Comprehensive Guide to Investigating Bullying Incidents
For School Employees and Youth Organization Staff
Date: October 2025

Purpose

This guide helps staff conduct fair, thorough, and timely investigations of alleged bullying. It ensures compliance with the Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012 (YBPA), protects students' rights, and promotes a safe and supportive learning environment.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about the contents of this guide, please contact Ernest Shepard, Program Manager of the Youth Bullying Prevention Program, at ernest.shepard@dc.gov or (202) 519-3333.

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1. Legal & Policy Framework

The foundation of any bullying investigation is a clear understanding of the legal and policy standards that apply. In Washington, DC, all schools and youth programs that receive District funding, including most private schools, as well as all youth-serving government agencies are subject to the Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012 (YBPA). This law establishes a uniform definition of bullying, sets expectations for prevention and response, and ensures that investigations are conducted fairly and consistently across the District. The YBPA requires each covered entity to enforce a bullying prevention policy.

Legal Definition of Bullying Under the YBPA:

Under the YBPA, "bullying" means any severe, pervasive, or persistent act or conduct, whether physical, electronic, or verbal, that:

- May be based on a youth's actual or perceived race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, genetic information, disability, source of income, or any other distinguishing characteristic, or on a youth's association with a person, or group with any person, with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics; and
- May reasonably be predicted to:
    - Place the youth in reasonable fear of physical harm to the youth's person or property;
    - Cause a substantial detrimental effect on the youth's physical or mental health;
    - Substantially interfere with the youth's academic performance or attendance; or
    - Substantially interfere with the youth's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by an agency, educational institution, or grantee.

This definition is not a personal opinion, parental perception, or general understanding of what constitutes bullying—it is the specific **legal definition** that determines whether formal bullying procedures and interventions must be implemented. While entities may, and should, address other inappropriate or harmful behavior, if the reported conduct doesn't meet these specific criteria it would not be classified as "bullying" under the YBPA.

Breaking Down "Severe, Pervasive, or Persistent"

The law requires that bullying behavior be **severe**, **pervasive**, OR **persistent**, meaning it only needs to be ONE of these three things:

1. Severe
    - **Definition:** The conduct is so serious or intense that a single incident or short series of incidents has significant impact.
    - **Example:** A student physically assaults another student, causing injury and creating immediate fear of further harm.
2. Pervasive
    - **Definition:** The conduct is widespread, affecting multiple areas of the victim's school experience or social environment.
    - **Example:** A group of students spreads rumors about a peer across multiple social media platforms, in different classes, and during various school activities, creating a hostile environment throughout the school day.
3. Persistent
    - **Definition:** The conduct continues over time.
    - **Example:** A student repeatedly calls another student derogatory names related to their sexual orientation during lunch periods over several weeks.

Key Legal Requirements

For conduct to qualify as bullying under this definition, it must:

1. **May be based on a protected characteristic** (actual or perceived): race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, genetic information, disability, source of income, or other distinguishing characteristics, or on the youth's association with anyone with these characteristics;

   AND
2. **Be reasonably predicted to cause at least one of four specific effects:**
    - Place the youth in reasonable fear of physical harm to person or property;
    - Cause substantial detrimental effect on physical or mental health;

- Substantially interfere with academic performance or attendance; and/or
- Substantially interfere with participation in the entity's services, activities, or privileges

3. **Fall within the scope of school jurisdiction** (on school property, during school-sponsored events, or off-site conduct that substantially interferes with the youth's participation)

Important Distinctions

Remember that this legal definition may differ from:

- Dictionary definitions of bullying
- Personal experiences or understanding of bullying
- Parent or student perceptions of what constitutes bullying
- Broader concepts of harassment or inappropriate behavior

Scope:

1. The YBPA specifies when and where a policy applies – not just physically but also virtually. The Act applies to bullying that occurs:
    - On the entity's physical property;
    - During entity-sponsored activities, programs, or events;
    - On the entity's transportation or transportation sponsored by the entity;
    - At any transit stop, such as a bus stop, where youth wait to be transported to the entity or to an entity-sponsored event; or
    - Through electronic communication if it substantially disrupts or interferes with a youth's ability to participate in or benefit from the entity's services, activities, or education, or if it creates a hostile environment.

