



# VSBA

**Virginia School Boards Association**

Leadership • Advocacy • Support

# 2025 Bullying Prevention Month Toolkit



*Participation in VSBA initiatives and observances is optional. School boards in Virginia have the discretion on whether to participate locally. All related materials from the Association are shared as suggested ideas for implementation for any board that may choose to do so.*

# October 2025 – VSBA Bullying Prevention Month

Dear School Board Member/Superintendent,

Each October, the VSBA Board of Directors recognizes Bullying Prevention Month to raise awareness and promote action to ensure that all students can learn in safe, supportive environments.

Bullying remains a serious issue impacting student well-being and academic success. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2024), students who are bullied are at an increased risk of depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, lower academic achievement, and dropping out of school. Bullying can also lead to school absenteeism, mental and physical stress, poor school performance, low self-esteem, and in some cases, school violence.

School board members, superintendents, teachers, administrators, and parents play a critical role in creating a climate where bullying is not tolerated. It is imperative that we, as educational leaders, take a proactive stance in addressing and preventing bullying within our schools.

VSBA will publicize Bullying Prevention Month in our newsletter, on the VSBA website and through social media, and will send out a statewide news release urging news organizations to provide coverage of local activities. School divisions are encouraged to issue their own news releases, and it would be helpful if divisions would apprise the VSBA of any related activities taking place in their division. Potential activities could include:

- **Adopt a proclamation:** Similar to the one adopted by the VSBA Board of Directors (see enclosed).
- **Utilize Social Media:** Use your school's social media platforms to share information and resources related to bullying prevention.
- **Implement School-Wide Activities:** Plan activities such as assemblies, poster contests, and themed days that promote kindness, inclusion, and respect.
- **Host Educational Workshops:** Conduct parent/caregiver workshops on bullying, which could include the opportunity for parents/caregivers to spend time with their child's guidance counselor.

This toolkit includes several resources to assist you in these efforts, including:

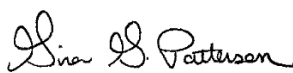
- References to applicable Virginia laws and VSBA sample policies
- Information on AI and Cyberbullying
- Sample proclamation
- Sample news release
- Sample social media posts

We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to help spread awareness of the serious nature of bullying in our schools.

Sincerely,



Dr. JoWanda Rollins-Fells  
VSBA President



Gina G. Patterson  
Executive Director

## References to applicable Virginia laws

The Virginia General Assembly has passed several laws to combat bullying. The VSBA proposes language in its sample policies to address the legal obligations on school boards and school divisions. The VSBA sample policies also include legal references to relevant statutes. Some of the Virginia statutes related to bullying prevention are referred to here, but this is not an exhaustive list. All section references are to the Virginia Code:

§ 22.1-79.3:1. Student cell phone and smart device possession and use policies; development and implementation.

§ 22.1-208.01. Character education required.

§ 22.1-276.01. Definitions.

Defines “bullying” and “cyberbullying” as:

"Bullying" means 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" includes cyberbullying. "Bullying" does not include ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict.

"Cyberbullying" means bullying that occurs through the use of technology, including through cell phones and other electronic devices or technology capable of accessing the Internet.

§ 22.1-279.6. Board of Education guidelines and model policies for codes of student conduct; school board regulations.

§ 22.1-291.4. Bullying and abusive work environments prohibited.

## VSBA Anti-Bullying Sample Policies

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The VSBA Policy Manual includes several sample policies that address bullying. Some of those sample policies are addressed below:

**Sample Policy JFCM** Student Cell Phone and Smart Device Possession and Use states that when a student is permitted to use cell phones or smart devices on school property, such use must not result in bullying.

**Sample Policy JFC** Student Conduct includes a section on the prohibition of bullying and cyberbullying. It includes parental notification requirements for the parent of any student involved in a bullying incident. The policy also states that the school division will provide protections as well as a list of support services and resources for victims of and witnesses to such conduct.

**Sample Policy IGA** Character Education states that the division’s character education program will include instruction on the inappropriateness of bullying.

**Sample Policy GCL** Professional Staff Development provides that the division's professional development program educates school board employees about bullying and the need to create a bully-free environment.

**Sample Policy GAB/IIBEA** Acceptable Computer System Use provides that the division's technology guidelines include provisions designed to educate students and employees on appropriate online behavior, including cyberbullying awareness and response.

In addition to policies that address bullying by name, it is important to remember that bullying is a term which incorporates many types of conduct. Some of that conduct, such as hitting, may amount to criminal misconduct. When that is the case, certain conduct must be reported to law enforcement officials pursuant to Virginia Code § 22.1-279.3:1 and VSBA Sample Policy CLA Reporting Acts of Violence and Substance Abuse. The conduct may also be addressed by VSBA Sample Policy JFCE Gang Activity or Association or VSBA Sample Policy JFHA/GBA Prohibition Against Harassment and Retaliation.

Whenever a division is confronted with conduct that may be bullying, it should carefully consider whether the conduct is also prohibited harassment. When a division discovers harassment, it should consider appropriate discipline for the harasser(s), and whether broader remedies, such as school-wide or division-wide training, are necessary.

# Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Cyberbullying

Virginia recently updated **Va. Code §§ 22.1-276.01 and 22.1-279.06** to specifically include cyberbullying, recognizing the need to address harmful behavior in digital spaces.

According to [StopBullying.gov](https://stopbullying.gov), cyberbullying is bullying that occurs through digital devices such as cell phones, computers, or tablets. It can take place via text messages, social media, online forums, or gaming platforms and often involves posting or sharing harmful, false, or mean content about others. In some cases, it may include sharing private information without consent, leading to embarrassment or humiliation.

