Iowa's Anti-Bullying Law
Iowa Code §280.28

Bullying and harassment are harmful to the social and emotional development of children. It can also get in the way of learning. The safety and emotional well-being of children in school is an important issue that parents and teachers both care about. Iowa's anti-bullying law was passed in 2007 (Iowa Code §280.28) and was updated in 2025 (HF 865).

In Iowa, every school district has to create its own policy to address harassment and bullying. These rules need to follow state guidelines. Every school district needs to share its anti-bullying policies with parents and the public. They can often be found in the student handbook, board policies, or on the district's website. If you have a child who has been bullied at school, it's important to learn about your school district's rules against bullying and harassment. It is also important to make sure that there is written documentation submitted to the school about the incident(s).

How is bullying defined in the Iowa Code?

Iowa code §280.28 "Any repeated and targeted electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or conduct toward a student that creates an objectively hostile school environment that meets one or more of the following conditions:

- **Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or property**
- **Has a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health**
- **Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's academic performance**
- **Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school."**

In short, bullying is repeated actions or behavior over time that targets a student. It can be electronic, written, spoken, or physical, and it makes school feel unsafe or unfair for them.

Bullying may include behavior that:

- Makes a student afraid of being hurt or having their belongings damaged
- Hurts a student's physical or mental health
- Gets in the way of a student's learning
- Prevents a student from taking part in school activities or services

What is required in school policy?

Each school district's anti-bullying policy must include the following:

- No bullying: A statement that teachers, staff, volunteers, and students must not bully or harass others in school, on school grounds, or during any school events or school-sponsored activities.
- No retaliation: A statement that school staff, volunteers, and students must not retaliate or make false claims against someone who has been bullied, a witness to the bullying, or anyone who knows about the bullying. Everyone should feel safe to speak up without fear.

Each school district's policy must also include:

- How the school will respond: A clear explanation of how school staff, volunteers, parents, and students should work to prevent, report, and respond to bullying or harassment. It tells everyone what they need to do to help keep the school safe and respectful.
- The consequences for violations: A description of what will happen if someone does not follow the anti-bullying and anti-harassment policy.

- How to report acts of bullying: A process for how to report bullying, including the job title of the person who makes sure the policy is followed and the person who receives the reports.
- The process for investigating reports: A process for quickly looking into complaints. This includes the Superintendent or someone they choose leading the investigation to decide if the behavior fits the definition of bullying.
- How the anti-bullying policy will be made public: Information about how the school will make the policy available to parents and the community.

The Iowa Department of Education has a responsibility to work with schools and districts to make sure they have appropriate policies and procedures in place and are following the anti-bullying laws.

What other options are available if a student is being bullied?

- Intra-district Transfer Due to Bullying: Senate File 496- Sec. 18. 279.82 states that if the school district decides that the student has been bullied or harassed by another student at their current school, the parent or guardian of a student who has been bullied can request to move their student to a different school in the same district that has classes for their grade.
- Open Enrollment Due to Bullying: Usually, when a student moves to a different school district and enrolls there, they can't take part in varsity competitions for the first 90 days. However, if the student's home district decides that they were bullied, this rule doesn't apply. Parents who want to enroll their child in a different school can check a box on the enrollment application and share some information about their situation. Both the home district and the new district must approve open enrollment.

Are there any additional protections available for students with disabilities?

For any students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 Plan, or Health Plan, Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II apply. These laws require schools to take action when bullying happens because of a student's disability. It's important to address this bullying, especially if it stops a student from participating in school activities, services, or opportunities.

If bullying gets in the way of a student with a disability's ability to access educational services, it could be considered a denial of their Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

What can families do to support anti-bullying?

Parents can help prevent bullying by learning about their school's rules and talking to their kids about how to treat others with respect. It's important for kids to understand and accept that people are different. Parents can also support programs and activities that promote good values and character among all students.

Parents should report any concerns they have about their child's safety and security in school to their child's teacher or Principal. If an incident has taken place, it is helpful to report the important details in writing. See our Related Resources for additional tips and a sample letter for reporting.

Related Resources

Look for the following resource(s) on the ASK website:

- How to Report Bullying/ Sample Letter

Look for the following resource(s) on educateiowa.gov:

- Bullying & Harassment in Iowa Schools: Responsibilities & Investigation Process

ASK Essential Questions

- What is the bullying policy at my child's school?
- Have I put my concerns in writing?

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