

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY

POLICY PROHIBITING HARASSMENT

Date Approved by
School Committee:

2/25/03

Signature of Chair:

On File

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I. BACKGROUND OF POLICY

The Lexington Public Schools is committed to maintaining a school environment free of any harassment based on, but not limited to, age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion or sexual orientation. Such harassment in the workplace or school environment is unlawful and is absolutely prohibited. This includes harassment by administrators, certified and support personnel, students, vendors, and other individuals in school or at school-related events. Further, any retaliation against an individual who has complained about harassment or against individuals for cooperating with an investigation of a harassment complaint is similarly unlawful and will not be tolerated.

II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Harassment is defined as any communication or conduct that is sufficiently serious to limit or deny the ability of a student to participate in or benefit from the educational program or the ability of a staff member to perform his/her duties. It includes, but is not limited to, any communication, written, spoken or otherwise, such as jokes, comments, innuendoes, notes; material placed on the internet or other electronic media such as email, web page, and voice mail; writing placed on school property, the display of pictures or symbols, graffiti, gestures, or other conduct that offends or shows disrespect to others based upon age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

By law, the particular communication or conduct is viewed from the perspective of a reasonable person with the characteristic on which the harassment is based. What one person may consider acceptable behavior may reasonably be viewed as harassment by another person; therefore, individuals should consider how their words and actions might be viewed by other individuals.

It should be noted that, while this policy sets forth the goal of the Lexington Public Schools to maintain a work and educational environment that is free of harassment based upon age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion or sexual orientation, the policy is not designed or intended to limit the authority of school officials to discipline or take remedial action for conduct which is deemed unacceptable, whether or not that conduct satisfies the definition of harassment.

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Sexual Harassment

While all types of harassment are prohibited, sexual harassment requires particular attention. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. Acceptance of or submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment or education, or
2. The individual's response to such conduct is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting an employee or as a basis for educational, disciplinary, or other decisions affecting a student, or
3. Such conduct interferes with an individual's job duties, education, or participation in extracurricular activities, or
4. The conduct creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or school environment.

The legal definition of sexual harassment is broad. In addition to the above examples, other sexually oriented conduct, whether it is intended or not, that is unwelcome and has the effect of creating a work or educational environment that is hostile, offensive, intimidating or humiliating to individuals of either gender may also constitute sexual harassment. While it is not possible to list all circumstances that may constitute such harassment, examples may include references to sexual conduct, comments on an individual's body, unwelcome leers, and suggestive or insulting comments.

III. APPLICATION

Employee Complaints

An **employee**¹ who believes that he/she is the victim of harassment should contact:

Director of Human Resources
Lexington Public Schools
1557 Massachusetts Avenue
Lexington, MA 02420
(781)861-2556

If an employee does not wish to discuss the issue with the Director of Human Resources or feels that she is not addressing the problem in an effective manner, the employee should contact the Superintendent of Schools (781)861-2550.

¹ Refer to Lexington Public Schools: Grievance Procedure

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Student Complaints

A **student** who believes that he/she is the victim of harassment should report the matter to a teacher, counselor, or administrator who in turn will notify a complaint manager in the school. As an alternative, a student may report directly to a complaint manager. Notice of each school's complaint managers will be posted in a prominent location in the school.

All employees of the Lexington Public Schools must respond to complaints by students of harassment by notifying the building principal or an appointed complaint manager. Employees are required to take every report of harassment seriously.

A **student**² may also file a complaint alleging harassment by contacting:

Director of Special Education
Diamond Middle School
99 Hancock St.
Lexington, MA 02420
(781)861-2490

If a student does not wish to discuss the issue with a teacher, counselor, administrator, complaint manager, or the Director of Special Education, or if the student feels that the aforementioned people do not address the problem in an effective manner, the student should contact the Superintendent of Schools (781) 861-2550.

The Director of Human Resources, Director of Special Education, and Superintendent as listed above are also available to provide information about this policy and the Lexington Public Schools' complaint process.

Investigation and Closure of a Complaint

The Lexington Public Schools urges all individuals in the school community to bring any complaint of harassment to the attention of school personnel so that they can resolve the issue. The Lexington Public Schools will promptly investigate every complaint, observing all relevant state and federal laws and regulations and school system policies and procedures, as well as applicable contractual requirements. If it determines that harassment has occurred, Lexington Public Schools will take appropriate action to end the harassment and to ensure that it is not repeated.

² Refer to Lexington Public Schools: Student Complaint Procedure

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When an investigation has been completed, school personnel will inform the complainant of the results and file a report with the Director of Human Resources, Coordinator for Title IX, the Student Services, Coordinator for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and for M.G.L. Chapter 76 Section 5 (commonly known as Chapter 622).

Retaliation against any individual who has filed a complaint of harassment or who cooperates in an investigation is unlawful and will not be tolerated.

Penalties

Persons who engage in harassment or retaliation will be subject to suspension, termination/expulsion or other sanctions, subject to applicable school system policies and procedures, as well as applicable contractual requirements.

In certain cases, harassment of a student, and in particular, sexual harassment of a student, may constitute child abuse under Massachusetts law³. Verbal sexual harassment of any child by anyone, including school district employees/volunteers, is recognized as a form of child abuse and a warning sign of actual physical or sexual abuse. Such abuse must be reported immediately to the Department of Social Services in accordance with the requirements of M.G.L. c. I 19, s. 51A. A matter reported under this section shall be screened to determine whether an investigation is pursuant to the Child Abuse and Neglect Policy, the Sexual Harassment Policy, or both. The Lexington Public Schools will comply with all legal requirements governing the reporting of suspected cases of child abuse.

References

State agencies that enforce laws prohibiting harassment or receive complaints thereunder include the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), which is located at One Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108, telephone (617) 727-3990, and the Massachusetts Department of Education, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5023, telephone (781) 338-3300.

Federal agencies responsible for enforcing federal laws prohibiting harassment include the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), One Congress Street, Boston, MA 02109, telephone (617) 565-3200, TDD Users (617) 565-3204; and the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), J.W. McCormack POCH, Boston, MA 02109-4557, telephone (617) 223-9662, TDD Users (617) 223-9695.

Voted 2/25/03

Reformatted: 2/03

³ See Lexington Public Schools: Child Abuse Policy