formal or informal proceedings shall also be protected. Such individuals will have immunity from any civil liability that may arise from making that report or from initiating, testifying, participating, or assisting in those proceedings.

Examples of Bullying

It is not always easy to determine whether a behavior is bullying. For instance, not everyone is always going to like one another, and it is natural for students to include their friends and exclude others when playing. Although unpleasant, in most cases this is not bullying. Anyone uncertain of whether or not a behavior is bullying should always consult a DASA coordinator.

Types of bullying include:

- **VERBAL BULLYING:** Name calling, teasing, sexual comments, taunting, and threatening to cause harm.
- **SOCIAL BULLYING:** Spreading rumors about someone, excluding others on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, and embarrassing someone in public.
- **PHYSICAL BULLYING:** Hitting, punching, shoving, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking someone's property, and making mean or rude hand gestures.
- **EMOTIONAL BULLYING:** Cruelly and deliberately attempting to hurt or humiliate someone, including teasing, spreading rumors, and excluding from activities.
- **CYBERBULLYING:** Using digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets to send, post, or share negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation.
- **MICROAGGRESSIONS:** Subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expressing a prejudiced attitude (via a comment or action) toward a member of a marginalized group.

Characteristics of Bullying Behavior

- Persistent
- Repeated
- Targets specific individual(s)

- Intended to cause fear or harm (physically or emotionally)
- Intended to hurt feelings
- Reduces self-esteem or damages reputation

How Do I Talk to My Child About Bullying?

- Explain what bullying is and make sure they understand that it's unacceptable behavior;
- Keep the lines of communication open. Know your child's friends, ask about their day, and listen to questions or concerns;
- Encourage your child to talk to you or a trusted adult at school if they are bullied or witness an incident of bullying;
- Serve as a role model by treating others with respect and understanding.

Signs That Your Child May Be Bullying Others

- Getting into physical or verbal fights;
- Disregarding/disrespecting other people's feelings;
- Disrespecting authority;
- Unexplained extra money or new belongings;
- Blaming others for problems;
- Lying to get out of trouble;
- Deliberately hurting pets or animals;
- Using anger to get what they want;
- Refusing to accept responsibility for actions.

What Should I Do if I Think My Child is Bullying Others?

- Talk to your child about the specific behavior and why it's wrong and won't be tolerated;
- Find out why your child bullied in order to understand the reasons and offer solutions;
- Use any disciplinary consequences to teach, not humiliate;
- Call your child's teacher, principal, social worker, or school counselor to talk about what happened and strategies for moving forward;
- Explain how their behavior impacts others.