2. Importantly, the Act explicitly recognizes that bullying can happen through electronic means, such as social media, text messages, emails, websites, or other digital platforms. Even if this electronic conduct originates off-site and outside school hours, it is still within the scope of the policy if it substantially interferes with a youth's education, threatens their safety, or creates a hostile environment on school/agency grounds.

3. This means an investigation should consider both the location and the impact of the alleged bullying. For example:
    - A mean-spirited social media post made at home but seen by peers at school and causing emotional distress at school is within the scope.
    - Text messages exchanged outside school hours that lead to fights or fear at school are within the scope.

2. Guiding Principles

- Timeliness: Start as soon as possible — delays can escalate harm.
    - Legal requirements mandate that investigations must begin within 2 business days of receiving a complaint and be completed within 30 calendar days. Quick action prevents further incidents, preserves evidence, and demonstrates a commitment to youth safety. Delays can worsen the situation for victims and may compromise witness recollection.
- Impartiality: Do not assume guilt or innocence.
    - Approach each case with an open mind, gathering facts objectively without predetermined conclusions. This protects both the alleged victim and the accused from bias, ensures due process, and maintains the integrity of the investigation. Document all perspectives fairly and let evidence guide conclusions.
- Confidentiality: Respect privacy but explain limits.
    - Information should only be shared with those who need to know to conduct the investigation or ensure safety. However, confidentiality cannot be absolute. Explain to all parties and witnesses that information may need to be shared with administrators, parents, or law enforcement when safety is at risk or as required by law.
- Supportive Environment: Reduce stress for everyone involved.
    - Create a safe space for reporting and participating in investigations. This includes providing emotional support resources, ensuring no retaliation occurs, and communicating regularly with all parties about the process. A supportive

approach encourages honest participation and helps maintain a positive school climate. Under the YBPA, entities are required to inform the parties

- Comprehensive Documentation: Write everything down.
    - Maintain detailed records of all interviews, evidence collected, actions taken, and decisions made. Include dates, times, locations, and direct quotes when possible. Thorough documentation protects the school legally, ensures consistency, and provides a clear record for follow-up actions or appeals. Under the YBPA, entities are required to draft a written record of complaints and issue written reports of findings.
- Non-Retaliation: Protect all parties from retaliation.
    - Clearly communicate that retaliation against anyone involved in the investigation is prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. Monitor all parties and witnesses for signs of retaliation and take immediate action if it occurs. This protection extends to witnesses, reporters, and all participants in the process.

3. Interim Measures: Keeping Youth Safe During the Investigation

When an allegation of bullying is reported, the investigation process can take days or weeks to complete. But youth safety cannot wait. That's why it is critical to implement interim measures immediately, even before the investigation concludes.

Non-Retaliation: Protect all parties from retaliation.

Why this matters:

- **Safety comes first.** If a youth reports being bullied, they may already feel unsafe, isolated, or at risk. Waiting until after an investigation to take action can expose them to further harm, increase anxiety, and erode trust in the adults responsible for protecting them.
- **Prevents escalation.** Without intervention, bullying can intensify. Interim measures can de-escalate tensions and prevent further incidents.
- **Shows youth and families you take them seriously.** Quick action demonstrates to the targeted youth, their family, the alleged aggressor, and bystanders that your school or program treats bullying seriously. This builds a culture of accountability and care.

- **Reduces retaliation risks.** When a report is made, there's a potential for retaliation. Interim supports can help monitor and reduce those risks by setting boundaries and keeping the involved students appropriately separated.
- **Supports mental well-being.** The period after a report is often the most emotionally charged. Interim counseling, check-ins, or safe spaces can make a big difference in how a the youth copes while the investigation unfolds.

You don't need to know exactly what happened to know that a student deserves to feel safe. Interim measures are not about assigning blame – they're about creating a protective environment while you gather the facts. Putting these supports in place early is not just good practice – it's a moral and professional responsibility and is required by the YBPA.

