

The Dignity for All Students Act



WHAT IS THE DIGNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS ACT (THE DIGNITY ACT)?

- The Dignity Act is intended to give students in public schools an educational environment free from discrimination and harassment. It protects against all forms of harassment, particularly those based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex.
- The Dignity Act will prohibit activities that create a hostile environment at school and school-sponsored events. These activities can include aggressive conduct, threats, intimidation or abuse that unreasonably and substantially interferes with another student's educational performance. The Dignity Act also creates a framework for promoting a more positive school culture through sensitivity training and classroom curricula on diversity.

HOW WILL THE DIGNITY ACT WORK?

- The Dignity Act amends state education law to require that schools incorporate curricula on diversity and sensitivity into lessons on civility and citizenship.
- One employee from each school will need to attend an intensive training program. This person will become the school's designated contact for handling bullying. They will be trained to recognize and respond effectively to harassment and bullying, and implement strategies to prevent it.
- Incidents of bullying will be reported to the New York State Education Department on at least an annual basis so the state can evaluate schools' performance. Your local school district will probably manage reporting.
- Schools and districts will need to draft age-appropriate, plain language versions of the statute to appear in student codes of conduct.
- The New York State education commissioner will assist school districts in establishing sensitivity and tolerance trainings open to all staff. The commissioner will also provide direction to school districts on developing effective responses to bullying, including intervention and education.
 - However, individual school districts will create their own guidelines for training and prevention as well as policies for responding to harassment and discrimination.

WHEN WILL THE DIGNITY ACT BE IMPLEMENTED?

The Dignity Act takes effect on July 1, 2012. Until then, a statewide task force will be developing guidelines and model programs for schools to adapt for their students and staff. As a member of the task force, the NYCLU is working closely with the governor's office to ensure that the Dignity Act will promote safe, nurturing classrooms across New York.