

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

DAVID LONG, *et al.*,

Plaintiffs-Appellants

v.

MURRAY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT, *et al.*,

Defendants-Appellees

ON APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA

BRIEF FOR THE UNITED STATES AS *AMICUS CURIAE*
SUPPORTING PLAINTIFFS-APPELLANTS
AND URGING REVERSAL IN PART

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**CERTIFICATE OF INTERESTED PERSONS AND
CORPORATE DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

Pursuant to Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 26.1 and Eleventh Circuit Rule 26.1-1, counsel for *amicus curiae* United States certifies that in addition to the persons and entities identified in the plaintiffs-appellants' briefs, the following persons may have an interest in the outcome of this case:

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Dated: September 28, 2012

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INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES

This case involves the rights of students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794 (Section 504), and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. 12131 *et seq.* (ADA), both of which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by public schools. Section 504 prohibits discrimination by recipients of federal funding, whereas the ADA prohibits discrimination by all state and local governments. The United States has

substantial enforcement responsibilities under these statutes and a strong interest in their proper interpretation. The Department of Justice (DOJ) issues regulations implementing Section 504 and the ADA, is authorized to bring civil actions to enforce these statutes, and coordinates enforcement of Section 504 by all federal agencies. 29 U.S.C. 794, 794a; 42 U.S.C. 12134; 28 C.F.R. Pts. 35, 41 & App. A (Exec. Order No. 12,250). The Department of Education (ED) issues regulations addressing compliance with Section 504 by recipients of ED financial assistance. 29 U.S.C. 794; 34 C.F.R. Pt. 104.

The United States also has a strong interest in the issue of student-on-student harassment, which is an Executive Branch priority. The United States recently has participated as *amicus curiae* in private litigation to enforce statutory protections against student-on-student harassment. See, e.g., *Zeno v. Pine Plains Cent. Sch. Dist.*, No. 10-3604 (2d Cir.) (racial harassment); *Williams v. Port Huron Area Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, No. 10-1636 (6th Cir.) (racial harassment); *Doe v. Merrill Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, No. 10-1028 (6th Cir.) (sexual harassment). ED leads a coalition of nine federal departments that works to develop and distribute research-based bullying prevention information. ED has issued guidance to state departments of education and local school districts nationwide on bullying and harassment in general, see, e.g., “Dear Colleague” Letter from Russlynn Ali, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Department of Education (Oct. 26, 2010) (Addendum 1-10), as

well as disability harassment, see “Dear Colleague” Letter: Reminder of Responsibilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Norma V. Cantu, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights and Judith E. Heumann, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education (July 25, 2000) (Addendum 11-15). The United States has a strong interest in preventing and redressing student-on-student harassment.

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

The United States’ brief is limited to the following issue:¹

Whether the district court erred in concluding, as a matter of law, that the school district was not deliberately indifferent to persistent student-on-student disability-based harassment, thereby precluding the trier of fact from deciding this contested, fact-bound issue.

¹ The United States takes no position on any other issue presented in this appeal, including the Longs’ 42 U.S.C. 1983 claim alleging a substantive due process violation. Our brief is limited to application of the legal standard in damages actions against a school district in student-on-student harassment cases under Section 504 and the ADA. We do not address the standards DOJ and ED use in resolving administrative complaints or the regulations each agency enforces, the injunctive relief standard in private actions or in actions brought by DOJ, or any other cause of action subject to a deliberate indifference standard outside of the student-on-student harassment context.

STATEMENT OF THE FACTS

1. *Background*

Tyler Long (Tyler) was born in 1992. Doc.226 at 3.² In 2005 and 2006, Tyler was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome (a form of autism) and was found to be deficient in social and communication skills. Doc.226 at 3-4, 3 n.3, 92-93. Beginning in 1999, Murray County School District (the District) provided Tyler with special education services. Doc.226 at 92. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400 *et seq.*, requires that each child with a disability be provided an individualized education program (IEP) that defines the special education and related services the child will receive. 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(4), 1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(IV). In February 2006, Tyler's mother, Tina Long (Long), informed the IEP team at Tyler's middle school that Tyler was "picked on and bullied" throughout the school day.³ Doc.179-1 at 2-3. This persistent peer harassment continued unabated until October 2009, when Tyler took his own life.

² Doc.____" refers to the district court's docket number entry.

³ For the purposes of this brief, consistent with the record and district court opinion, we use the terms "bullying" and "harassment" interchangeably.

a. Ninth Grade (2007-2008)

Tyler's ninth grade IEP team decided that he would attend regular education classes, supplemented by speech and language services and consultative services for autism. Doc.226 at 41-42.

