

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

**Position Statement on
Creating a Healthy Learning Environment that is
Physically, Emotionally and Intellectually Safe**

February 3, 2010

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes that schools must create healthy learning communities that are physically, emotionally and intellectually safe, clean and secure. Environments that enhance student learning require attention to the health and safety needs of all school community members. Safe and healthy learning environments require attention to the physical condition of the settings as well as the assurance of frequent, consistent and positive teacher-student and student-student interaction. Research demonstrates that academic achievement improves in schools where students feel physically and emotionally safe and where school cultures support reasonable rules that are carefully explained and fairly enforced. A healthy learning community that is physically, emotionally and intellectually safe is the foundation for a comprehensive high-quality education.

Students learn best when physical settings are clean, well maintained, bright and secure; individuals respect themselves and others; and the emotional climate supports positive, respectful and meaningful relationships. When students feel welcome, accepted, valued and safe, they will challenge themselves academically and their readiness for learning is significantly enhanced. Intellectual safety refers to students being able to take academic risks, engage in necessary dialogue when one does not know and to feel comfortable questioning when confused. Intellectually safe environments allow students freedom to excel, focus on learning, participate in daily academic challenges, explore interests with teachers' encouragement and support, and engage in activities that develop skills such as leadership and perseverance.

All school personnel, board of education members, families, students and community members share a role and responsibility in creating nurturing learning environments that foster individualized and personalized settings and increase positive and meaningful relationships. The Board recommends that school districts develop and implement clear, inclusive and comprehensive missions and visions that guide efforts to create learning communities for achieving positive student outcomes. Open communication, thoughtful discussion and collaborative planning among schools, families and communities assist in creating and maintaining school environments that enable all students to achieve and ultimately graduate from high school. Schools must be a place where no one experiences harm or personal bias, including, but not limited to race, religion, sex and sexual orientation, which are protected under state and federal civil rights laws.

The Board believes that creating a safe and healthy learning environment calls for an approach that is systemic and collaborative. This approach incorporates teaching respect for self and others, healthy behaviors, integrity, citizenship, a sense of commitment, and contribution to the school and society. Schoolwide beliefs and practices that foster understanding and respect for cultural diversity and celebrate the contributions of diverse groups must be in place. Educators and school personnel, in concert with families, are charged with positive role-modeling and providing balanced education that includes understanding and fostering of ethical and legal conduct while honoring individual rights and responsibilities.

The outcomes of a safe, healthy and personalized school setting are a more positive school climate; a culture of high standards and expectations; greater parental, student and community involvement; and overall student and school community satisfaction leading to higher attendance rates and lower dropout rates. Guidelines to support a safe and healthy learning environment are outlined in the corresponding document.

**Policy Guidance for Position Statement on
Creating a Healthy Learning Environment that is
Physically, Emotionally and Intellectually Safe**

February 3, 2010

GUIDELINES

The Connecticut State Board of Education, in its 2010 Position Statement on Creating a Healthy Learning Environment that is Physically, Emotionally and Intellectually Safe calls for a systemic and collaborative approach that significantly increases student engagement, positive health behaviors and student outcomes.

The Board offers the following guidelines to support the implementation of a safe and healthy learning environment.

State Department of Education Responsibilities

- Strengthen and expand partnerships with state and local agencies, higher education, local businesses, health centers, families, schools and communities to address the health and safety needs for all students.
- Develop new and use existing program guidelines, sample policies, resource lists, state and local data regarding health, attendance, suspension/expulsion, race, gender and school climate/anti-bullying and other information to inform program planning and improvement.
- Provide leadership in identifying and disseminating research and best practice related to healthy, supportive and respectful school environments.
- Align these guidelines with existing initiatives including, but not limited to, secondary school reform, coordinated approach to school health, early childhood education, school improvement, culturally responsive education and scientific research-based interventions.
- Provide planned, ongoing and systematic professional development, technical assistance and resources for program implementation to schools and community partners to increase the health and safety for all students.
- Partner with appropriate health and education organizations to recognize, promote and support exemplary schools that model safe and productive learning environments.
- Partner with higher education institutions, business and industry to strengthen the skill base of Connecticut's teachers and students in creating and maintaining safe and healthy learning environments.
- Provide assistance on the implementation and compliance *with all* federal and state legislation and regulations pertaining to healthy school environments including An Act Concerning School Learning Environments (Connecticut General Statutes § 10-222d) and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

School Districts' Responsibilities

- Develop and implement policies and procedures that assist all staff and administrators in creating safe and healthy learning environments that address the needs of every student.

- Promote efforts to improve school climate as a critical component for effective learning and school reform.
- Review all disciplinary policies and practices to ensure that they encourage students to stay in school rather than excluding them from school.
- Provide appropriate resources for a broad array of extra-curricular programs to maximize the number of students involved and connected to school in constructive, adult-supervised activities (e.g., clubs, leadership activities, service learning and peer mentoring).
- Ensure compliance with all health and safety standards pertaining to the school building and outdoor facilities so that every student has the maximum opportunity to learn in a safe and healthy school environment.
- Enhance student learning by addressing the health and safety needs of school personnel by implementing staff wellness programs.
- Provide opportunities for students to connect to the school and to those within the school by developing positive, healthy relationships, experiencing a climate of fairness that fosters safe and healthy environments, and creating a positive school culture that benefits individuals, the school and society.
- Personalize academic and social settings for all students.
- Provide sufficient professional development that will enable school personnel to create and maintain positive and supportive learning settings.
- Incorporate research-based approaches and practices that contribute to the creation of productive, healthy and safe learning environments.
- Use data to inform decision making and prioritize and implement policies, practices, programs and initiatives.
- Adopt a vision and action plan for creating and sustaining safe and healthy environments.
- Implement action plans that systemically seek to incorporate health and safety of all students into existing school improvement efforts and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the plans.
- Ensure full compliance with *all* state and federal legislation that supports healthy school environments, including An Act Concerning School Learning Environments (Connecticut General Statutes § 10-222d).
- Provide safe, healthy, effective and culturally responsive environments at all grade levels.
- Provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of cultural diversity.
- Implement the policies, practices and strategies outlined in the CSDE *Guidelines for a Coordinated Approach to School Health*.
- Involve families in planning, development and implementation of programs and policies supporting a healthy school environment.

