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For Immediate Release

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Bullies Beware: New SCUSD Policy Cracks Down on Harassment

***District toughens stance in a sweeping initiative to keep kids,
schools as safe as possible***

May 3, 2011 (Sacramento) – A comprehensive new policy aimed at cracking down on bullying – in school hallways *and* in cyber space – will be considered by Sacramento City Unified School District’s Board of Education on Thursday.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday (May 5) in the Serna Center Community Room, 5735 47th Ave. The anti-bullying item is set for discussion at 9 p.m.

The proposed policy is in response to rising public concern both locally and nationally about bullying and its detrimental effects on child health and student learning. The advent of Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube has substantially increased the potential for harassment and the need for clear, rigorous policies against it.

“This district will not tolerate harassment or bullying in any form by anyone,” said SCUSD Superintendent Jonathan Raymond, who directed the formation of the Bullying Prevention Task Force in October 2009 out of concern that SCUSD lacked policies to specifically address bullying and harassment. The Task Force includes students, parents and community members in addition to district staff. The policy is a product of months of collaboration, discussion and research into effective strategies.

“Our goal is to provide the safest schools possible so everyone in the classroom can concentrate on the joy of learning without fear,” Superintendent Raymond said.

Guidelines in the proposed policy will help students, parents, faculty and others identify bullying and details procedures to be followed in addressing such harmful behaviors once recognized.

The new policy defines harassment or bullying as “any gesture or written, verbal, graphic, physical or electronic act” that is motivated by a person’s “actual or perceived characteristics,” such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, weight or socio-economic status.

“Such behavior is considered harassment or bullying whether it takes place on or off school property, at any school-sponsored function, in a school vehicle, or by students, family members or staff,” the policy states. For conduct to be bullying, it must also “involve an imbalance or power or strength” and a “pattern of behaviors repeated over time.”

The trend of teen “sexting” – sending semi-nude or nude photos electronically – is also addressed in the proposed policy. “Sending sexually explicit images electronically, even consensually, may be considered as distribution of child pornography, which is a felony, and is to be referred to district security and/or law enforcement.”

Principals would have one week after receiving a complaint about bullying or harassment to conduct a “prompt, thorough and complete” investigation and make a determination whether the student was bullied or harassed as defined by the new policy.

Students who try to stop bullying or who report bullying to officials would be supported by the district for making the right decision. SCUSD is also committed to providing extensive services to victims and perpetrators of bullying, families, staff and witnesses to harassment. Those services include counseling, training and workshops.

The Bullying Prevention Task Force is now crafting a district-wide strategic plan on bullying prevention and intervention to compliment the policy.

Last fall, the U.S. Department of Education sent a letter to schools, colleges and universities explaining educators' legal obligations to protect students from student-on-student racial and national origin harassment, sexual and gender-based harassment and disability harassment.

President has also weighed in on the issue.

"We've got to dispel the myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage, or an inevitable part of growing up. It's not," President Obama has said. "We have an obligation to ensure that our schools are safe for all of our kids. Every single young person deserves the opportunity to learn and grow and achieve their potential, without having to worry about the constant threat of harassment."

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