

**Kimberly Hickson**  
*Principal*

**Rachel Medina**  
*Assistant Principal*

## *Delran Intermediate School*

20 Creek Road  
Delran, New Jersey 08075



September 7, 2017

Dear Parents and Students,

The Delran Board of Education prohibits acts of harassment, intimidation or bullying of a pupil. (H.I.B. Policy 5512.01, available on the district website) the following information is drawn directly from that policy:

“Harassment, intimidation or bullying” means any gesture, written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function or on a school bus and that:

1. Is motivated by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or mental, physical or sensory disability; or
2. By any other distinguishing characteristic; and
3. A reasonable person should know, under the circumstances, that the act(s) will have the effect of harming a pupil or damaging the pupil’s property or placing a pupil in reasonable fear of harm to his/her person or damage to his/her property; or
4. Has the effect of insulting or demeaning any pupil or group of pupils in such a way as to cause substantial disruption in or substantial interference with the orderly operation of the school.

Acts of harassment, intimidation or bullying may also be a pupil exercising power and control over another pupil, either in isolated incidents (e.g., intimidation, harassment) or patterns of harassing or intimidating behavior (e.g., bullying).

Complaints alleging violations of this Policy shall be reported to an administrator or guidance counselor. The Assistant Principal (Mrs. Medina) and Anti-Bullying Specialist (Miss Brown) are responsible for determining whether an alleged act constitutes a violation of this Policy. The Anti-Bullying Specialist shall conduct a prompt, thorough and complete investigation of the alleged incident. The Anti-Bullying Specialist and Assistant Principal will maintain a record of each investigation regarding allegations of harassment, intimidation or bullying. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for pupils who commit acts of harassment, intimidation or bullying may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion.

The language above is from our district policy and will guide our response to instances of bullying. At Delran Intermediate School, we always work hard to set a tone of respect, encourage our students

through our example and through pointed and frequent reminders to treat peers kindly, and step in firmly when that goal is not met.

New Jersey now has the toughest bullying laws in the nation. A significant difference parents will experience is the documentation. Now you will receive two formal letters if your child is involved in a situation judged to fall within this definition of harassment, intimidation or bullying – one at the beginning of the investigation, and one at the end. We will better be able to track students whose names recur and apply progressive formal and informal interventions to reduce these behaviors. The entire policy is intended to protect children. It is also designed to heighten parental awareness that their children may be responsible for treating their peers unkindly. Parents can then join the schools in working to retrain students to greater levels of respect and civility. Finally, it is intended to establish accountability. Schools are given clear guidance in when and how to intervene, and students who behave inappropriately are disciplined in the hopes that no student ever dreads coming to school because of harassment, intimidation or bullying.

Some of you are reading this from the perspective of children who have experienced bullying and hoping our school will stand behind the language and respond strongly and swiftly to any and all instances of harassment, intimidation and bullying. Others are reading it from the perspective of wondering if schools in general, and our school in particular, will begin to punish students for any statement or action that could be considered as unkind. It is worth noting that there will still be examples of peer conflict, which are similar behaviors, but are not examples of bullying. Each incident will receive attention and an appropriate intervention, but not every report of an unkind statement or action will necessarily meet the standard of bullying. The benefit to our school community is that the awareness of children and adults will be heightened to the absolute necessity of treating other human beings with respect, a life lesson that eclipses in importance every other thing we set out to teach our students.

We would like to share with you some of our primary concerns, and we encourage you to discuss these with your children.

**Bias:**

Please help us by reminding your children that race, religion, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation are off-limits as topics for jokes, remarks and doodles. Students need to understand that drawing a swastika, making a racial, ethnic, religious, disabled or gay joke, using a pejorative term, or belittling students for these reasons are serious issues with strong disciplinary consequences here at school and potential legal consequences in the wider world.

Students need parents' help to develop good judgment regarding this issue. They may make the comment innocently, or feel that their intent was a "joke" and it's "no big deal" or, "we're friends, he doesn't care". Some will make remarks about a group they belong to. Neither the intent, the reaction of the recipient, nor the identity of the speaker mitigates the inappropriateness of biased remarks.

**Harassment:**

Students of this age are developing a sense of humor and need guidance to make sure they understand that laughter at their own expense, or at a situation is fine, but laughter at someone else's expense can quickly cross the line to harassment. No student wants to be laughed at. We do not tolerate students who attempt to build their own status at someone else's expense.

**Intimidation:**

Students can sometimes speak in ways threatening violence and then tell the adult who intervenes, “I was only kidding”. Then students (and sometimes parents) are upset that the child faces discipline for the threatening language. Threats of violence, kidding or real, have no place in a school environment.

**Bullying:**

Students can be very physical with one another. Often horseplay is just that, horseplay between friends. It tips into the realm of bullying when one student puts hands on another child who is younger, smaller or in any way vulnerable. Swatting the back of a friend’s head can be a gesture with very little significance among two friends (resulting in an intervention or consequence, but not rising to the level of bullying), but swatting the back of a student’s head can rise to the level of bullying if the students are not friends, and the one hit feels intimidated.

**Cyber-bullying:**

Harassment, intimidation and bullying occurring on-line is challenging for schools, but can be a problem among pre-teens. If there is an interaction of which you need us to be aware, please capture screen shots, or cut and paste the entire exchange into an email or word document.

In cases of bias, harassment, intimidation and bullying, the situation is much worse if there is an imbalance of power or status between the two students. It is part of what guides our range of responses. Vulnerable students should never be targets. Inappropriate words spoken from one friend to another will result in an intervention, but the same words coming from a perceived “popular” child to a vulnerable child who struggles to fit in are more likely to rise to the level of bullying.

A question that we ask of students is, “What kind of school do you want to go to?” Each student wants to go to a school where he or she never has to worry about being hurt. To realize that vision takes every child committing to treating peers with respect. At DIS, we model respect and we expect respect for each adult and child, and, with your support, we will use the impetus of NJ’s bullying law to move closer to our vision.

Thank you for your support.

Respectfully,

Kimberly Hickson  
Principal

Rachel Medina  
Assistant Principal