Virginia law ensures that victims and witnesses of cyberbullying are protected. Students should never be discouraged from reporting due to fear of retaliation or rejection. Schools are required to provide victims with access to support services and resources to guide them through both reporting and recovering.

To assist families and schools, tools are available:

- **ReThink**: Flags offensive content before it is posted, giving adolescents a chance to reconsider. Students change their minds 93% of the time. More information is available at <https://www.rethinkwords.com/>
- **Puresight**: Monitors online activity, alerts parents to harmful content, and blocks offensive users. More information is available at <https://www.puresight.com/>

In addition to technology, school divisions play a key role. Effective strategies include division-wide anti-bullying policies, consistent consequences for offenders, and family education. Many divisions begin with an assessment of bullying prevalence, then create reporting systems that encourage positive behavior and inclusiveness. Schools also integrate anti-bullying lessons into curriculum and provide staff training to ensure early detection and intervention.

## Generative AI and Deepfake Risks

As technology evolves, new online risks are emerging beyond cyberbullying. Generative AI is a powerful tool capable of creating images, videos, audio, and text. While these tools can be useful in education and creativity, they also carry risks if misused. According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), Generative AI can be exploited to create harmful content, such as altered images of real children that depict them in inappropriate or exploitative ways. These manipulated products are often called deepfakes.

A deepfake is an image, video, or audio clip that has been digitally altered by AI to make it appear as though a person said or did something they never actually did. Because these manipulations can be so realistic, they pose serious risks for spreading false information, damaging reputations, and exploiting individuals.

To reduce the risk of students and others of becoming a victim of a deepfake, it is important for them to be cautious about what is shared online. Students and families can take steps such as:

- Limiting the personal information, photos, or videos posted online.
- Adjusting privacy settings on social media to control who can see shared content.

- Reviewing digital footprints regularly to ensure online safety.

For additional resources, the NCMEC offers guidelines, training materials, tip sheets, and more:

- Generative AI and Exploitation: <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/generative-ai>
- Internet Safety: Generative AI: <https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/topics/generative-ai>
- Tip Sheets and Resources: <https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/resources#tipsheets>

By combining updated legal protections, digital tools, division wide policies, and awareness of emerging technologies like Generative AI, families and school divisions can work together to create safer digital environments for students.

# VSBA Board of Directors Proclamation

**WHEREAS**, school bullying has become an increasingly significant problem in the United States and Virginia; and

**WHEREAS**, nearly twenty percent of the youth in the United States are estimated to be involved in bullying each year, either as a bully or as a victim; and

**WHEREAS**, an estimated ten percent of elementary schools, fifteen percent of high schools, and twenty-eight percent of middle schools reported the occurrence of bullying at school at least once a week; and

**WHEREAS**, bullying can take many forms, including verbal, physical, and electronic, and can happen in many places both on and off school grounds;

**WHEREAS**, it is important for Virginia parents, students, teachers, and school administrators to be aware of bullying, and to encourage discussion of the problem as a school community; and

**WHEREAS**, the VSBA has developed sample policies to encourage positive behaviors and to eliminate bullying behaviors;

Now, **THEREFORE**, the Virginia School Boards Association recognizes the month of October 2025 as VSBA Bullying Prevention Month, with the intention that the issue of bullying and its prevention be discussed in Virginia schools and classrooms during that time.

# Sample News Release

## News Release

For Immediate Release

[DATE]

### Contact

[NAME]

[PHONE]

### October is VSBA Bullying Prevention Month

[CITY/COUNTY], VA – School board members, superintendents, teachers, and parents can play a critical role in creating a climate where bullying is not tolerated. It has been proven that when adults and children stand together, bullying ends. This is why the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) has declared October as VSBA Bullying Prevention Month.

Childhood bullying is a significant problem nationwide. It can cause school absenteeism, mental and physical stress, poor school performance, low self-esteem, and, in some cases, school violence. The National Center for Education Statistics at IES found in a national survey that 10% of elementary schools, 15% of high schools, and 28% of middle schools reported the occurrence of bullying at least once a week ([Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools, 2024](#)). Bullying is common and can include cyber, physical, and verbal actions.

[INSERT QUOTE FROM BOARD MEMBER AND/OR SUPERINTENDENT]

Local activities include [INSERT LIST OF ACTIVITIES]

### About the Virginia School Boards Association

Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training, and services. The Association offers conference, information, training, and counseling designed to meet the needs of the Commonwealth's educational leaders.

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# Sample Social Media Posts

Use these sample messages to promote Bullying Prevention Month throughout October. Feel free to personalize the content to reflect your school division's voice and activities.

📅 October is Bullying Prevention Month. We are committed to creating safe, inclusive school communities where all students feel supported. ❤️

🔔 Join us this October as we recognize Bullying Prevention Month. Together, we can build schools full of respect and free from bullying. 🏡

👤 Our students are leading the way in building positive school cultures. We're proud of their efforts to speak up and stand strong against bullying. 🙌

🔊 Empowering student voices is key to lasting change. Their leadership is helping create safer, more respectful schools. 💡

🎨 [School Name] hosted a powerful bullying prevention assembly today focused on kindness and belonging. Proud of our students for engaging! 🙌

🖼️ Look at the amazing posters from [School Name]'s anti-bullying art contest! Our students are spreading powerful messages through creativity. 🎉

👨👩👧 We encourage families to speak with their children about recognizing bullying and how to report it. Together, we support every child. ❤️

📅 Students who experience bullying are more likely to face challenges like anxiety, low grades, and skipping school. Awareness is the first step. 🔍

🧠 Bullying affects mental health and academic success. Prevention starts with understanding and taking action. 📄



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