

Addressing Hate and Bias at School

Guidance for Districts and Schools

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Hate Incident: A hostile emotion toward a specific group based on the social construct of race, age, size, income, language, disability, religion, national origin & other minoritized or marginalized individuals.

Bias Incident: An irrational assumption or belief regarding a person and/or group not based in fact.

In the past two years, incidents of hate and bias have increased significantly across the United States (SPLC, 2018). The Southern Poverty Law Center documented over 800 incidents of hate and bias incidents in schools. Two-thirds of educators observed these incidents in schools and a large percentage of these incidents were racially motivated. Currently, schools are tasked to address specific incidents of interpersonal fighting, cyberbullying, and upticks in hate toward Asian-Pacific Islanders and Black Students (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). In some areas these attacks are aimed at vulnerable populations experiencing poverty or LGBTQ+ students. Schools have been challenged to create policy and clearly denounce these growing issues, while attempting to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic. Increasing divisions between school boards, superintendents, and principals further compound these issues. The business of schooling has become highly politicized while school leaders seek to maintain academically sound and engaging places of learning.

Often school districts are not ready to address these incidents swiftly and thoroughly. Clear and collaborative policies and procedures are essential to addressing hate and bias in schools prior to incidents occurring. As districts and schools review and develop policies each

school year, hate and bias policies should be included among these policy revisions. A paradigm shift is needed. As we consider building policies that address hate and bias in schools, we must consider that specific policies support social emotional programming and positive school culture.

Districts and schools can lead the charge to eliminate hate and bias in schools. Our children need guidance and accountability to maintain equitable and safe school environments. Educators also need support to address these challenges and require training to prevent educator bias.

We know that hate and bias is a learned behavior that is perpetrated by experiences, lack of exposure, and socialization (Johnson (2011)). These behaviors can be challenged and changed. How we as leaders address these challenges will determine school climate and culture.

Ultimately all children have a right to affirming school spaces; however, marginalized and vulnerable students will need specific policies, procedures and expectations in order to feel safe in school.

Before we discuss the pre-policy development, we must address the fears and anxieties of school leaders regarding discussing race. While there are many challenges to discuss, the social construct of race is one of the most difficult issues to address.

Prior to preparing to address policies that address race, school leaders will need support and guidance to talk about and address these challenges. School leaders need language as well as policy, and will need to embark on their individual equity journey in order to effectively address hate and bias.

Some pre-policy behaviors you can implement:

- (1) Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) training for School Leaders (see resources)
- (2) A series of REDI workshops for educators
- (3) Social-emotional support, student mentoring, role-plays, and student guidance
- (4) Curriculum review to evaluate culturally responsive instruction across content areas
- (5) Data review of past incidents

- (6) Assessment of student safety and the most common types of bullying reported via student voice

Pre-policy behaviors can occur simultaneously as school leaders and districts build out policies. Here are some ways to conceptualize, develop, and implement policy:

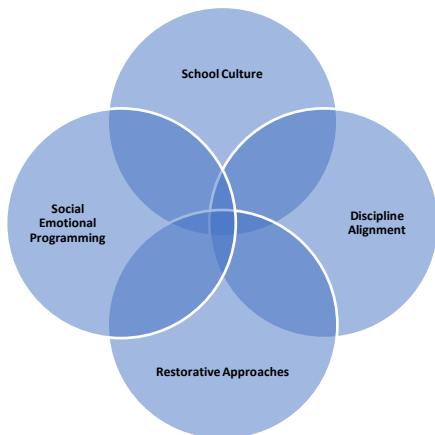
Pre-Policy

The following intersections are important as districts and schools build their hate and bias policies and procedures. For example, the language of hate and bias is not separate from building a positive school culture. Revising anti-bullying policy is imperative. School districts and leaders must not be afraid to call out and name hate and biased behaviors. Pre-policy planning cannot occur without examining data. Discipline must also be in alignment, and restorative approaches and positive behavioral supports must be ingrained in the work that you do.

The components of pre-policy development are depicted in Fig 1. These areas represent foundational and intersectional areas of inquiry that must be considered prior to building an effective hate and bias policy. Ultimately, districts and schools must acknowledge the harm and consequences when hate and bias occurs in schools. This initial conversation can be the catalyst for developing effective policy and shared responsibility.

Fig 1 depicts the intersectional systems that anchor hate and bias policies:

Fig 1



Calling out and naming specific types of bullying include a general statement and also encompass the specific types of racialized violence that will not be tolerated.

Fig 2 depicts a visual utilized in an anti-bullying message to students demonstrating the types of bullying that will not be tolerated. The visual is utilized as a tool followed by a description of the specific type of bullying. For instance: Size bullying would be listed with a corresponding key and definition; such as this is bullying that involves teasing someone who is of a larger, smaller or different size. Bullying occurs in so many ways that we often do not consider or plan for it in schools. This visual assists with multiple unnamed forms of bullying.

Fig 2



Post-Policy Development

No policy is effective without periodic revisions and updates. The process is not simply reviewing existing policy. Districts and schools must align disparity data with policy updates and examine current challenges that existing policies do not cover. Schools and districts cannot cover everything; however, yearly reviews are essential as communities and needs change.

