



BOARD BRIEFING

Information of Special Interest to Board of Education Members

Requirements of the Dignity for All Students Act include incorporating certain sections of the Act into a district's Code of Conduct.

Since the law also requires that student handbooks reflect the changes to the Code of Conduct, it would be a good idea to undertake a review and revisions to your Code, if required, as soon as possible because student handbooks are generally published during the summer to be ready for the opening of school.

Additionally, the Dignity Act requires that age-appropriate versions be made available to all students. Your elementary administrators might consider convening a committee that includes elementary staff and parents to ensure that language for your youngest students is clear and appropriate.

WHERE CHANGES ARE REQUIRED
Sections of the Code of Conduct that require Dignity Act component inclusion are:

- Definitions
- Reporting and Data Collection
- Prohibited Conduct
- Public Conduct on School Property
- Descriptions of the Roles of Various Personnel and the Public

WHAT THE CHANGES ADDRESS
Board members on your Policy Committee should have copies of the Dignity Act in hand for undertaking

revisions. As a guide, some specific changes they should make, if not already included in your Code of Conduct, are:

- Making sure that your Code clearly states that harassment based on real or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender (including gender identity and expression) and sex, is prohibited and that discrimination based on these same characteristics is prohibited.
- Including harassment, sexual orientation and gender in the Definitions section as well as weight, religious practice and ethnic group, all of which are now protected under the terms of the Dignity Act;
- A statement that actual or perceived membership in any of these groups is protected;
- Clear language that harassment and discrimination are behaviors that are not permitted;
- Descriptions of consequences for violating school rules and engaging in acts of harassment and discrimination.

HOLDING A HEARING

A public hearing must be held to allow for public input before any changes can be adopted by the Board. This hearing can be a special meeting posted and publicized, or

it can take place during a regular Board of Education meeting with the presentation of the revised Code of Conduct posted and publicized as part of the Board's agenda.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW

While the Board's first obligation is to update the Code of Conduct, the Dignity Act contains other requirements for all New York public school districts. These include:

- Adopt policies to make schools harassment- and discrimination-free environments;
- Inform students and parents of anti-discrimination and harassment policies;
- Develop guidelines to be used in school training programs for teachers, administrators and other school employees to discourage discrimination and harassment among staff and students;
- Create guidelines relating to the development of nondiscriminatory instruction and counseling;
- Incorporate discrimination and harassment awareness and sensitivity into civility, citizenship and character education curricula;
- Provide a staff member trained in human-relations counseling; and
- Report on incidents of discrimination and bias harassment to the State Education Department (SED).