



Florham Park Public Schools

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
P.O. BOX 39 FLORHAM PARK, NJ 07932
973-822-3880
973-822-0867 Superintendent Fax
973-822-0716 Business Office Fax

DR. STEVEN G. CAPONEGRO
Superintendent of Schools
steve.caponegro@fpks.org

JOHN CSATLOS
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary
john.csatlos@fpks.org

October 14, 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

RE: Difference between conflict and HIB

As we just concluded the Week of Respect in the Florham Park School District, we would like to review the Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) policy, as well as the difference between conflict and HIB. Conflict is a typical and healthy part of child and adolescent development.

All students will experience conflict as a natural part of life. Often students are able to peacefully resolve a conflict amongst themselves. At times our students may need some help and support from parents/guardians or school staff members. Our staff are always supporting, observing, and monitoring students and facilitate conflict resolution as needed.

At times, students, parents, and community members may need to report conflicts or issues to the school principal for follow up. We encourage everyone to share any concerns with their children's principal. When making a report of a concern it is helpful for parents to understand New Jersey HIB language. Please note that all concerns will be investigated. **According to the the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying is:**

1. any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it be a single incident or a series of incidents, that: Is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by an actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic;
2. Takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus; or off school grounds, as provided for in N.J.S.A. 18A:37-15.3,
3. Substantially disrupts or interferes with the orderly operation of the school or the rights of other students;
4. **and that**
 - a. A reasonable person should know, under the circumstances, will have the effect of

physically or emotionally harming a student or damaging the student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm to his person or damage to his property; or

- b. Has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students; or
- c. Creates a hostile educational environment for the student by interfering with a student's education or by severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to the student.

Our students receive education on the topic of HIB via classroom lessons and assemblies every school year. Prior to the implementation of this law, the word "bullying" could have been used to describe many different types of behavior that would not necessarily meet the criteria for HIB with the current legal definition in New Jersey. We would like to clarify some information to better assist students and parents/guardians in recognizing the differences between a typical student conflict and behaviors that rise to the level of reporting an HIB.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, we ask that you describe incidents as they have occurred without labeling the behavior as "bullying", "harassment" or "intimidation" unless it is your intent to formally begin an HIB investigation. There are several reasons for this:

1. The principal needs specific information about what happened, what was said, and who was involved; just reporting "bullying" without details does not provide us with a clear picture of your concerns and may prevent us from acting swiftly. With detailed information without labels, the principal can determine if an HIB needs to be conducted as well as address concerns from a Code of Conduct and/or conflict resolution perspective.
2. At times an HIB investigation is initiated and a parent/guardian may contact us requesting that we stop the process. Once an HIB investigation begins, there is no way to retract a statement and/or request that an HIB investigation not be conducted as per the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act.
3. Once an HIB investigation begins, the students cannot be brought together for conflict resolution or other restorative discussions.

Please know that we want any and all concerns to be communicated to your child's building principal. We ensure that anything reported, whether it is a conflict, code of conduct concern, or a possible HIB, is looked into. If a report is determined to be a possible HIB, the following will occur as per the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act set forth by the state:

- An administrator or their designee will call the parents/guardians of students involved
- Potential victims, accused, and witnesses will be interviewed
- Upon the conclusion of the investigation process, parents/guardians will be notified of the findings - confirmed HIB, or Unfounded HIB

- Confidential results will be reported at the next Board of Education meeting at the conclusion of the investigation
- Parents/guardians will receive a letter postmarked within five school days of the BOE meeting with the findings documented in writing

Across our three buildings, Florham Park Public Schools has experienced great success with conflict resolution and utilizing a restorative approach. This process allows students to meet and express the nature of their conflict with the help of a trained staff member, in a safe space. Effective conflict resolution skills are critical for students to build and maintain positive peer relationships now and in their future endeavors. In Florham Park we are committed to the social and emotional growth of all our students. We welcome any questions or concerns from our parent/guardian community regarding the HIB process. Please visit our district webpage for all HIB Information at:

https://www.fpkps.org/for_parents/harassment_policy_hib_

Sincerely,

Anna Crumm
District Anti-Bullying Coordinator