On September 6, 2007, Long emailed Marelle Bowers, the ninth grade lead special education teacher, and Keith Swilling, the assistant principal in charge of discipline for the ninth grade, and reported that Tyler's weight training teacher, Mr. Archie, had been picking on Tyler.⁴ Doc.226 at 42-43. Long also contacted Murray County High School (MCHS) principal Gina Linder and requested a meeting. Doc.226 at 43. Swilling talked to Tyler's parents, David and Tina Long (the Longs), and Archie. Doc.226 at 43. Bowers spoke with the Longs and scheduled an IEP meeting, where the IEP team spoke to Tyler's teachers about his disability, the resultant social misunderstandings that could affect his academic performance, and the need for adult monitoring in light of the recent problems in Archie's class. Doc.226 at 43-44.

On September 28, 2007, Long emailed Bowers to report that a student had spit in Tyler's food at lunch. Doc.226 at 45. Bowers forwarded this email to Swilling and another assistant principal. Doc.226 at 45. Swilling investigated the

⁴ Archie's first name is not apparent in the record.

incident, but did not discipline anyone because Tyler could not identify the perpetrator and Swilling did not find corroborating evidence. Doc.226 at 45-46.

On October 25, 2007, the IEP team again met, recognizing that students harassed Tyler often because of his disability. Doc.144 at 63-64. Tyler's IEP was amended to allow him to eat breakfast in Bowers' classroom, sit near a teacher in the lunchroom, and leave class five minutes early to change classrooms. Doc.226 at 46. These accommodations were intended to help Tyler avoid situations where he would be bullied. Doc.108 at 6 ¶16; Doc.144 at 69-70; Doc.226 at 47.

Although the Longs did not challenge Tyler's IEP, they later retained expert witnesses who opined that these IEP accommodations were inadequate to meet the needs of a student with Asperger's Syndrome, contributed to Tyler being singled out, and negatively affected Tyler's education by causing him to miss parts of class. Doc.226 at 97, 99; see also p. 14, *infra*.

On November 2, 2007, Bowers took Tyler to see Karen Harkleroad, Tyler's counselor, because students had tripped Tyler. Doc.226 at 47. Bowers and Harkleroad met with Tyler and the harassers. Doc.226 at 47. The students were not referred for discipline because Harkleroad did not consider the "isolated incident" to be bullying. Doc.226 at 48.

On November 8, 2007, Long emailed Linder, Swilling, and Bowers to ask that Archie stop teasing Tyler, and to protect Tyler from harassment by students.

Doc.226 at 48-49. Long informed school officials that Tyler was afraid to report harassment because he believed that nothing would happen and that he would suffer retaliation from students. Doc.226 at 50. Linder spoke with Swilling about the situation, met with Archie, and issued Archie a directive. Doc.226 at 51-52. Bowers also emailed Tyler's teachers to remind them of the recent accommodations added to his IEP. Doc.226 at 52.

On November 20, 2007, Long notified Bowers that a student had kicked Tyler while they were waiting for the school bus and asked that Bowers stand next to Tyler until he boarded the bus. Doc.226 at 54. Bowers agreed. Doc.226 at 54.

On January 23, 2008, Long emailed Swilling to report that Tyler was being bullied on the bus and that one of his teachers was being "hateful." Doc.226 at 56-57. Swilling forwarded this email to Bowers, who met with Long and the bus driver, spoke to the teacher, and arranged for a teacher to accompany Tyler to the school bus and for Tyler to sit behind the bus driver. Doc.226 at 57.

On April 22, 2008, Tyler reported to Harkleroad that two students made lewd sexual remarks to him and grabbed his genitals. Doc.116-1 at 5; Doc.226 at 59. Harkleroad referred the matter to Swilling, who warned each of the perpetrators. Doc.226 at 59-60.

At an unspecified time during ninth grade, Tyler told Bowers that he was being bullied and that students called him names, spit in his food, and picked on

him. Doc.226 at 61. Following this report, Bowers saw students teasing Tyler in the hallway. Doc.226 at 61. Bowers took these students and Tyler to the counseling office, where she and Harkleroad spoke with Tyler and the harassing students. Doc.226 at 61.

On May 7, 2008, Long emailed Linder and Sergeant Patrick Gainey, Tyler's classroom and JROTC instructor at MCHS, to thank them both for all of the assistance they had given Tyler. Doc.226 at 63-64.