Examples of Interim Measures:

- **Safety Plans**
    - Structured agreements outlining specific steps and precautions to protect the targeted student from further harm while maintaining their access to education.
- **Separation Plans**
    - Temporary arrangements to minimize contact between involved parties, such as different class schedules, lunch periods, proximity in the classroom, or physical locations within the school.
- **Temporary Counseling or Emotional Support Services**
    - Short-term access to school counselors, social workers, or external mental health professionals to help students process the situation and develop coping strategies.
- **Classwork flexibility**
    - Academic accommodations for affected students such as extended deadlines, alternative assignment formats, or modified participation requirements to reduce academic stress during the investigation.

- **Increased adult presence in high-conflict areas**
    - Enhanced supervision in locations where incidents occurred or are likely to occur, such as hallways, cafeterias, bathrooms, or playgrounds.
- **Safety word**
    - A predetermined code word or phrase that students can use to immediately signal distress to trusted adults, triggering prompt intervention and support.
- **Daily check-ins**
    - Regular scheduled meetings between the affected student and a designated staff member to monitor wellbeing, assess ongoing safety concerns, and provide consistent emotional support throughout the investigation process.

Steps to the Investigation:

1. **Receive the Report**
    - Take all reports seriously.
    - Accept verbal, written, or anonymous reports.
    - Draft a written record of the complaint.
    - Thank the reporter and explain the next steps.
2. **Preliminary Review**
    - Does the alleged behavior align with the YBPA definition of bullying?
    - Did the alleged behavior occur on school property or other location covered by the YBPA?
    - Is there an immediate safety concern? If yes, address immediately.
    - Is there a credible allegation of criminal activity? If yes, report it to the Principal or to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.
3. **Assign Investigator**
    - Investigator must be trained, impartial, and not directly involved in the situation.
4. **Plan the Investigation**
    - Identify who needs to be interviewed.
    - Gather evidence proactively.
    - Schedule interviews at convenient times and in a way that ensures privacy.

5. **Conduct Interviews**
    - Meet privately with all parties — target(s), aggressor(s), witnesses, reporter(s).
6. **Gather & Preserve Evidence**
    - This includes digital, physical, and testimonial evidence.
7. **Analyze Evidence**
    - Use legal criteria to assess findings.
8. **Determine Outcome & Communicate Results**
    - Draft a written report of the findings and recommendations.
9. **Inform all parties of findings and next steps.**
    - Apply consequences/supports appropriately.

4. Evidence Collection & Evaluation

Evidence serves as the foundation for all bullying investigation determinations. The investigator's primary responsibility is to collect, preserve, and evaluate evidence to determine whether the reported behavior meets the legal definition of bullying under the YBPA.

The investigator must carefully analyze all collected evidence in light of both elements of the YBPA definition of bullying:

Element 1: Conduct Analysis of the Conduct

1. **Severity, Pervasiveness, or Persistence:** Evidence must show the behavior was either severe (serious in nature), pervasive (widespread), or persistent (enduring or frequent).
2. **Form of Conduct:** Document whether behavior was physical, electronic, or verbal.
3. **Protected Characteristics:** Determine if conduct was based on any of the enumerated characteristics or association with someone who has these characteristics.

Element 2: Impact Analysis

Evidence must demonstrate the conduct can reasonably be predicted to cause at least one of the four specified harmful outcomes:

1. Fear of physical harm to person or property;
2. Substantial detrimental effect on physical or mental health;

3. Substantial interference with academic performance or attendance; and/or
4. Substantial interference with ability to participate in school services, activities, or privileges

Types of Evidence:

- **Direct Evidence: Eyewitness testimony, video, messages, photos**
    - Direct evidence provides firsthand accounts or documentation of bullying incidents. This is often the strongest form of evidence as it directly demonstrates what occurred.
- **Circumstantial Evidence: Pattern of behavior, prior complaints**
    - While not directly showing the incident, circumstantial evidence can establish context, motive, and patterns that support or refute allegations.
- **Digital Evidence: Screenshots, emails, texts, posts**
    - Digital evidence has become increasingly important as cyberbullying grows more prevalent. This evidence can exist across multiple platforms and devices.

Tips:

- **Act quickly to preserve evidence –** digital content disappears, memories fade, and witnesses become harder to locate. Start evidence collection immediately upon receiving a report.
- **Focus on the YBPA elements –** Always collect evidence that specifically addresses whether conduct was "severe, pervasive, or persistent" and whether it can reasonably predict one of the four harmful outcomes.
- **Maintain objectivity and document everything –** Record what you observe, not what you interpret. Include details about when where the conduct occurred and who was present, and exact quotes from interviews.
- **Verify and corroborate –** Don't rely on single sources. Cross-check witness statements, ask for supporting documentation, authenticate digital evidence, and look for multiple pieces of evidence that support the same conclusion.

