



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association®

Leadership • Advocacy • Support

2026 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 2026 – VSBA Bullying Prevention Month

Dear School Board Members/Superintendents,

Each October, the VSBA Board of Directors recognizes Bullying Prevention Month as an opportunity to promote awareness, encourage respectful school communities, and support efforts to ensure all students can learn in safe and welcoming environments.

Creating positive school climates where students feel valued, respected, and supported is a shared responsibility. School board members, superintendents, administrators, teachers, families, and community partners all play an important role in fostering cultures of kindness, inclusion, and civility. Bullying Prevention Month provides an opportunity to reinforce these efforts and highlight the importance of treating others with dignity and respect.

Throughout October, VSBA will promote Bullying Prevention Month through our website, newsletter, and social media platforms, and will distribute a statewide news release encouraging coverage of local activities and initiatives. We encourage school divisions to participate in recognition efforts and to share information about activities taking place in your schools and communities.

Potential activities may include:

- Adopting a proclamation recognizing Bullying Prevention Month (see enclosed sample proclamation).
- Utilizing social media to share information, resources, and messages that promote kindness, respect, and inclusion.
- Implementing school-wide activities such as assemblies, poster contests, student-led campaigns, or themed displays that encourage positive peer relationships.
- Hosting educational workshops or informational sessions for students, families, and staff on bullying prevention and digital citizenship.

This toolkit includes resources to assist school divisions in their efforts, including:

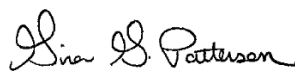
- References to applicable Virginia laws and VSBA sample policies
- Information on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Cyberbullying
- Sample Parent/Caregiver Guide: Recognizing and Responding to Bullying
- Sample proclamation
- Sample news release
- Sample social media posts
- Suggested activities calendar for October
- Sample student pledge for kindness, respect, and inclusion

We appreciate your commitment to fostering safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for all students and encourage you to participate in Bullying Prevention Month activities throughout October.

Sincerely,



Jenny Nichols
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

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 Related 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 follow division policy and procedures for handling such harassment, including 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

Understanding Cyberbullying

Virginia law requires school divisions to address bullying, including cyberbullying, and provide protections for students who report incidents. (Va. Code §§ 22.1-276.01 and 22.1-279.06).

Under Virginia Code § 22.1-276.01, cyberbullying is bullying that occurs through the use of technology, including cell phones and other electronic devices capable of accessing the internet. According to StopBullying.gov, it can occur through text messages, social media, online forums, or gaming platforms and often involves posting or sharing harmful, false, or mean content. It may also include sharing private information without consent.

Today's cyberbullying extends beyond texts and social media posts. Cyberbullying may include:

- Sending threatening or harassing messages
- Sharing embarrassing photos or videos without permission
- Creating fake profiles and impersonating another person online
- Excluding someone from online groups or activities
- Spreading rumors through social media, messaging apps, or gaming platforms
- Using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to create deceptive or harmful content about another person.

Legal Protections and Reporting

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.

If cyberbullying occurs, students and families are encouraged to:

- Save screenshots, messages, emails, or other evidence.
- Report the behavior to school administrators and the online platform when appropriate.
- Avoid responding to harmful messages.
- Seek support from trusted adults, school counselors, or other support services.

Prevention Strategies for Families and Schools

To assist families and schools, tools are available:

- **ReThink:** A tool designed to encourage users to reconsider posting potentially offensive content before it is shared. 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 in preventing cyberbullying. Effective strategies include implementing division-wide anti-bullying policies, establishing clear reporting procedures, promoting family education, and creating school environments that encourage positive behavior and inclusiveness. Schools may also integrate anti-bullying lessons into instruction and provide staff training to support early detection and intervention.

Generative AI and Deepfake Risks

As technology evolves, new online risks are emerging beyond traditional cyberbullying. Generative AI is a powerful technology capable of creating images, videos, audio, and text. While these tools can support learning and creativity, they also carry risks when misused.

Generative AI may be used to:

- Create altered images, videos, or audio recordings without consent
- Impersonate students or staff online
- Generate harmful messages or misinformation
- Produce content intended to embarrass, threaten, or harass another person
- Spread false information quickly and widely

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.

Promoting Responsible Digital Citizenship

Helping students become responsible digital citizens can reduce the risk of cyberbullying and other harmful online behaviors. School divisions and families can encourage students to:

- Think critically before sharing information online
- Respect the privacy and dignity of others
- Verify information before sharing it
- Report concerning online behavior to a trusted adult
- Consider the long-term impact of their digital footprint
- Use AI tools responsibly and ethically

Digital technologies continue to evolve rapidly, creating new opportunities for learning as well as new challenges related to student safety and well-being. By promoting responsible technology use, encouraging reporting, and educating students and families about emerging online risks, school divisions can help foster safer and more respectful digital environments.

