

Roxbury Township Public Schools

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Dear Parents/Guardians:

As you may be aware, earlier this year New Jersey passed a new anti-bullying law which took effect September 1, 2011. The Roxbury School District, along with other schools around the state, is implementing new procedures which reflect both the spirit and letter of the law. I am taking this opportunity to advise you of the procedures we have in place and the rights you and your child have in this process. Our goal is to implement this policy in a way which enhances the well being of all students and creates an environment in each of our schools which nurtures good citizenship and mutual respect. We enlist your help in our efforts to implement this initiative successfully. To that end we ask you to join us by impressing on the student(s) in your family the importance of taking this initiative seriously.

Each of the seven schools in the district has a guidance counselor who serves as the anti-bullying specialist. At the K-4 level the guidance counselors serve two schools. Our Human Resources Manager, Ms. Phyllis Prestamo, is the district's anti-bullying coordinator. (For your information these individuals are all listed on the district website.) There is a significant amount of investigative time and paperwork which has been added to the valued and lengthy list of responsibilities that guidance counselors continue to fulfill to the best of their ability. One of the requirements that we are facing is the obligation to notify you if your child is involved in an investigation that is underway. School administrators and the anti-bullying specialists have a relatively short period of time in which to determine if that investigation may lead to determination that harassment, intimidation, or bullying was involved. Therefore, it is possible that you will be notified about investigations which are subsequently determined to have no connection to **H**arassment, **I**ntimidation or **B**ullying (HIB) but may be related to a more typical behavioral issue of students in each age group. Subsequent to being notified of the investigation, which may be via phone or email, you will be notified when the investigation is complete and is resolved at the building level. You are entitled to appeal the Principal's decision to the Superintendent of Schools and in turn you are entitled to appeal the Superintendent's decision to the Board of Education. At the end of the day, you may also appeal the Board of Education's decision to the New Jersey Commissioner of Education.

When time allows you will receive a call if your child is part of a situation that needs to be investigated but many times we will have to notify you in writing. ***It is important for you to know the notices which we are required to send will be sent via email unless you advise us that you do not wish to receive information via email or you do not have access to the Internet.*** In both of those cases we will send you a hard copy of the letter. To make sure that our records are complete, it is important that you respond to this letter if you want us to send future correspondence other than via email. If we do not hear from you, we will assume email is a preferable means of communicating with you. Please contact your child's home school and advise us if you do not wish to receive emails.

The new law is very prescriptive and imposes very tight time frames for reporting issues to parents. In many cases we may be forced to report a case before we have been able to fully research what happened and determine the appropriate penalty. Like all schools we are likely to encounter some difficult situations which are unique and do not fit into any of the anticipated categories. We will make our best judgment and advise you of the outcome. What is most important for you to know is that we are determined to be proactive in this regard and to help all students who feel they need help. We are interested in receiving information from you if there is an issue you don't believe your son or daughter is reporting so that we can pursue it and work collaboratively to ensure that the Roxbury Schools have a culture and climate that encourages and endorses positive behavior and discourages students from interacting inappropriately with their peers. It is also important for you to impress on your children that the issues are serious; they have been passed into legislation; some issues require us to report information to the local police; and, the law gives us less latitude than we have had in the past when it comes to dealing with issues related to HIB.

You can help. Each school has a school safety team. The school safety team encourages activities that will help create a culture and climate that is conducive to positive behavior and interaction among students; it is also a team that helps the schools be proactive in dealing with issues that stem from inappropriate behavior on the part of students. You should also know that Roxbury has been chosen as one of the 12 districts in New Jersey to be part of the Rutgers Bullying Prevention Institute and we believe that our involvement in this program will assist us in establishing the appropriate climate in each of our schools.

We are determined to take accusations and charges seriously; we are determined to investigate them to the best of our ability, and we feel obligated to take the appropriate action that is required in light of the intent of the law. If you have any questions, you should feel free to call or email the guidance counselor/anti-bullying specialist who is dealing with the case that involves your child. It is also fine to call the Principal or to call my office.

To recap in summary form:

- You may be advised that there is an investigation of an issue in which your child was involved.
- If you are notified, you will be notified again that the situation has been resolved and you will be advised of any penalty that is assigned to your own child.

- You have multiple levels of appeal if you don't feel that your child has been dealt with fairly.
- Appeals can be made to the Superintendent, the Board of Education, and ultimately, to the Commissioner of Education.

We are optimistic that parents and students will respond in a positive way and that everyone will take the intent of this law seriously because there are some serious potential implications that come from penalties under this law. We are not under any illusions that we can alter everyone's behavior or that we can force everyone to be a good citizen, but we do believe that with the right reinforcement at home and consistent emphasis on appropriate behavior in schools we will generate a climate that encourages positive interaction between students and also discourages negative interaction.

Thank you for your time and effort. On behalf of our faculty and support staff, we look forward to working with you in an effort to make Roxbury Schools safe and secure places for children in every school in every grade level and every classroom.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James O'Neill", with a horizontal line underneath.

James O'Neill
Interim Superintendent of Schools

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