- **Require direct evidence for findings –** While patterns and prior complaints provide important context, your determination should be supported by direct evidence that clearly demonstrates the alleged bullying behavior occurred.

5. Interview Process

Effective interviewing is the cornerstone of a thorough bullying investigation. The quality of information gathered during interviews often determines whether investigators can make accurate findings. Skilled interviewing techniques ensure students feel safe to share their experiences while providing investigators with the detailed information needed to assess whether conduct occurred and meets the legal definition of bullying.

Here are some best practices for interviewing during a bullying investigation:

- **Interview all parties separately –** prevents contamination of accounts and allows each person to speak freely without influence from others present. Start with the complainant, then witnesses, then the accused.
- **Create a safe, private environment –** choose a neutral location away from peers and potential distractions. Ensure confidentiality and explain the purpose of the interview upfront to build trust.
- **Use open-ended questions first** – Begin with "tell me what happened" rather than leading yes or no questions. This allows the interviewee to share their perspective in their own words before you ask for specific details.
- **Focus on observable facts, not opinions** – Ask "What did you see/hear?" rather than "Do you think this was bullying?" Stick to concrete details about who, what, when, where, and how.
- **Document exact quotes** – Write down precise wording, especially statements that show intent, impact, or fear. These direct quotes can be crucial evidence in your final determination.
- **Clarify inconsistencies gently** – if accounts don't match, ask clarifying questions without being accusatory. Different perspectives on the same event are normal and don't necessarily indicate dishonesty.

- **End with future safety planning** – Ask what the student needs to feel safe and explain next steps in the process. This helps reduce anxiety and shows the investigation is solution-focused.

6. Assessing Credibility

Credibility assessment is a critical skill for investigators, as conflicting accounts are common in bullying investigations. Investigators must evaluate the reliability of each piece of information using objective criteria. This process helps ensure fair, evidence-based determinations.

Key Factors in Credibility Assessment:

1. Consistency of Statements
    - Are the party and witness accounts consistent over time?
    - Do the details remain largely the same, or do they change significantly without explanation?
    - Are the witness's statements consistent with known facts (e.g. camera footage, schedules, other observations)?
2. Plausibility and Specificity
    - Are the details believable and logically possible?
    - Are events described with clarity and detail, or are they vague and generalized?
3. Corroboration
    - Do other students or adults confirm aspects of the account?
    - Does physical or digital evidence support the party or witness's version?
4. Demeanor and Nonverbal Cues
    - Does the party or witness appear nervous, defensive, or evasive when answering specific questions?
    - Do they display signs of being coached or rehearsed?
5. Motivation and Bias
    - Does the student have a known conflict with the other party that could motivate false or exaggerated statements?

- Is there a history of dishonesty, retaliation, or past behavioral concerns that may impact credibility?

6. Developmental Considerations
    - Is the student's developmental level or language ability affecting how they express themselves?
    - Younger students or those with disabilities may need additional support or alternative methods of expression to convey their experiences accurately.

Caution against Bias:

Investigators must avoid allowing personal impressions, stereotypes, or assumptions to influence their judgement. Credibility should be assessed using neutral, observable criteria.

Documentation Tip:

When noting credibility in the investigative summary, avoid subjective language (e.g., "I didn't believe her") and instead use objective phrasing (e.g., "Student A's account was inconsistent with camera footage and changed over time without explanation").

7. Making a Determination

The determination phase is where investigators synthesize all collected evidence and apply the YBPA legal definition to reach a conclusion. This decision must be objective, well-documented, and based solely on the evidence gathered during the investigation. The determination will guide all subsequent actions and interventions.

Standard of Proof

Bullying investigations typically use the "preponderance of evidence" standard, meaning it is more likely than not (greater than 50% likely) that bullying occurred as defined by the YBPA. This is a lower standard than "beyond a reasonable doubt" used in criminal cases, but higher than mere suspicion or plausibility.