MCHS had no records of reported harassment for the few weeks remaining in Tyler's ninth grade year. Doc.226 at 40-64. There were, however, other unreported incidents of harassment. Doc.226 at 60-61.

b. Tenth Grade (2008-2009)

Tyler's tenth grade IEP continued the same accommodations from ninth grade. Doc.226 at 62-63. Kevin Tackett, the lead special education teacher for tenth through twelfth grades, was appointed as Tyler's case manager, replacing Bowers. Doc.226 at 62.

On August 29, 2008, Tyler told his counselor, Julie Gallman, that a student was spreading rumors that he was gay and looked at gay pornography. Doc.226 at 66-67. Gallman warned the student and notified Long and Chris Thornbury, the assistant principal in charge of discipline for tenth through twelfth grades.

Doc.226 at 65, 67-68. Based on her understanding of the MCHS code of conduct, Gallman did not consider this incident “bullying.” Doc.226 at 68.

On September 8, 2008, Tyler told Thornbury that a student had pushed him down the stairs and her boyfriend had punched Tyler in the face. Doc.226 at 68. Thornbury investigated the incident and gave both students a five-day in-school suspension for bullying. Doc.226 at 68-70.

On September 12, 2008, Tyler’s chemistry teacher gave him and two other students a warning for incessant talking and a second warning to the two other students for “picking on a special needs student.” Doc.226 at 72. The chemistry teacher also emailed Thornbury to ask that he speak with all three students; Thornbury did not recall if he did so. Doc.129 at 4 ¶7; Doc.226 at 72-73.

On October 6, 2008, Tyler’s honors Spanish teacher warned a student for saying something unkind about Tyler. Doc.226 at 74. Thornbury counseled the student. Doc.226 at 74-75.

In November 2008, Tyler’s English teacher reported to the discipline office that a student had kicked Tyler. Doc.226 at 75. Tyler had asked his teacher not to report the incident because he was friends with the student. The student, who had an extensive, unrelated disciplinary history, may have received a three-day in-school suspension. Doc.226 at 75-76; Doc. 174 at 105 ¶222.

On December 12, 2008, Tyler's Spanish teacher told Gallman, Tyler's counselor, that a student had bumped his head into Tyler's fingers during class. Doc.226 at 77. The Spanish teacher also informed Gallman that Tyler had told her that he was "picked on" *daily*. Doc.208 at 47. Gallman met with Tyler, who asked her not to report the Spanish class incident to the discipline office because he was friends with the student. Doc.226 at 77. Gallman then asked Tyler about his comment that he was picked on every day. Doc.208 at 36-38. Tyler told Gallman that he was picked on daily, but was used to it and had been putting up with it for years. Doc.226 at 77-78. Gallman told Tyler that he could talk to her if he got tired of the harassment, if he was upset, or if he needed a break. Doc.226 at 78. Tyler asked Gallman to speak with two students who were not supposed to talk to him but continued to do so, which she did. Doc.226 at 80. Tyler did not identify any other students or specific incidents of bullying to Gallman. Doc.226 at 78. Following her conversation with Tyler, Gallman emailed the Spanish teacher and said, among other things, that she was "not sure what to do to protect [Tyler]." Doc.208-2. Gallman did not relay Tyler's report of daily harassment to other school officials or seek any advice on how to address the harassment. Doc.208 at 39-40; Doc.226 at 78-79.

In March 2009, Long emailed Linder and other school officials to commend them on helping Tyler. Doc.226 at 85-87; Doc.118-1 at 13.

In May 2009, Tyler's IEP team met to plan for eleventh grade. Doc.226 at 84. The team decided Tackett would continue to be Tyler's case manager and Tyler's IEP would retain the same accommodations. Doc.226 at 84-85. The IEP team did not discuss Tyler's December 2008 report that he was still being bullied every day. Doc.226 at 77-78, 84-85.

MCHS had no records of reported harassment from December 2008 through the end of the school year. Doc.226 at 82. There were, however, many unreported incidents. A student testified that Tyler was repeatedly bullied in the cafeteria, and that students called him names, stole his food, and smacked him in the head. Doc.226 at 80-81. Another student observed Tyler being bullied in English and math class; students repeatedly threw his books on the floor, called him names, and said that he was gay. Doc.226 at 81. The math teacher saw some of the harassment and told the harassing students to stop. Doc.226 at 82.

c. Eleventh Grade (2009)

The only communication between the Longs and school officials was regarding Tyler's removal from advanced placement classes. Doc.226 at 12. MCHS had no records of reported harassment that year, but a student reported to an English teacher that students had knocked books out of Tyler's hands in the hallway and pushed him. Doc.226 at 16. The English teacher does not appear to have done anything in response. Doc.226 at 16-17.