When an Incident has occurred

Hate and bias behavior creates a trauma-like response for those who experience it. This may be situational or historical for some populations. Imagine being bullied or hearing the stories of your family being bullied racially and historically; however, the same behaviors are also

perpetuated within the school setting. Schools are microcosms of society; therefore, they are also responsible for maintaining order and non-abusive spaces for all children. Not only are there cumulative impacts when children face hate and bias, these behaviors impact the entire school community. The consciousness of schools has a tremendous impact on how students treat each other. Under-utilized empathy shows up in student interactions when educators fail to acknowledge the harm done to others. Unchecked hate and bias can become operationalized and normed in student behavior and within school culture.

We know that one of the first orders of business when trauma is involved is to: (1) Acknowledge the trauma and name the behavior; (2) Anchor the challenge within empathy; (3) Work toward establishing a sense of safety; and; (4) Provide clear definitions and direction (Thomas, Crosby & Vanderhaar, 2019). Addressing these issues must occur as soon after the incident comes to the attention of school leaders even though the investigation is not complete.

School leaders are often concerned about calling out hate or bias incidents due to multiple factors. Not making a definitive statement denouncing the behavior creates a system of disproportionality and anchors a lack of safety. School leaders may also worry about community or parental backlash, political influences, or a rush to judgement. However, not clearly defining expectations around hate and bias can support the negative behaviors when they are not challenged.

This is where policy supports your stance. In many situations specific policy development has not occurred and school leaders are ill-equipped to address immediate challenges.

The following examples specifically call out hate and bias behavior and provide examples of language that can be utilized when addressing hate and bias incidents:

General Statement:

We at _____ (school district or school) do not tolerate _____ in our school community. As we thoroughly investigate this situation, we commit to a safe school community for all children. As our investigation unfolds we will _____.

Racialized Incidents in schools: (sample language)

The _____ school district/school was informed that several Black Students were called the “N” word during the basketball game. We will not tolerate any racial hate or bias in this school/district. As we investigate these allegations, we want to assure all students/parents/guardians/community members that _____. (* Name how you will restore, safety & order. Be careful to not minimize the history of the “N” word and its historical trauma. Communities of color deal with cumulative forms of violence and are monitoring for your authentic response. Your actions inform BISOC (Black & Indigenous Students of Color) that you recognize the harm that racialized violence can cause, and that you are leading with equity).

Sample Partial Letter to Students/Parents/Guardians after a hate/bias incident:

After Black & Brown Children were called names at a school in Evansville, the Principal specifically called out the behavior:

In the letter, written a day after the massacre at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Weinberg said, “I have heard and received information” that students had been called the N-word and other disparaging epithets, including “brownie” and “you are dumb black boys.”

“I want to make it clear that hatred is not welcome in our community,” Weinberg wrote in the parent letter.

He added that “meanness and misunderstanding stop through education, an expectation of excellence, and a welcoming spirit.”

The Principal detailed the harm done and set boundaries:

“If our children are using racial slurs whether lightly or with intent to deeply harm... I believe those who were the intended target need to feel protected and welcomed, and those who have witnessed it or feel secondary trauma need support to understand the gravity of the harm, and those who perpetuated it needed to be clear on what the school environment will accept and not.”

The School Leader named the common experiences inherent in bullying and indicated how the situation would be addressed:

...."some white children, children of Asian descent, Latinx and multiracial children have also experienced "some shaming."

What the Principal and School did to restore safety and order:

Principal, Max Weinberg followed up his letter with a school-wide "peace building" assembly that would be held the following Monday after the incident.

Access the article at:

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/evanston/ct-evr-reports-of-racism-school-district-65-tl-1108-story.html>

You are the leaders that set the tone. As we continue to build on our equity and culturally responsive knowledge, we must authentically acknowledge trauma and racialized pain in our past and current history. You are the catalyst and the leaders of the future who will create welcoming spaces for all children. Onward with equity and hope!

Resources

Addressing Race & Racism Head On in the Classroom. Gosner, S. (2021, March 21). *Edutopia*. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/addressing-race-and-racism-head-classroom>

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Fischer, A., Halperin, E & Canetti, D. (2018). Why We Hate. *International Society for Research on Emotion*, 30-320.(10)4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073917751229>

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Johnson (2011). *The Psychology of Racism: How Internalized Racism, Academic Self-concept, and Campus Racial Climate Impact the Academic Experiences and Achievement of African American Undergraduates*. ProQuest Publishers.

Kleinrock, L. (2021). *Start Here, Start Now: A Guide to antibias & Antiracist work in your School Community*. Heinemann.

Picower, B.(2021). *Reading, Writing & Racism: Disrupting Whiteness in Teacher Education and in the Classroom*. Beacon Press.

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Sampson, D., & Toomey, C. (2021). *Preparing Leaders for the Equity Journey*. Western Educational Equity Assistance Center. Retrieved from <https://www.msudenver.edu/western-educational-equity-assistance-center/weeac-virtual-college/course-access-preparing-for-the-equity-journey-guidance-for-school-districts-and-schools/>

Sternberg (2020). *Perspectives on Hate: How It Originates, Develops, Manifests, and Spreads*. American Psychological Association.

Thomas, Crosby & Vanderhaar (2019). Trauma-informed practice in schools across two decades: An interdisciplinary review of research. *Review of Research in Education*, 43(1),422-452. doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18821123

Who has Bias: We all Do! (February, 2019). Western Educational Equity Assistance Center. Retrieved from <https://www.msudenver.edu/western-educational-equity-assistance-center/weeac-virtual-college/course-access-who-has-bias-we-all-do/>

Please visit the Western Educational Equity Assistance Center's website for multiple resources: <https://www.msudenver.edu/western-educational-equity-assistance-center/>

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