

Civility Policy

Adopted: September 26, 2022

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure a safe and civil educational and work environment. A safe and civil educational and work environment is essential to the successful operation of schools, the free exchange of ideas central to a quality educational process, and the development of youth as thoughtful participants in our democracy. Conversely, uncivil conduct (see definition) may interfere with students' ability to learn, a district's ability to support and educate its students, and the administration's and School Board's ability to manage and lead. As such, the District seeks to support respectful and civil interaction and communication among students, staff, parents, volunteers, community members, and school board members.

Definition of Uncivil Conduct

Civility has a different meaning to different people. For some, civility is fluid and may change based on circumstances or the individuals who are interacting with one another. Some may be more tolerant of conflict than others. Likewise, some may be more tolerant of specific behavior based on the person engaging in the behavior, the person receiving the behavior, the time or place of the behavior, and/or the duration of the behavior. As such, *civility* is often challenging to define.

Nevertheless, certain behaviors are near-universally recognized as *uncivil* conduct. For purposes of this Policy, "uncivil conduct" includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Directing or communicating vulgar, obscene, or profane gestures or words at another individual, either in person or in written or electronic communications;
- Threatening, either in person or in written or electronic communications, to physically harm another or to damage their property;
- Repeatedly and intentionally interrupting another individual who is speaking at an appropriate time and place;
- Engaging in discriminatory, harassing, or retaliatory behavior based on or because of a person's protected class or status;
- Imposing personal demands at times or in settings where they prevent a person from engaging in assigned duties or obligations;
- Using derogatory epithets or slurs;
- Gesturing in a manner that puts another in reasonable fear for their safety;
- Invading the personal space of an individual after being directed to move away;
- Intentionally physically blocking an individual's exit from a room or location;
- Remaining in a school area after a teacher or administrator in authority has directed one to leave; and
- Violating the privacy of another individual's belongings (except for lawful searches by school officials conducted in connection with the administration of school rules and applicable laws).

Uncivil conduct does not include the expression of controversial or differing viewpoints that may be offensive to some, so long as the following conditions are present:

- The ideas are presented in a manner that does not constitute uncivil conduct and at a time and place that are appropriate; and
- The expression does not materially disrupt the educational process or work environment and may not be reasonably anticipated to disrupt each such process and environment.

Self-Regulation and Conflict Management

Avoiding uncivil conduct requires self-regulation and a commitment to effectively manage conflict.

- Self-regulation includes self-monitoring, insight, and self-management of behaviors.
- Conflict management requires effective communication such as active listening, attacking problems instead of people, de-escalation, and, sometimes, the involvement of third parties.

Because of the shared value placed on a safe and civil educational and work environment, the District encourages students, staff, parents, volunteers, community members, and school board members to commit to self-regulation and active conflict management.

Freedom of Speech and Other Rights Not Prohibited or Penalized

Nothing in this Policy shall be construed to prohibit or penalize the lawful exercise of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to peaceably assemble and petition the government for a redress of grievances, subject to the following limitations:

- The conduct does not materially disturb, interfere with, or obstruct or threaten to materially disturb, interfere, or obstruct any lawful task, function, process, or procedure of the District or any lawful task, function, or process of any student, official, employee, or invitee of the District; and
- The conduct does not violate a prohibition or limitation lawfully imposed by the District upon entry or use of any motor vehicle, building, grounds, or other property which is owned, operated, or controlled by the District.

In addition to this Policy not being construed in the manner described above, this Policy will not be enforced in a manner that penalizes the lawful exercise of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and right to peaceably assemble and petition the government for a redress of grievances. Accordingly, the District commits to enforce this Policy only in those situations where the enforcement does not violate a person's freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to peaceably assemble and petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Informal Resolution of Uncivil Conduct Complaints

In all cases, individuals who perceive they have been treated in an uncivil manner will be urged to resolve their concerns promptly through direct or assisted communication with the person(s) at the source of the concern. When this is not possible or appropriate, anyone who needs help identifying and using appropriate problem-solving procedures may seek assistance from a school or district administrator.

Formal Enforcement of Uncivil Conduct

The District may take the following steps to enforce this Policy. Certain steps may be skipped depending on the severity of an individual's conduct.

Official Warning

If a person engages in uncivil conduct covered by this Policy, a district administrator may issue an oral or written warning. This warning should identify the uncivil behavior and give the individual an opportunity to improve their behavior before the District takes more severe action.

Brief Suspension

If the individual does not improve their behavior in response to a warning, a district administrator may direct the individual to leave district premises, to cease using district premises, or to cease using the district forum (*i.e.*, email, Zoom, etc.) for a designated period. The specified period should be long enough to allow the individual and administrator to discuss the behavior, de-escalate, and consider alternatives. This temporary suspension is intended to provide an opportunity to de-escalate and reflect on the cause of the uncivil conduct and the conduct itself.

Cease-and-Desist Letter

If the individual does not improve their behavior in response to a warning or brief suspension, the District may respond by sending a cease-and-desist letter. The letter will identify the prohibited conduct and the District's potential remedies.

Further Measures

Nothing in this Policy precludes the District from taking additional action, including referring the matter to law enforcement.

Other Rules, Policies, or Laws

Certain types of uncivil conduct may violate other school rules, policies, or laws. Violation of such policies, rules, and laws may result in the District taking further action (including, but not limited to, action under Chapter 28A.635 RCW, the District's policies against harassment and discrimination, and a school's conduct codes). Nothing in this Policy is intended to interfere with the ability of school officials to maintain order and discipline in the schools or to enforce school rules and applicable policies and laws.

Classification: **Mabton School District**

08/22/2022