There were also many unreported incidents of harassment at unspecified times during the eleventh grade. Doc.226 at 16-19, 81-82. A student spit in Tyler's food and pushed him in the back of the head; students referred to Tyler as gay in history class; a student bumped into Tyler, called him names, pushed books out of his hand, and kicked him; students called Tyler names and pushed him out of his chair in Spanish class; and students bullied Tyler in the bathroom. Doc.226 at 16-19. On October 15 and 16, 2009, a student harassed Tyler in guitar class by taunting Tyler and pretending to take his guitar away. Doc.226 at 13-15. The guitar teacher did not intervene, although it is unclear if he saw the harassment. Doc.226 at 15 & n.11.

On October 17, 2009, Tyler hanged himself. Doc.226 at 5. Following Tyler's death, students wrote "we will not miss you" and "it was your own fault" on walls at MCHS. Doc.226 at 19. Other students drew hangman's nooses on the walls and some students even wore nooses around their neck at school. Doc.226 at 20.

There were other incidents of harassment at unspecified times during Tyler's tenure at MCHS. Doc.226 at 87-90. Students knocked books out of Tyler's hands, yelled at him, insulted him, called him names, kicked him, bumped into him, pushed him, slammed his head into a hair dryer in the bathroom, and pulled his pants down in the bathroom. Doc.226 at 87-90. None of the student-witnesses

reported any of these incidents to any school official, but some teachers saw the harassment. Doc.226 at 88-90. One student testified that teachers would tell the harassing students to stop and threatened to write them up, but that did not stop the daily bullying. Doc.226 at 89.

d. MCHS Anti-Harassment Policies And Training

During Tyler's tenure at MCHS, the school's code of conduct contained an anti-bullying policy that prohibited verbal and physical harassment, but did not specifically address disability harassment. Doc.226 at 21-24, 32. At no time during Tyler's studies at MCHS did the school offer any assembly or group instruction that explained the school's anti-harassment policy, nor did it inform the student body that harassment would not be tolerated. Doc.226 at 31-34. Linder told the school personnel to review the code of conduct, but never gave them any training or instruction on harassment, how to respond to it, or when to report it. Doc.226 at 35-36. Linder never emphasized that student-on-student harassment should not be tolerated at MCHS. Doc.226 at 35.

e. Plaintiffs' Expert Testimony

The Longs' experts, Barbara Coloroso and Jason Andrews, concluded that school officials had failed to recognize, respond to, and prevent bullying at MCHS. Doc.226 at 94-99. According to Coloroso, MCHS's anti-harassment policy was not clearly articulated, broadly communicated, or consistently enforced, and school

officials failed to follow mandatory disciplinary procedures that should have been taken when they learned of the on-going harassment of Tyler. Doc.226 at 94-96. Andrews found that there were no clear reporting procedures or expectations in place for teachers to report harassment to school administrators and that MCHS failed to provide adequate anti-harassment training to employees and students. Doc.226 at 99-100.

Both Coloroso and Andrews opined that school officials had failed to develop an IEP that adequately met the needs of a child with Asperger's Syndrome, like Tyler, and to provide Tyler's teachers and counselors with a copy of his IEP. Doc.226 at 97-100. Coloroso found that school officials had failed to train MCHS employees regarding Tyler's disability and how it might make him more vulnerable to bullying. Doc.226 at 97-98. Andrews concluded that Tyler's IEP contained accommodations that were inappropriate for him, singled him out from other students, and negatively affected his education. Doc.226 at 99-100.

2. *District Court Proceedings*

On January 29, 2010, the Longs, on behalf of themselves and their deceased son Tyler, sued the District and Linder in her individual and official capacity (the defendants-appellees). Doc.1. The Longs' amended complaint alleged violations of 42 U.S.C. 1983, Section 504, the ADA, and a state law nuisance claim, and sought compensatory and punitive damages and attorney's fees. Doc.3. The

defendants-appellees moved for summary judgment on all claims. Doc.107. On May 21, 2012, the district court granted summary judgment to the defendants-appellees. Doc.226 at 184. With regard to the Longs' Section 504 and ADA claims, the court held that while Tyler had been subject to severe and persistent disability-based harassment of which the District had notice, the Longs had failed to prove, as a matter of law, that the District was deliberately indifferent to the persistent harassment of Tyler by his fellow students. Doc.226 at 161-184. This appeal followed.⁵ Doc.228.

