



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DATE: October 13, 2023

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Lisa Coons, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Bullying Prevention in Local Schools

As we continue to focus on ensuring every child attends school every day, our schools must also focus on creating strong and positive school climates throughout the year. Given the recent outbreak of war in Israel and antisemitic demonstrations around the world, it is important that our schools reiterate that the protection, safety, and security of students of all faiths and backgrounds is paramount.

October is also National Bullying Prevention Month, calling schools to educate students and staff about the presence, danger, and negative consequences of bullying. Schools have an obligation to adopt policies and procedures to educate school staff about the harmful effects of bullying and the need to create a “bully-free” environment. Schools can also teach behaviors that help protect students from the harmful effects of bullying. The Department has a set of strong resources to support school divisions available on our [website](#).

As a reminder, Virginia law defines “bullying” as any aggressive and unwanted behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor or aggressors and victim; and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma. “Bullying” also includes cyber bullying. *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-276.01. As of July 1, 2023, principals (or their designees) are required to notify the parent of any student involved in alleged incident of bullying within 24 hours of learning of the bullying allegation as well. *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-279.6.

The Virginia Department of Education has begun the process of updating and revising the [Virginia Department of Education's Policy to Address Bullying in Virginia's Public Schools](#). Please consider reviewing the current policy and then completing the [feedback form](#) to share your ideas, strategies, questions, and/or favorite resources for responding to and preventing bullying in our schools. School divisions are also encouraged to review and communicate their

own bullying policies with students, families, and educators to ensure that all students have a safe environment in which to learn.