

# Youth Development

Instructional Support • Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES

## The Dignity for All Students Act

July 1, 2012

Amended State Education Law by creating a new Article 2

### Why is The Dignity Act necessary?

Survey (2009) by Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that 1/3rd of LGBTQ students in NYS stated that harassment, bullying, and name calling are serious problems at their schools.

The Olweus survey (2012) found that 10% of the students said they had bullied others and 17% of students said they had been bullied 2-3 times per month or more. There have also been several highly-publicized suicides of students after they were reportedly harassed and bullied, several of which took place in New York State.

### What is the Intent of The Dignity Act?

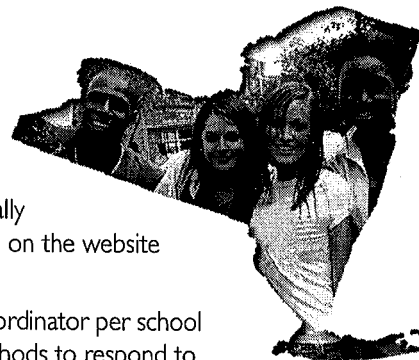
The goal of The Dignity Act is to create a safe and supportive school climate where students can learn and focus, rather than fear being discriminated against and/or verbally and/or physically harassed.

### What does The Dignity Act say?

No student shall be subjected to harassment by employees or students on school property or at a school function; nor shall any student be subjected to discrimination based on a person's actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender (including gender identity or expression), or sex.

### What are the requirements for School Districts?

1. Update policies to include language to support The Dignity Act
2. Code of Conduct that reflects the updated policies and is developmentally appropriate, in plain language, and posted on the website for the community.
3. Board must approve one Dignity Act Coordinator per school building who is thoroughly trained in methods to respond to human relations regarding The Dignity Act. Post the names of the DAC's on the website for parents and community members.
4. Annual staff training to support the tenets of The Dignity Act.
5. Annual review of Code of Conduct with students.
6. Student Instruction infused into the curriculum to raise awareness and sensitivity to discrimination or harassment based on a person's actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex. Sample lesson plans are on this website: [www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact).
7. Reporting of incidents sent to the Commissioner of Education once per year. The template is available on New York State Education Department website under The Dignity Act. School Districts may use their own feeder forms to populate the yearly form sent to the state.



### Is Cyber-bullying included in the law?

Currently, cyber-bullying is not included in The Dignity Act. However, cyber-bullying has been added to the next rendition of The Dignity Act which will go into effect on July 1st, 2013.

Many districts have already included cyber-bullying in their Code of Conduct and Policy work.

### How can the community support The Dignity Act?

Understand the definitions of the law and clarify any misconceptions about the law (e.g., it is NOT an anti-bullying law).

Practice giving dignity to all people you meet.

Dialogue with community members about how to infuse dignity into all community gatherings.

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# Community & Family Information

## What is the definition of bullying?

Bullying may consist of hitting, teasing, taunting, spreading rumors and gossip, stealing, or excluding someone from a group. It is carried out with the intent to harm someone who cannot defend themselves. Bullying is unfair and one-sided. It can be repeated over time or can be a one-time occurrence. The important component is that it involves an imbalance of power.

**Steps to Respect:** [www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org)

## Possible warning signs that a Child is being bullied:

- Comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches
- Has few, if any friends, with whom he or she spends time
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, riding the school bus, or taking part in organized activities with peers (such as clubs)
- Takes a long, "illogical" route when walking to or from school
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly begins to do poorly in school
- Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Experiences a loss of appetite
- Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem

[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

## What to do if you suspect that your child is being bullied?

1. **Talk with your child.** Ask questions about friends, situations and difficult encounters. Ensure your child that she is not to blame.
2. **Instruct your child not to fight back.** This will continue the bullying cycle.
3. **Advise your child to report the incidence** to an adult and keep reporting if it doesn't stop.
4. **Role-play social interactions** with your child to assist them in expressing themselves appropriately and firmly.
5. **Talk with staff at your child's school.** Ask questions about what the teacher or other staff members observe regarding your child's interactions with others or whether they see him/her sitting by themselves.
6. **Talk with a School Counselor/Social Worker** about your fears and see if there are other concerns that the child is experiencing.

[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov) & **Steps to Respect:** [www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org)

## Could my child be bullying others?

**Look for these behaviors:**

- Frequent name-calling (wimps, dummies, jerks, gay, faggot, dyke)
- Regular bragging
- A constant need to get his own way
- Spending time with younger or less powerful children
- A lack of empathy for others
- A defiant or hostile attitude; easily takes offense

**Steps to Respect:** [www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org)

## How can I help promote respectful behavior?

- **Spend time with your child.** When problems come up, help her think of respectful, cooperative ways to solve them.
- **Know your child's friends.**
- **Be consistent about discipline.** Hold your child responsible for negative or hurtful behavior, but avoid using public put-downs and physical punishment.
- **Eliminate toys, games, and TV shows that reward aggression.** Some children learn how to bully by seeing it on television or in video games.
- **Encourage your child to be slow to take offense.** Teach your child to stay cool and calm by counting to ten or trying self-talk.
- **Make sure your child knows what other children expect.** Respectful behaviors we have all learned include taking turns or apologizing when you accidentally hurt someone.
- **Help your child see other points of view.** Children who bully often have difficulty interpreting facial expressions or tone of voice. They forget to consider other children's feelings. Explore with your child how he might feel "In someone else's shoes."

**Steps to Respect:** [www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org)

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