Sample Parent/Caregiver Guide: Recognizing and Responding to Bullying

What is Bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time. Bullying can occur in person or online (cyberbullying).

Bullying may include:

- Physical actions, such as hitting, pushing, or damaging belongings
- Verbal actions, such as name-calling, teasing, or threats
- Social behaviors, such as excluding others, spreading rumors, or public embarrassment
- Cyberbullying through text messages, social media, gaming platforms, or other digital spaces

Warning Signs a Child May Be Experiencing Bullying

Children may not always tell adults when they are being bullied. Warning signs may include:

Changes in Emotions or Behavior

- Appears anxious, sad, withdrawn, or irritable
- Experiences mood changes or increased emotional reactions
- Shows a loss of confidence or self-esteem
- Seems fearful about going to school or participating in activities

Changes in Social Habits

- Frequently complains of headaches, stomachaches, or feeling ill
- Has unexplained injuries or damaged belongings
- Experiences changes in grades or loss of interest in school
- Avoids school, extracurricular activities, or social events

Changes in Technology Use

- Becomes upset or anxious after using a phone, computer, or social media
- Suddenly stops using devices or social media accounts
- Becomes secretive about online activities
- Receives an unusually high number of messages or notifications that cause distress

How to Talk With Your Child About Bullying

- Choose a quiet time to talk and listen without judgement
- Ask open-ended questions, such as:
 - “Can you tell me what happened?”
 - “How did that make you feel?”
 - “Has this happened before?”
 - “How can I support you?”
- Reassure your child that they did the right thing by telling an adult
- Avoid blaming your child or minimizing the situation
- Remind your child that no one deserves to be bullied

What to Do If Your Child Is Being Bullied

- Stay calm and provide reassurance and support
- Gather information about what happened, including who was involved and where the incident occurred
- Save evidence of cyberbullying, including screenshots, messages, photos, or videos
- Encourage your child not to retaliate or respond aggressively
- Contact your child's teacher, school counselor, principal, or another school administrator to discuss concerns
- Work collaboratively with school staff to identify supports and next steps
- Continue checking in with your child and monitor their well-being

What to Do If Your Child Has Bullied Others

Learning that your child has bullied someone can be difficult. Use the situation as an opportunity to teach accountability and empathy.

- Talk calmly about what happened and gather the facts
- Discuss how the behavior may have affected another person
- Clearly communicate that bullying is unacceptable
- Help your child identify positive ways to resolve conflict and manage emotions
- Monitor online activity and social interactions when appropriate
- Work with school staff to support positive behavior changes

Help Prevent Bullying

Parents and caregivers can help prevent bullying by:

- Encouraging kindness, empathy, and respect for others
- Teaching children to speak up when they witness bullying
- Maintaining open communication and problem-solving at home
- Monitoring technology use and discussing responsible digital behavior
- Helping build healthy friendships and positive coping skills
- Modeling respectful communication and problem-solving at home

Additional Support

If bullying is affecting your child's emotional well-being, consider reaching out to:

- School counselors or mental health professionals
- Teachers, principals, or school administrators
- Community-based counseling or support services

Creating safe, respectful, and inclusive environments is a shared responsibility. By maintaining open communication and working together, families and school can help ensure that all students feel supported, valued, and safe.

Sample Proclamation

WHEREAS, the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) encourages school divisions across the Commonwealth to promote safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for all students; and

WHEREAS, bullying in all forms, including verbal, physical, social, and electronic (cyberbullying), can negatively impact student well-being, school connectedness, and academic success; and

WHEREAS, fostering positive school climates where students feel respected, valued, and included is a shared responsibility of students, families, educators, school boards, and community partners; and

WHEREAS, school divisions across Virginia are committed to preventing bullying through education, awareness, clear policies, and the promotion of respectful and responsible behavior both in-person and online; and

WHEREAS, the VSBA provides guidance and sample policies to support school divisions in addressing bullying and encouraging positive student conduct; and

WHEREAS, Bullying Prevention Month provides an opportunity for schools and communities to engage in conversations and activities that promote kindness, inclusion, and respect.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the [SCHOOL DIVISION NAME], in partnership with the Virginia School Boards Association, hereby recognizes October 2026 as VSBA Bullying Prevention Month.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the [SCHOOL DIVISION NAME] encourages all schools, staff, families, and community members to work together this month, and throughout the year, to promote safe, respectful, and supportive learning environments for all students.