Possible Determinations

- **Substantiated (Bullying Occurred)** – Evidence meets the preponderance standard. Document which specific evidence supports each element.
- **Unsubstantiated (Bullying Did Not Occur or Does not Meet Legal Definition)** – Evidence indicates that the reported behavior did not occur as alleged, or, while concerning behavior may have occurred, the conduct does not meet the legal threshold for bullying under the YBPA.
- **Unable to Substantiate (Insufficient Evidence) –** There is insufficient reliable evidence to make a determination either way. This should be used when evidence is genuinely conflicting, key witnesses are unavailable, or critical evidence cannot be obtained despite thorough investigation efforts.

8. Post-Investigation Actions

Once an investigation is complete, you must take prompt, appropriate action to address the findings. These actions should be consistent with the YBPA, which emphasizes both accountability and support to ensure student safety, prevent recurrence, and promote a positive school/organization climate.

Remember: Investigators have 30 days to conclude their bullying investigation per the requirements of the YBPA.

Issuing Sanctions for Students Found Responsible

If a student is determined to have engaged in bullying behavior, the school/organization must apply appropriate disciplinary or remedial measures. These should be:

- Proportionate and Fair – responses should reflect the severity, frequency, and impact of the behavior. Investigators may also consider prior violations and behavioral issues.
- Educational, Not Just Punitive – Sanctions should aim to teach accountability and empathy rather than relying solely on punishment.

Possible Sanctions and Corrective Actions May Include:

- Verbal warnings or reflective conversations

- Restorative practices (e.g., mediation, peer conferencing, repairing harm)
- Loss of privileges or access to school/program activities
- Behavior contracts or monitoring plans
- Suspension or expulsion (only when other measures are insufficient and such action is proportional and in line with due process)

Support for Students Targeted by Bullying

Students who have experienced bullying require tailored support to ensure their safety, well-being, and continued access to learning. Supports may include:

- Regular check-ins with a counselor or trusted staff member
- Academic supports if bullying has disrupted learning
- Safety planning (e.g., changes to class schedules, designated safe spaces, staff monitoring, implementation of safety plan)
- Access to mental health services or referrals
- Encouragement of positive peer connections and mentorship

Supports for Students Who Engaged in Bullying

The law recognizes that students who bully also need intervention to address underlying issues and prevent further harm. Supports may include:

- Social-emotional learning opportunities (e.g., empathy training, anger management, problem-solving skills)
- Counseling to address behavioral or emotional challenges
- Restorative practices to rebuild relationships and repair harm
- Parent/guardian involvement in planning and monitoring behavior improvement
- Ongoing monitoring to assess behavior change and provide guidance

Support for Bystanders and Witnesses

Students who witness bullying may experience fear, guilt, or pressure to stay silent. Providing support helps foster a culture of reporting and allyship. This may include:

- Opportunities to debrief with staff
- Guidance on safe ways to report and intervene

- Recognition of positive bystander actions

Writing the Outcome Letter

Under the YBPA, schools are required to provide written notification of the results of a bullying investigation to all parties involved. This ensures transparency, accountability, and that students and families understand the findings and the next steps.

Timeline

- Outcome letters must be issued within 30 days of the initiation of the investigation.
- If more time is required, the school should document the reason for delay and provide interim updates to families.

Who Receives an Outcome Letter

- The target of bullying
- The parent/guardian of the target of bullying if the youth is under 18
- The youth who was found to have engaged in bullying behavior
- The parent/guardian of the youth who engaged in bullying behavior if the student is under 18
- Any other affected parties as determined appropriate by school policy

However, an entity is **not** required to provide the letter to a parent or guardian of a student if doing so may cause harm to, or endanger the health or well-being of, either the target or the alleged perpetrator. The reason for not sending the report to a parent or guardian must be documented in writing.

Required Elements of an Outcome Letter

Each letter should:

- Include a written record of the initial complaint
- State the conclusion of the investigation
    - Whether bullying was substantiated, unsubstantiated, or inconclusive.
- Summarize the findings

    - Provide a clear explanation of the determination without disclosing confidential information about other students.
- Outline actions taken
    - For the target: supports, safety measures, and resources available.
    - For the student who engaged in bullying: disciplinary and/or educational interventions applied, consistent with school policy.
- Explain appeal rights
    - Parents/guardians must be informed of their right to request an appeal if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of an investigation.

