

# Springfield Public Schools

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We are all aware of tragic incidents involving students who have been bullied at school. These incidents have placed families and districts alike on high alert in seeing that every single instance of alleged harassment, intimidation, and bullying ("HIB") be swiftly and comprehensively addressed.

The Springfield Board of Education responds accordingly. As required by state law, school policy, and the district's general obligation to provide students with a safe and constructive learning environment, Springfield takes comprehensive action in a timely manner addressing every reported incident of HIB. To facilitate this, every school in the district has designated staff who undergo repeated and intensive training in the prompt investigation of reported incidents of HIB, monitoring classroom and recreational environments, administering individual and group counseling, and working with other school personnel to improve school culture generally. Moreover, every alleged instance of HIB -- whether or not substantiated -- is reported to the Board of Education. The Board then vets each determination, which includes reviewing relevant statements, and any parent who is in disagreement with the findings is reminded of his or her right to request a hearing before the Board of Education and to appeal that determination to the Commissioner of Education. Given the carefulness with which Springfield's school administrators make their HIB assessments, and the scrutiny with which the Board thereafter reviews those assessments, Springfield's HIB determinations are rarely appealed, and in the rare instances they are appealed, the Commissioner of Education has never overturned them. This is important to us as a District, as it signals that our procedures are comprehensive and our staff is trained, fully knowledgeable and performing appropriately in this area.

Recently, there has been much misinformation in the media regarding alleged HIB and Springfield's actions. Given the district's legal obligations around student privacy, which prevent us from providing specific information regarding any individual student or case, we are constrained in how much we can say in correcting the record and addressing the misconceptions some people may have as a result of these media reports. However, in a general sense, we can offer that every instance of alleged HIB reported is promptly investigated. In particular, every instance reported this school year has been promptly investigated. This is true even for incidents that allegedly occurred last school year, but were only reported this school year. Unfortunately, delay in reporting incidents or concerns of this nature can hamper our ability to promptly and thoroughly investigate; it can also delay implementation of effective strategies to address a situation.

While there are limits to what behavior constitutes HIB under the law, that does not change how protective we are of our students in our schools. Indeed, poor conduct that does not constitute HIB is still addressed by school administration towards fostering a physically and emotionally safe school environment. Notwithstanding, to be doubly sure of our investigation efforts, we have, at times, gone so far as to engage our district's legal counsel to conduct a second round independent investigation.

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The recent news reports inferred that the District was ignoring certain requests made by medical providers. This is never the case. It is important for all parents to know that should medical information regarding a student's condition or state of mind be presented to District staff or administration, such information is not merely reviewed by relevant school personnel. It is reviewed and evaluated by a highly credentialed medical professional, who seeks direct input from the student's treating physician(s), should a parent permit this to occur. In other words, Springfield's tendency has been to over-evaluate a given situation and allow those most qualified to obtain necessary information before making a determination. Federal and State laws limit our ability to speak with a child's treating physician(s) without written parental consent. If that consent is delayed or withheld by a parent, it hampers our ability to promptly address a situation.

While not reported by the news media recently, all of these steps have been taken in the case featured and are ongoing. We have been and are continuing to address that particular situation. In fact, two investigations were conducted, the second of which by an outside entity is ongoing. It is disheartening when the information conveyed to the public is not accurate and causes you as community members and parents to question the safety of your children and the commitment of the District's staff to ensure the best interests of all Springfield children. We can only say that the information presented as to the alleged bullying being reported in the news reports is inconsistent with the information we received (from all sources, including the parents and the student herself). The outcome of the HIB investigation was not appealed to the Board or the Commissioner; despite that, we remain committed to working through this, and every, bullying claim.

We recognize that families will not agree with every decision made by District administrators. However, we want to assure our families that no HIB determination has occurred or will occur thoughtlessly. To aid our efforts in making the right determination in each instance, we urge families to promptly report HIB, to exercise transparency in investigations, and to work with our personnel to achieve the right outcome for all students.

As Superintendent, I have been involved personally in the situation reported by the media and am aware of and oversee all alleged instances of HIB, the investigations, and the determinations. The safety and security of the students in our district is of the utmost concern to the administration, the Board of Education, and myself. The school administration and staff at the Sandmeier School followed all applicable State laws and regulations, and all locally developed processes and procedures. I have every confidence that they act, every day, in the best interests of the children of Springfield.

Should you have any questions about HIB, our practices or procedures, you are welcome to contact my office.

*Michael A. Davino*  
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