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

In a Section 504 or ADA suit, a school district is liable for damages when it fails to respond promptly and reasonably to student-on-student harassment of which it is aware. The district court erred in concluding, as a matter of law, that the District was shielded from any liability for the pernicious harassment of Tyler by his peers. Under the appropriate summary judgment standard, that is, viewing the evidence and all inferences in the light most favorable to the Longs, a reasonable jury could find that the District was deliberately indifferent based on its failure to take action reasonably calculated to abate persistent harassment that the school knew of and prevent its reoccurrence, including implementing anti-

⁵ The defendants-appellees also filed a cross-appeal (Doc.232), which the plaintiffs-appellants have moved to dismiss.

harassment training and programs for employees and students and amending Tyler's IEP when it was evident that the anti-harassment accommodations were ineffective.

Even more important, a jury could find that once Tyler told his counselor in December 2008 that he was still being harassed *daily*, school officials had clear notice that their remediation had been ineffective, triggering a duty to act. A jury also could find deliberate indifference based on the school's failure to take *any* measures reasonably calculated to end the harassment following this report. Summary judgment on the Section 504 and ADA claims should be reversed so that a trier of fact can decide the contested, fact-bound issue of deliberate indifference.

ARGUMENT

THE DISTRICT COURT ERRED IN GRANTING SUMMARY JUDGMENT TO THE DEFENDANTS-APPELLEES ON THE SECTION 504 AND ADA CLAIMS

A. *The District Court Erred In Holding That The Longs Failed, As A Matter Of Law, To Raise A Genuine Issue Of Material Fact As To Whether The District Was Deliberately Indifferent To Persistent Harassment*

1. The Longs raised student-on-student disability harassment claims pursuant to Section 504 and the ADA. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against an individual because of a disability by any program or entity receiving federal funds, including local public school districts. 29 U.S.C. 794(a) and (b)(2)(B). Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by

any public entity, including public school districts. 42 U.S.C. 121231-12132. A school district is liable for damages under both Section 504 and the ADA when school officials fail to address disability-based student-on-student harassment of which they are aware. See *S.S. v. Eastern Ky. Univ.*, 532 F.3d 445, 453 (6th Cir. 2008); *M.P. v. Independent Sch. Dist. No. 721*, 326 F.3d 975, 981-982 (8th Cir. 2003); *Preston v. Hilton Cent. Sch. Dist.*, No. 11-CV-6420L, 2012 WL 2829452, at *4 (W.D.N.Y. July 11, 2012); *Doe v. Big Walnut Local Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 837 F. Supp. 2d 742, 755-756 (S.D. Ohio 2011) (*Big Walnut*); *Werth v. Board of Dirs. of Pub. Schs. of Milwaukee*, 472 F. Supp. 2d 1113, 1126-1127 (E.D. Wis. 2007); *K.M. v. Hyde Park Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 381 F. Supp. 2d 343, 357-359 (S.D.N.Y. 2005); *Biggs v. Board. of Educ. of Cecil Cnty.*, 229 F. Supp. 2d 437, 444 (D. Md. 2002). Although these statutes provide distinct sources of protection against disability-based harassment, this Court has examined these statutes together. *E.g.*, *Cash v. Smith*, 231 F.3d 1301, 1305 (11th Cir. 2000).

The district court analyzed the Longs' claims under the framework in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, 526 U.S. 629, 119 S. Ct. 1661 (1999), a student-on-student sexual harassment case pursuant to Title IX of the Education

Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. 1681 *et seq.*⁶ Title IX is similar to Section 504 and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally-funded educational programs. In *Davis*, the Supreme Court held that in a private suit for damages under Title IX, a recipient of federal funds may be liable for its *own* misconduct with regard to student-on-student sexual harassment. 526 U.S. at 640, 119 S. Ct. at 1670. A school district may be liable for damages when it “is deliberately indifferent to known acts of student-on-student sexual harassment and the harasser is under the school’s disciplinary authority.” 526 U.S. at 646-647, 119 S. Ct. at 1673. *Davis* establishes that a school district is liable for damages when it fails to respond promptly and reasonably to known student-on-student harassment. 526 U.S. at 646-649, 119 S. Ct. at 1673-1674.

Under *Davis*, a court assessing the availability of damages must determine whether:

(1) the plaintiff is an individual with a disability, (2) he or she was harassed based on that disability, (3) the harassment was sufficiently severe or pervasive that it altered the condition of his or her education and created an abusive educational environment, (4) the defendant knew about the harassment, and (5) the defendant was deliberately indifferent to the harassment.