Tips for Writing Outcome Letters

When drafting outcome letters, school staff should aim for clear, professional, and parent-friendly communication while also protecting student privacy. Keep these best practices in mind:

1. **Use clear and neutral language** – Avoid overly technical or legal terms. State whether bullying was substantiated, unsubstantiated, or inconclusive and the reasonings for your findings in plain language.
2. **Keep the focus on the recipient's child** – Frame the letter around the supports, findings, or actions that directly relate to the student whose parents are receiving the letter. The parent/guardian of the targeted student and the parent/guardian of the aggressor should not receive the same letter.
3. **Do not name other students** – to protect confidentiality, never type out the name of the other student(s) involved in the incident. Instead use "Student A" or terms such as "the other party".
4. **Balance detail with discretion** – provide enough information for parents to understand the findings and next steps, but do not disclose personal details about other students.
5. **Highlight supports and next steps** – Emphasize how the entity will ensure safety, provide interventions, and support all students moving forward.
6. **Stick to facts, not opinions** – Outcome letters should be factual and objective. Avoid language that expresses personal judgements, assumptions, or bias. Summarize findings and decisions based on the investigation only.

Sample Outcome Letter

[DATE]

[Parent/Guardian Name]

[Parent/Guardian Email]

RE: Letter of Response to Complaint filed on **[DATE]**

Dear **[Parent]**,

In accordance with the Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012 and Chapter 4, Section 1505.5 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations, **[name of entity]** has completed its investigation of the above referenced grievance.

Allegation(s)

Based on a review of the information provided, the following was alleged:

1. [**brief description of allegations, e.g. "**It was reported that [Student A] has been bullied by [Student B] and [Student C] while attending [SCHOOL] during the 2024-2025 school year. Specifically, it was reported that Student B and C [brief description of alleged conduct].

Pertinent Policy

According to the [**Name of School's bullying prevention policy]**, bullying by students is prohibited. "Bullying" means any severe, pervasive, or persistent act or conduct, whether physical, electronic, or verbal, that is based on certain characteristics and can be reasonably predicted to:

1. Place a student in reasonable fear of physical harm to their person or property;
2. Cause a substantial detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health;
3. Substantially interfere with the student's academic performance or attendance; or
4. Substantially interfere with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from school activities or services.

Investigative Procedure

The investigation included interviews with the following individuals:

1. **[List of persons interviewed, e.g.:** Student A
2. Student B
3. Student C
4. Principal A.G.
5. Dean of Students M.R.
6. Teacher F.A.

The investigation also included a review of the following documents and information:

1. **[List of materials reviewed, e.g.:** Student Behavior Tracker
2. Emails from the Parent of Student A
3. Screenshots of text messages between Student A and Student C

Investigation Findings

The following findings of fact resulted from the investigation:

1. **[brief summary of relevant facts, e.g.:** On September 10, 2024, Student A was hit in the face by Student B while on the playground.
2. Student B admitted to hitting Student A in the face on September 10, 2024.
3. On September 13, 2024, Student B and Student C pushed Student A into the bathroom and refused to let Student A out for approximately 3 minutes.
4. On October 1, 2024, Student C texted Student A and said, "Don't come to school tomorrow or you will be hurt".
5. On October 2, 2024, Student B and Student C, pushed Student A while on the playground which resulted in Student A scraping their knee and requiring a nurse's assistance. This incident was observed by Teacher F.A.
6. On October 12, 2024, while in Teacher T.P's classroom, Student C called Student A "ugly" and "fat". Teacher T.P. observed this incident and responded by sending Student C to Dean of Students M.R.
7. On October 13, 2024, Student B, kicked Student A in the shin while walking in the hallway. This incident was witnessed by Student D.]

Discussion/Conclusion

As a result of the findings, it is determined that **[brief summary of conclusions. Note that pursuant to 4 DCMR § 1505.5, summary must include whether bullying was found to be based on the following protected traits: actual or perceived race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, intellectual ability, familial status, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, genetic information, disability, source of income, status as a victim of an intra-family offense, place of residence or business, or any other distinguishing characteristic, or on a youth's association with a person or group with any person, with one or more of the actual or perceived foregoing characteristics.]** Student B and Student C are responsible for bullying and have violated the **[Name of School bullying prevention policy].** During the 2024-2025 school year, Student A was subjected to repeated harmful behavior that consisted of physical harm, verbal insults, threats, and cyber harassment. The cyber harassment was based on Student A's physical appearance. As a result of Student B and Student C's behavior, **[Name of School]** concludes that Student A was in reasonable fear of physical harm and these events have caused a substantial detrimental effect on their mental health.]

