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School Bullying

Your Responsibilities Under Current Georgia Law and the Code of Ethics

Of particular note is the expansion of the bullying definition to include bus stops, school-related events and anything accessed through the use of school technology.

Several high-profile cases over the last few years brought much deserved attention to Georgia's bullying laws. Georgia's 2010 bullying statute (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-751.4) expanded to include a broader definition of bullying, the grade levels where bullying has to be reported (all grade levels) and the form that bullying takes. The new law mandates changes for school districts, schools and educators.

As an educator, you are bound by Georgia's laws and the Code of Ethics for Educators. Standard Two of the Code of Ethics states, "unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: (4) engaging in or permitting harassment of or misconduct toward a student that would be a violation of state or federal law." Bullying a student or failing to report bullying of a student is a violation of the Code of Ethics and Georgia law.

The state expanded the definition of bullying in section (a) and added number (3) to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-751.4. The relevant code section reads,

a) As used in this Code section, the term "bullying" means an act which occurs on school property, on school vehicles, at designated school bus stops, or at school related functions or activities, or by use of data or software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, computer network, or other electronic technology of a local school system, that is:

(1) Any willful attempt or threat to inflict injury on another person, when accompanied by an apparent present ability to do so;

(2) Any intentional display of force such as would give the victim reason to fear or expect immediate bodily harm; or

(3) Any intentional written, verbal, or physical act which a reasonable person would perceive as being intended to threaten, harass, or intimidate, that:

(A) Causes another person substantial physical harm within the meaning of Code Section 16-5-23.1 or visible bodily harm as such term is defined in Code Section 16-5-23.1;

(B) Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education;

(C) Is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening educational environment; or

(D) Has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school.

Of particular note is the expansion of the bullying definition to include bus stops, school-related events and anything accessed through the use of school technology. Cyber bullying now falls well within the expanded school definition.

In order to protect yourself and your students, you should first familiarize yourself with your system's policies regarding bullying. It's important that you know what to look for and to whom you should report if you suspect that bullying has occurred. If you suspect that an incident has occurred, follow your school's procedures and make the required report.

As with this or any other issues, if you are not sure how to proceed, remember to call PAGE. ♦

