**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND SECTION 59‑63‑120, CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, RELATING TO BULLYING PROHIBITION POLICIES ADOPTED BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS, SO AS TO PROVIDE PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO AND REMEDIATING ALLEGATIONS OF BULLYING, TO REQUIRE AN APPEALS PROCEDURE, AND TO PROVIDE CERTAIN ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Section 59‑63‑120 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 59‑63‑120. As used in this article:

(1) ‘Harassment, intimidation, or bullying’ means a gesture, an electronic communication, or a written, verbal, physical, or sexual act that is reasonably perceived to have the effect of:

(a) harming a student physically or emotionally or damaging a student’s property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of personal harm or property damage; ~~or~~

(b) substantially interfering with a student’s educational performance, opportunities, or benefits;

(c) substantially disrupting or interfering with the orderly operation of the school;

(d) creating a hostile or intimidating environment in the school, on school property, on a school bus, or other activity vehicle, or at a school‑sponsored event;

(e) insulting or demeaning a student or group of students causing substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the school; or

(f) being sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment.

(2) ‘School’ means in a classroom, on school premises, on a school bus or other school‑related vehicle, at an official school bus stop, at a school‑sponsored activity or event whether or not it is held on school premises, or at another program or function where the school is responsible for the child.”

SECTION 2. Section 59‑63‑140(B) and (C) of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“(B) The policy must include, but not be limited to, the following components:

(1) a statement prohibiting harassment, intimidation, or bullying of a student;

(2) a definition of harassment, intimidation, or bullying no less inclusive than the definition in Section 59‑63‑120;

(3) a description of appropriate student behavior;

(4) consequences and appropriate remedial actions for persons committing acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, and for persons engaging in reprisal or retaliation;

(5) procedures for reporting acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, to include a provision for reporting anonymously. However, formal disciplinary action must not be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report. The procedures must identify the appropriate school personnel responsible for taking the report and investigating the complaint;

(6) ~~procedures for prompt investigation of reports of serious violations and complaints;~~

~~(7)~~ a statement that prohibits reprisal or retaliation against a person who reports an act of harassment, intimidation, or bullying;

(~~8~~7) consequences and appropriate remedial action for persons found to have falsely accused another;

(~~9~~8) a process for discussing the district’s harassment, intimidation, or bullying policy with students; ~~and~~

(~~10~~9) a statement of how the policy is to be publicized, including notice that the policy applies to participation in school‑sponsored functions;

(10) procedures for responding to reports of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, which must:

(a) identify school and district personnel charged with addressing complaints and include written procedures for:

(i) proper documentation of allegations at the school and district level;

(ii) timelines for response to allegations;

(iii) procedures for informing parents or guardians of the student alleged to have bullied; provided this communication must include information on the steps being taken to prevent further incidents, disciplinary action, and any additional recommendations for outside counseling; and

(iv) procedures for informing parents or guardians of the student alleged to have been bullied; provided this communication must include steps being taken to prevent further incidents and procedures for ensuring the student can safely report any further incidents.

(b) A school district shall adopt a policy for additional procedures that may include referrals for out of school mediation or counseling and a process for making such referrals to ensure that the parent or guardian has received the information.

(c) A school district shall include in an adopted policy disciplinary actions which may include, but are not limited to, imposing a series of graduated consequences that include alternative discipline. In determining the appropriate response to students who engage in bullying behavior, school administrators should consider the type of behaviors, the frequency and any pattern of behaviors, and other relevant circumstances. Alternative discipline includes, but is not limited to:

(i) meeting with the student and the student’s parent or guardian;

(ii) reflective activities, such as requiring the student to write an essay about the student’s misbehavior;

(iii) mediation, but only when there is mutual conflict between peers, rather than one‑way negative behavior, and both parties voluntarily choose this option; and

(iv) in‑school detention or suspension, which may take place during lunchtime, after school, or on weekends; and

(d) In an effort to remediate any substantiated incident of bullying, counter the negative impact of the bullying, and reduce the risk of future bullying incidents, a district may adopt a policy for referrals for outside services that may benefit the victim, perpetrator, or other involved person. Referrals must include, but are not limited to:

(i) counseling;

(ii) anger management;

(iii) health counseling or intervention;

(iv) mental health counseling;

(v) participation in skills building and resolution activities, such as social‑emotional cognitive skills building, resolution circles, and restorative conferencing;

(vi) community service; and

(11) procedures for appealing a decision of a school principal or a superintendent’s designee related to taking or not taking remedial action in accordance with this policy, which must include providing notice to parents, guardians, and students of the right to appeal. The appeals procedure must be consistent with other appeals procedures established by the school board and may include an appeal to the superintendent.

(C) To assist local school districts in developing policies for the prevention of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, the State Board of Education shall develop model policies applicable to grades kindergarten through twelve, and shall denote requirements that must be met in policies adopted by local school districts. Local districts shall adopt policies that are at least as stringent as the model policies. The State Superintendent shall approve local policies to ensure that they meet the minimum requirements of the policies adopted by the State Board of Education. If, in the determination of the State Superintendent, the local policies fail to meet the minimum requirements established by the State Board of Education, the model policies shall become the policy of the local district until such time as an acceptable policy is submitted and approved. Additionally, the State Board of Education shall develop teacher preparation program standards on the identification and prevention of bullying. The model policies and standards must be developed no later than September 1, 2006.”

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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