Actions Taken

[SCHOOL NAME] has taken the following actions below to address this incident:

1. **[detailed summary of corrective actions, e.g.:** On October 16, 2024, a safety plan was developed in response to the allegations. The safety plan will remain in place for the duration of the 2024-2025 school year.
2. As of October 21, 2024, Student A is no longer in a class with Student B and Student C.
3. Effective immediately, Dean of Students M.R. will perform daily check-ins with Student A at the end of each school day.
4. On October 21, 2024, Social Worker G.L. offered to have weekly meetings with Student A. However, you denied the offer, stating that Student A was currently receiving outside services.]

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you have the right to file an appeal. Appeals must be submitted in writing and received within 30 calendar days of receipt of this notice. Please

submit appeal requests to [**NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBLE FOR HANDLING APPEALS**.

9. Appeals Process

Under the YBPA and its implementing regulations, every covered entity must provide a clear appeals process when a bullying investigation is completed.

Right to Appeal

- Both the alleged target of bullying and the person accused of bullying have the right to appeal if they are not satisfied with the results of the initial investigation.
- Appeals must be made in writing.

Timeline for Appeals

- An appeal (request for a secondary investigation) must be submitted within 30 days after the initial investigation's conclusion.
- The secondary investigation must be completed within 30 days of receiving the appeal request.
- If more time is needed to complete the secondary investigation, an extension of up to 15 additional days may be granted, but the reasons must be documented in writing.

Who Conducts the Appeal

- The secondary investigation must be carried out by an employee of higher authority than the original investigator.
- This person must not have been involved in the initial investigation.

Notification of Results

- At the end of the secondary investigation, the higher authority must provide a written outcome letter to the parties involved.
- This written notice must also include:
    - Information about the right to seek further remedy under the DC Human Rights Act.

- Contact details for the DC Office of Human Rights and the Bullying Prevention Program Director.

External Remedies

- If either party remains unsatisfied after the secondary investigation, they may file a formal complaint with the DC Office of Human Rights. This is a complaint against the covered entity, not against the accused student.
- Depending on the allegations, the complaint may be brought under the YBPA, the DC Human Rights Act, or both.
- Such complaints must be filed within one year of the alleged violation.

10. Best Practices & Prevention

Bullying investigations are only one piece of the puzzle. The ultimate goal is to prevent bullying behaviors before they occur to build a safe, inclusive, and respectful school climate. The following best practices align with the YBPA and national research on effective prevention:

Climate & Culture

- Promote inclusivity: create spaces where diversity is valued and differences are respected.
- Encourage youth input: involve students in setting norms and expectations for behavior.
- Consistent expectations: reinforce clear rules and consequences related to bullying across classrooms and activities.

Staff Training & Capacity Building

- Provide annual professional development on recognizing, preventing, and responding to bullying.
- Train staff to use trauma-informed and restorative approaches rather than solely punitive measures.
- Ensure staff understand their mandatory reporting obligations under DC law.

Youth Education & Engagement

- Integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum to build empathy, self-awareness, and conflict resolution skills.
- Use classroom activities to help students understand the spectrum of harmful behaviors.
- Establish peer support programs, mentoring, or student-led initiatives that promote kindness and inclusion.

Family & Community Partnerships

- Provide parents and guardians with resources on how to recognize signs of bullying and support their children.
- Host workshops or include information in newsletters about digital citizenship and cyberbullying prevention.
- Partner with community organizations to bring in guest speakers, workshops, or extracurricular programs that reinforce positive behaviors.

Continuous Monitoring & Improvement

- Use climate surveys or feedback tools to assess youth perception of safety and belonging.
- Track bullying reports and outcomes to identify patterns and target prevention efforts.
- Regularly review and update policies to ensure they remain aligned with best practices and the requirements of the YBPA.