

Discipline Equity/Advisory Committee Meeting
February 1, 2018

Present:

Erica Bales, Parent	Katharine Fetig, Central
Jesse Guzman, Jefferson	Stephanie Hayek, CECC
Jennifer Hinds, Centennial	Cindy Lockett, Mellon
Kathy Shannon, Board of Ed.	Lindsey Trout, ACTIONS
Joel Wright, Jefferson	Orlando Thomas, Mellon, Chair
Jeanne Smith, Mellon, Recorder	

Students from Centennial's Empower group gave a presentation on sexual harassment in schools and proposed changes to the sexual harassment policy/procedure 720.09/R and health curriculum to bring more focus to bear on the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in the school environment. Empower students reported that an informal survey of approximately 120 students indicated that about 66% of students had experienced either sexual harassment or sexual assault in the school setting.

This group believes sexual harassment and sexual assault are under-reported because:

- Students lack knowledge of the reporting process.
- The policy is not easily accessible to students.
- A victim-blaming culture exists.
- Victims distrust administrators believing they'll side with teachers instead of students.
- Victims fear retaliation if they report.
- Victims don't feel confident their reports will result in any real repercussions for harassers/abusers.

This group proposed specific changes to policy/procedure 720.09/R which are summarized below:

- Add a definition of "consent" to specify that it needs to be "enthusiastic" and "continuous."
- Add more examples of what may constitute sexual harassment (examples provided by students) p. 52 of Code, paragraph 3. The sample language was taken from another school's handbook.
- Delete verbiage that states, "Advise the student to tell the accused to stop" because a "survivor" shouldn't have to confront a "perpetrator" (p. 53 of Code, #1.a. under "Student Complaint Process."
- Delete verbiage from the student complaint process which states "However, students who are found to have willfully made false accusations of sexual harassment are subject to discipline" because it makes victims feel "they are assumed to be lying" (p.54 of Code, #11 under "Student Complaint Process." Propose that students be disciplined under Violation #12 False Reports/Forgery only.
- Revise "victim-blaming language" that states "complaining student(s)" (p. 55 of Code, #1.b under subsection "In All Cases.") Is "complaining" a legal term? It portrays the victim in a negative light.
- Add language at the beginning of policy to clarify that the policy/procedure applies to all types of relationships not just heterosexual ones.
- Add language that states, "Students are entitled to the credit that they were receiving if they have to [or elect to] drop the class because of sexual misconduct from a teacher."
- Change reporting period from 30 days to 300 days (p. 53 of Code, #3 under "Student Complaint Process") "to match Illinois' legal statute of limitations for reporting sexual misconduct/harassment/assault."

- Add language that talks about repeated offenses (p. 55 of Code, under “In All Cases”). [Note: This language appears in the Code of Conduct consequence section for Violation #15.c Harassment/Hazing/Bullying (p. 30).]

This group proposed making the reporting process more transparent by:

- Providing students (and teachers) with copy of policy/procedure during freshman orientation or beginning-of-year behavior assemblies/meetings.
- Adding to the policy/procedure the investigation form administrators use when investigating sexual harassment/abuse cases.
- Informing victims and/or including in the policy/procedure what school disciplinary options exist if they choose NOT to make a legal/criminal report.
- Informing victims and/or including in the policy/procedure the administration’s ability to use camera footage in their investigations.
- Recognizing that “restorative measures between survivors and perpetrators are an advanced level restorative skill that is beyond the district’s current capabilities” and should not necessitate that a victim confront a perpetrator.”

This group proposed improving the health curriculum relative to sexual harassment by:

- Providing bystander intervention training for staff and students.
- Making instruction age-appropriate beginning in elementary school and providing adequate focus on the topics of sexual harassment and sexual abuse. Erin’s Law was mentioned regarding elementary instruction.
- Clarifying which committee is referenced on p. 53 of Code, #2 under subsection “The District’s Educational Program” and letting stakeholders know how to join this committee.
- Clarifying “specific measures” on p. 54 of Code, #6 under subsection “The Superintendent’s or Designee’s Investigation Process (Student to Employee).” This same wording is included on p. 54 of Code, #19 under subsection “The Superintendent’s or Designee’s Investigation Process (Student to Student).” Resources should be made known and available to “survivors” to process and deal with the after-effects (e.g., R.A.C.E.S., Courage Connection, etc.).
- If these issues cannot be addressed in the next couple of years, there are a variety of community groups that could come in and present to students (R.A.C.E.S./UIUC FYCARE Program/Tier 1).

Sexual Harassment vs. Sexual Assault

Orlando reported that in response to two sexual harassment situations that occurred last year, new procedures were developed to guide administrators in investigating sexual misconduct incidents. School officials are to conduct an initial investigation, after which they are to determine whether police need to be informed and conduct a separate investigation. If the incident is believed to be a criminal matter, police will follow legal protocols including possible interviews conducted by the Child Advocacy Center (CAC). Jennifer Smith, District legal counsel, will be providing sexual harassment/sexual abuse training to administrators in the summer of 2018.

Next meeting: February 15, 2018, 4:00 p.m., Mellon Lower-Level Conference Room.

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