Sample News Release

News Release

For Immediate Release

[DATE]

Contact

[NAME]

[PHONE]

[DIVISION NAME] Recognizes October as Bullying Prevention Month in Partnership with VSBA

[CITY/COUNTY], VA – [SCHOOL DIVISION NAME] is joining school divisions across Virginia in recognizing October as Bullying Prevention Month, as designated by the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA). This statewide observance encourages schools and communities to promote kindness, respect, and inclusion while fostering safe, supportive learning environments for all students.

Bullying can take many forms, including physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying. Addressing bullying requires a shared commitment among school board members, superintendents, educators, families, and community partners. Bullying Prevention Month provides an opportunity to reinforce positive school climates and highlight the importance of ensuring that all students feel safe, valued, and supported.

“[INSERT QUOTE FROM SCHOOL BOARD CHAIR, SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, OR SUPERINTENDENT ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFE, SUPPORTIVE, AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS],” said [NAME], [TITLE].

Throughout October, [SCHOOL DIVISION NAME] will participate in Bullying Prevention Month activities aligned with this initiative. Planned activities include:

- [LIST ACTIVITIES]

“[INSERT SECOND QUOTE FROM A SCHOOL LEADER OR BOARD MEMBER, OR A MESSAGE TO FAMILIES ABOUT PARTNERSHIP AND STUDENT WELL-BEING].”

VSBA recognizes October as Bullying Prevention Month to raise awareness and encourage action across Virginia’s public schools. [SCHOOL DIVISION NAME] is proud to join this effort and remains committed to creating learning environments where every student feels respected, supported, and empowered to succeed.

About [SCHOOL DIVISION NAME]

[INSERT SCHOOL DIVISION BOILERPLATE]

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. Student 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. 

Suggested Activities Calendar for October

Bullying Prevention Month

School divisions can use all or select suggested activities below that best meet the needs of their schools and communities.

Week 1: Awareness

October 1 – Kickoff Day

Announce Bullying Prevention Month through school communications and social media and share the division's commitment to creating safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments.

October 2 – Wear Blue Day

Encourage students and staff to wear blue to show support for bullying prevention and kindness.

Week 2: Kindness and Inclusion

Monday – Kindness Challenge

Encourage students to perform an act of kindness for someone else.

Tuesday – Compliment Day

Invite students and staff to write positive notes or compliments to classmates and colleagues.

Wednesday – Include Everyone Day

Encourage students to sit with someone new at lunch, invite others to participate in activities, or welcome new students.

Thursday – Thank You Day

Recognize teachers, school staff, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and others who help create positive school environments.

Friday – Spirit Day

Wear school colors to celebrate unity and respect.

Week 3: Digital Citizenship

Monday – Think Before You Post

Share tips for responsible social media use and respectful online communications.

Tuesday – Cyberbullying Awareness Day

Discuss what cyberbullying is and how students can report concerns.

Wednesday – AI Awareness Day

Provide age-appropriate information about responsible use of artificial intelligence and the risks associated with deepfakes and harmful online content.

Thursday – Digital Footprint Day

Encourage students to reflect on how their online actions can have lasting impacts.

Friday – Technology-Free Challenge

Encourage students and families to spend time connecting offline.

Week 4: Student Voice and Community Engagement

Monday – Student Pledge Day

Invite students to sign the Student Pledge for Kindness, Respect, and Inclusion. (See sample on next page.)

Tuesday – Poster or Video Contest

Create posters or short videos promoting kindness, empathy, and inclusion.

Wednesday – Classroom Conversations

Facilitate age-appropriate discussions about friendships, empathy, and respectful disagreement.

Thursday – Community Connections Day

Encourage families to discuss bullying prevention and digital citizenship at home.

Friday – Celebration Day

Recognize students and staff who have demonstrated kindness, leadership, and efforts to promote positive school climates throughout the month.

Sample Pledge for Kindness, Respect, and Inclusion

I pledge to help make my school a place where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued.

I will:

- Treat others with kindness and respect.
- Include others and welcome new friendships.
- Use my words and actions to encourage and support others.
- Think carefully before posting or sharing content online.
- Speak up or seek help when I see bullying or someone being treated unfairly.
- Respect differences and appreciate the unique qualities of others.
- Take responsibility for my actions and work to make positive choices.

I understand that creating a safe and inclusive school community is a shared responsibility, and I pledge to do my part to promote kindness, respect, and belonging every day.

Student Signature

Printed Name

Date



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