⁶ The United States takes no position on whether this is the appropriate standard in all student-on-student disability harassment cases, but agrees that it is the appropriate standard in this case.

S.S., 532 F.3d at 454; accord *Big Walnut*, 837 F. Supp. 2d at 756; *Werth*, 472 F. Supp. 2d at 1127; *Biggs*, 229 F. Supp. 2d at 445. The district court held in the Longs' favor on every factor except deliberate indifference, finding that although the defendants-appellees should have done more to prevent the harassment, their actions were not, as a matter of law, "clearly unreasonable in light of the known circumstances." Doc.226 at 161-184. Thus, resolution of the Section 504 and ADA claims here turns on the fifth factor: whether school officials were deliberately indifferent to the reported harassment.

In deciding that the Longs failed to prove deliberate indifference as a matter of law, the district court improperly drew inferences in the defendants-appellees' favor and overlooked factual disputes concerning the reasonableness of the District's response. In doing so, the district court contravened the summary judgment standard and improperly removed the fact-driven decision of deliberate indifference from the trier of fact. *E.g.*, *Strickland v. Norfolk S. Ry. Co.*, No. 11-15589, 2012 WL 3640999, at *1 (11th Cir. Aug. 27, 2012) ("Credibility determinations, the weighing of the evidence, and the drawing of legitimate inferences from the facts are jury functions, not those of a judge.") (quoting *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 255, 106 S. Ct. 2505, 2513 (1986)).

2. Inexplicably, the district court found that the defendants-appellees' response to the persistent harassment of Tyler was "100 percent effective" because

no individual student harassed Tyler again after being counseled or disciplined. Doc.226 at 168. Applying the correct summary judgment standard, a reasonable jury could find that the District had *not* taken steps reasonably calculated to stop the known harassment, which began in middle school and continued for years, and prevent its reoccurrence, because the harassment as a whole continued unabated. The district court ignored the fact that the District first had notice in February 2006, when Tyler was in seventh grade, that Tyler was harassed on a daily basis (Doc.179-1 at 2-3), and that Tyler made this same report nearly three years later, in December 2008, telling a school official that he had been subject to incessant peer harassment “for years.” Doc.226 at 77-78. Although the *reported* harassment had declined, Long had informed MCHS administrators that Tyler had become afraid to report harassment because he feared inaction from school officials and retaliation from students. Doc.226 at 50. A reasonable trier of fact could find that it was unreasonable for school officials to require Tyler, a student with disabilities that detrimentally affected his communication and interpersonal skills, to continue reporting harassment before they would take action, and to take no action at all once Tyler confirmed in 2008 that daily harassment was still on-going.

To be sure, a school district may not be able to purge its schools of all student-on-student harassment. *Davis*, 526 U.S. at 648, 119 S. Ct. at 1673-1674. A school district has substantial flexibility in its response to student-on-student

harassment, *ibid.*, and its response to harassment is not judged by effectiveness in hindsight, *Sauls v. Pierce Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, 399 F.3d 1279, 1285 (11th Cir. 2005). But courts have found summary judgment inappropriate in cases, like this one, where school officials know that the school's response to individual harassers has not abated pervasive and on-going harassment of the student-victim. *E.g.*, *Patterson v. Hudson Area Sch.*, 551 F.3d 438, 446-448 (6th Cir.), cert. denied, 130 S. Ct. 299 (2009); *Martin v. Swartz Creek Cmty. Sch.*, 419 F. Supp. 2d 967, 974-975 (E.D. Mich. 2006); *Theno v. Tonganoxie Unified Sch. Dist. No. 464*, 377 F. Supp. 2d 952, 965-966 (D. Kan. 2005).

In *Patterson*, *Martin*, and *Theno*, the student-victims were subjected to a pattern of harassment over months and years perpetrated by many different students. Even though the school district's response "typically reprimands[,] largely stopped harassment by the reprimanded student, [it] did not stop other students from harassing" the student-victim. *Patterson*, 551 F.3d at 448; see also *Martin*, 419 F. Supp. 2d at 974; *Theno*, 377 F. Supp. 2d at 966. The fact that the school district "dealt successfully with each identified perpetrator" did not shield it from liability as a matter of law when the school district knew that its "success with individual students did not prevent the overall and continuing harassment." *Patterson*, 551 F.3d at 449. As *Theno* held, "[w]hile * * * the school was not legally obligated to put an end to the harassment, a reasonable jury certainly could

conclude that at some point during the four-year period of harassment the school district's standard and ineffective response to the known harassment became clearly unreasonable." 377 F. Supp. 2d at 966.