Schools' Responsibilities

- Ensure that the learning environment is healthy and safe.
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in activities (e.g., clubs, leadership activities, service learning and peer mentoring) that promote a positive school climate and benefit the greater community.
- Monitor and supervise all areas of the school (e.g., classrooms, hallways and stairwells, cafeterias, playgrounds, shop areas, lavatories and locker rooms) to ensure the health and safety of all students, staff, families and visitors.

- Create personalized and nurturing learning environments.
- Take immediate action to identify and address all acts of mean-spirited words and actions including, but not limited to name calling, teasing, exclusion, harassment and bullying behaviors.
- Work with and support families to identify and address their critical role to assist in providing a safe and healthy productive learning environment.
- Ensure that all students share a caring relationship with at least one adult in the school, in which regular, ongoing and meaningful interactions occur.
- Send clear and consistent messages to students regarding their individual responsibility to behave responsibly and respectfully toward others.
- Ensure that school personnel model positive behaviors that reflect respectful and responsible treatment of others.
- Enforce rules fairly and consistently and provide opportunities to develop and foster ethical reasoning, self-control and a generalized respect for others.
- Use academic subjects and teachable moments as methods for examining and reflecting upon respect and responsibility toward self and others.
- Incorporate conflict resolution skills into school-based practices and provide students with the capacity and commitment to solve conflicts in fair, nonviolent ways.
- Ensure that every student in grades PK-12 has an individualized success plan that addresses their health and safety needs.
- Provide effective leadership to create a climate that supports student achievement and well-being.
- Support the implementation of a coordinated and integrated approach to school health, and student success plans that address the physical health, mental health and wellness of students.
- Maintain school environments that are welcoming and friendly.
- Maintain a welcoming school atmosphere that recognizes the relevant transitions and mobility of students and families that occur throughout the school year.
- Ensure that schools provide students with a safe environment in which to share their questions or concerns on matters concerning sexuality, violence, gender dynamics, and abuse and family issues.

Teachers’/Staff Responsibilities

- Participate in professional development activities that address health and safety concerns of all school community members.
- Communicate and collaborate with families to address the health and safety needs of individual students.
- Develop positive and meaningful relationships with students.
- Celebrate students’ uniqueness and strengths.
- Use research-based practices to inform instruction, programs and services to honor all learning styles.
- Differentiate and individualize instruction to ensure the health and safety needs of all students are met.
- Encourage academic risk taking of all students by actively participating in challenging and reflective discussions and expanding their knowledge base.
- Ensure that instruction is challenging, relevant and engaging for all students.
- Model respectful and appropriate treatment of others.
- Apply school policies and classroom rules consistently and fairly.
- Participate in health enhancing activities with students (e.g., creating a safe and welcoming classroom environment).

Families' Responsibilities

- Model respectful and appropriate treatment of others.
- Maintain a physically and emotionally healthy home.
- Contribute to a physically safe and healthy community, for example, take an active role in maintaining a recreation area or supporting a community recycling program.
- Provide emotional support, set strong examples and correct inappropriate actions (e.g., resolving conflicts peacefully, demonstrating tolerance and respect for individual differences and encouraging lifelong learning).
- Become involved and engaged in school programs, practices and activities.
- Stay connected to children's academic and social lives (e.g., know where children are, know who children's friends are, and have regular conversations with children about their interests, activities, etc.).
- Communicate regularly with classroom teachers and other relevant school personnel.
- Volunteer at school as appropriate and as time allows.
- Participate in collaborative school and family functions (e.g., family activity nights, family resource centers).
- Participate in educational open house opportunities and become familiar with school strategies for creating and sustaining a physically, emotionally, intellectually safe and healthy learning environment and how families can support and contribute to these strategies.
- Ensure that children are prepared for school by getting adequate sleep, healthy meals, daily physical activity and provide an area at home that is conducive to studying.
- Ensure that children receive regular health care (e.g. immunizations, dental care).

Students' Responsibilities (as developmentally appropriate)

- Follow the laws, rules, policies and procedures of the classroom, school, district, community, state and nation.
- Take advantage of the teaching and learning opportunities that are provided.
- Recognize individual differences and diversity and demonstrate respect toward all people.
- Contribute to creating and sustaining safe and healthy learning environments.
- Serve as positive role models toward others in school, at home and in the wider community.
- Actively participate in school activities in addition to satisfying academic requirements.
- Work with school personnel to create individualized student success plans that include individual health and safety needs.
- Assume leadership and /or supportive roles in the school to support a positive and productive learning community.
- Develop positive and meaningful relationships with peers and school personnel.
- Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills as a means of enhancing health and promoting healthy relationships, such as refusal and conflict resolution skills.
- Plan and engage in school-sponsored wellness activities, including participation on health and wellness committees in school.
- Advocate for the inclusion of personal health goals into Individual Student Success Plans.
- Attend annual check-ups and other important appointments with health care providers.
- Accurately complete school health surveys.

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