

Managing Bullying Events in Schools

Background

The victim, a transgender female high school student, was repeatedly harassed over the course of two academic school years by a fellow classmate. Each incident was more severe than the last, resulting in the ultimate expulsion of the aggressor.

Scenario

Throughout the Scenario, let the aggressor be known as *Student A* while the person who was bullied be known as *Student B*. The first critical incident occurred in the spring of the school year when *Student A*, a female high school student, approached *Student B* in the cafeteria during lunch period. A verbal confrontation ensued for reasons undetermined through post-incident investigations. Staff separated the students accordingly during that period; however, subsequent investigation concluded it to be unlikely that this incident would lead to any retaliation or further disruptions. Both students were made aware that such behavior was unacceptable and would be met with disciplinary actions if it happened again. The ongoing bullying led to a second incident, which took place in early September of the following school year. *Student A* observed *Student B* walking alone in the hallway after school was dismissed and began yelling and pushing her. This incident lasted about two to three minutes, and was mostly captured on video with a bystander's cell phone. The students were again separated and an investigative process ensued, which lasted five weeks. Once the investigation was concluded in mid-October, *Student A* was notified that she would be receiving a three day out-of-school suspension. While waiting for the bus on that same day, *Student A* again confronted *Student B* and engaged in a variety of hostile and insubordinate behavior, including pushing *Student B*, striking a staff member, damaging school property, and defying administrators. *Student A* was ultimately expelled following an investigation and expulsion hearing.

Lessons Learned

- School staff failed to conduct a proper investigation that identified the cause of the first incident.
- The school did not notify the designated Title IX Coordinator or Law Enforcement of the potential bullying of a student in a protected class.
- The Board of Education failed to implement a safety plan to ensure the emotional health and physical safety of *Student B* during and following the investigative process.
- School did not follow its safe school climate plan, which is mandated under Connecticut Public Act No. 11-232.

Recommended Best Practices

CIRMA recommends the following best practices:

- Schools must follow Public Act No. 11-232 – An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws, which mandates that “each local and regional board of education shall develop and implement a safe school climate plan to address the existence of bullying in its schools...”.
- Continue to train faculty and staff on how to identify the warning signs of bullying and appropriate ways of intervening.
- Schools should communicate to all faculty the roles and responsibilities of school staff, the Title IX Coordinator, and Law Enforcement, as each should play specific roles in their respective investigative and disciplinary processes.
- Schools should consider training all faculty and staff on the Restorative Practices method or another behavioral management technique, including asking the following questions in the interview process:
 - What happened?
 - What were you thinking at the time?
 - What have you thought about since?
 - What has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
 - What do you think you need to do to make things right?

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant. Visit CIRMA.org for a list of current training programs and e-Learning Center courses.