A jury could reach the same conclusion here. A jury could find that evidence that school officials had to repeatedly counsel different students for years on the same issue (harassment of Tyler) triggered an obligation on the part of MCHS to evaluate whether its remedial efforts were effective against harassment, and that failure to do so was deliberate indifference.

The district court also did not adequately weigh or consider MCHS's failure to provide anti-harassment training and to adequately communicate its anti-harassment policy to employees and students. A clearly articulated and disseminated anti-harassment policy and appropriate anti-harassment training are critical to ensuring a prompt and reasonable response to student-on-student harassment. See "Dear Colleague" Letter from Russlynn Ali, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Department of Education (Oct. 26, 2010) (Addendum 1-10, 3) ("[D]epending on the extent of the harassment, the school may need to provide training or other interventions not only for the perpetrators, but also for the larger school community, to ensure that all students, their families, and school staff can recognize harassment if it recurs and know how to respond."); Department of Education, Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by

School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties, Title IX (Jan. 19, 2001) (Addendum 16-63, 37) (“[S]chools need to ensure that employees are trained so that those with authority to address harassment know how to respond appropriately, and other responsible employees know that they are obligated to report harassment to appropriate school officials.”).⁷

The district court also found that the defendants-appellees were not deliberately indifferent as a matter of law because they had developed a “safety plan” through Tyler’s IEP. Doc.226 at 170-171. In a case of student-on-student harassment involving a student with disabilities, whether and how the school district modified the student-victim’s IEP to address the harassment clearly is relevant. *M.P.*, 326 F.3d at 982. Here, the district court ignored the fact that while the IEP accommodations developed in October 2007 during Tyler’s ninth grade

⁷ Anti-harassment policies and training are not merely a matter of best practice. A school district’s failure to have or communicate an effective anti-harassment policy, establish a procedure for filing complaints, or train employees on discrimination and harassment are all relevant to the deliberate indifference inquiry. See *Gebser v. Lago Vista Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 524 U.S. 274, 291-292, 118 S. Ct. 1989, 1999-2000 (1998); *Williams v. Board of Regents of Univ. Sys. of Ga.*, 477 F.3d 1282, 1297 (11th Cir. 2007); *Flores v. Morgan Hill Unified Sch. Dist.*, 324 F.3d 1130, 1136 (9th Cir. 2003); *G.C. v. North Clackamas Sch. Dist.*, 654 F. Supp. 2d 1226, 1238-1239 (D. Or. 2009). As one court has explained, a school district’s “failure to ensure that its principal, and its teachers, received training in handling reports of sex abuse, could be viewed by a reasonable juror as evidence that [it] does not take such allegations with the seriousness such allegations deserve.” *Ibid.* Of course, on summary judgment, all inferences must be drawn in the plaintiff’s favor.

year were ineffective against harassment that persisted for the following *two years*, the school never changed Tyler's IEP. Nor did the district court consider the expert opinions that the IEP accommodations were inappropriate and, in fact, contributed to Tyler's social isolation. Doc.226 at 85, 97, 99. The district court also overlooked evidence that Tyler's teachers and counselors may not have been adequately informed of his disability, the on-going harassment, and the IEP accommodations (Doc.206 at 74-78; Doc.208 at 52-54; Doc.226 at 97-99), which is a potential violation of 34 C.F.R. 300.323(d). A reasonable trier of fact could find that all of this was evidence of the school district's deliberate indifference.

This evidence and all reasonable inferences viewed in the light most favorable to the Longs are sufficient to create a genuine issue of material fact as to deliberate indifference. Contrary to the district court's holding, it was error to hold that *no reasonable jury* could find that the District was deliberately indifferent to the harassment of Tyler.

B. A Reasonable Trier Of Fact Could Find That The District Was Deliberately Indifferent When School Officials Knew That Their Remedial Measures Were Ineffective And Nonetheless Failed To Take Any Action Reasonably Calculated To Eliminate The On-Going Harassment

1. Following Tyler's December 2008 report of daily harassment to school counselor Gallman, a reasonable trier of fact could find that the District had clear notice that its remediation efforts had been unsuccessful. The District's failure to act following this notice could easily, in our view, support a finding of deliberate

indifference. Stemming from a school district's duty to act in the face of known student-on-student harassment is a corresponding duty to modify its response to harassment when the school district *knows* its response to the harassment has been ineffective.

This Court has rejected the theory that a school district need only take *some* action in response to student-on-student harassment. In *Doe v. School Board of Broward County (Broward Cnty.)*, this Court held that although “a school district is not deliberately indifferent simply because the measures it takes are ultimately ineffective[,] * * * ‘where a school district has knowledge that its remedial action is inadequate and ineffective, it is required to take reasonable action in light of those circumstances to eliminate the behavior.’” 604 F.3d 1248, 1261 (11th Cir. 2010) (quoting *Vance v. Spencer Cnty. Pub. Sch. Dist.*, 231 F.3d 253, 261 (6th Cir. 2000)); accord *Doe v. Autauga Cnty. Bd. of Educ.*, No. 2:04-CV-1155, 2007 WL 3287347, at *6 (M.D. Ala. Nov. 5, 2007); *A.G. v. Autauga Cnty. Bd. of Educ.*, 506 F. Supp. 2d 927, 938-939 (M.D. Ala. 2007).

This Circuit precedent is consistent with decisions of the First, Ninth, and Sixth Circuits. All of these circuits have refused to relieve a school district of liability as a matter of law when the school district failed to alter its response to student-on-student harassment once the school district knew that its response was *not* working. See *Patterson*, 551 F.3d at 446-447; *Flores v. Morgan Hill Unified*

Sch. Dist., 324 F.3d 1130, 1135-1136 (9th Cir. 2003); *Vance*, 231 F.3d at 260-261; *Willis v. Brown Univ.*, 184 F.3d 20, 26 (1st Cir. 1999); accord *Doe v. Gladstone Sch. Dist.*, No. 3:10-CV-01172, 2012 WL 2049173, at *9 (D. Or. June 6, 2012); *Martin*, 419 F. Supp. 2d at 974-975; *Jones v. Indiana Area Sch. Dist.*, 397 F. Supp. 2d 628, 644-646 (W.D. Pa. 2005); *Tesoriero v. Syosset Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 382 F. Supp. 2d 387, 399 (E.D.N.Y. 2005); *Theno*, 377 F. Supp. 2d at 965-966; *Canty v. Old Rochester Reg'l Sch. Dist.*, 66 F. Supp. 2d 114, 116-117 (D. Mass. 1999).

This body of case law recognizes that “[w]here a school district has actual knowledge that its efforts to remediate are ineffective, and it continues to use those same methods to no avail, such district has failed to act reasonably in light of the known circumstances.” *Vance*, 231 F.3d at 261.

The district court failed to apply this Court’s clear precedent and examine whether a reasonable jury could find that the school officials were deliberately indifferent when they learned from Tyler in December 2008 that their remedial efforts were ineffective and nonetheless failed to take any action to prevent further harassment of Tyler.⁸ Despite the fact that Tyler reported to his counselor in

⁸ While Gallman told Tyler to speak to her if the harassment was bothering him, she already knew he would not do so. Tyler already told her that students were harassing him *daily* and yet he had not reported each incident of harassment. Tyler’s mother had previously told school officials that Tyler was afraid to report harassment. Gallman’s gesture, without more, was wholly insufficient, given that she knew Tyler would not report the daily and on-going harassment.

December 2008 that he was bullied *every day*, school officials did nothing to address that daily harassment and essentially resigned themselves to the fact that students would continue to harass Tyler. A jury could have found that inaction was clearly unreasonable in light of the known circumstances and constituted deliberate indifference.

2. Under the *Davis* framework, liability for student-on-student harassment is predicated on the school district's deliberate indifference to harassment of which an "appropriate person" within the school district had actual notice. *Broward Cnty.*, 604 F.3d at 1254-1255. The Supreme Court has not defined precisely who constitutes an "appropriate person," but such an individual "is, at a minimum, an official of the recipient entity with authority to take corrective action to end the discrimination." *Gebser v. Lago Vista Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 524 U.S. 274, 290, 118 S. Ct. 1989, 1999 (1998). This Court has said that "the ultimate question of who is an appropriate person is 'necessarily a fact-based inquiry' because 'officials' roles vary among school districts.'" *Broward Cnty.*, 604 F.3d at 1256 (quoting *Murrell v. School Dist. No. 1*, 186 F.3d 1238, 1247 (10th Cir. 1999)).

Although the "appropriate person" inquiry will always be fact-driven, a broad range of school employees may be "appropriate persons" in cases involving student-on-student harassment because many school officials have authority to take corrective action against students. *Hawkins v. Sarasota Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 322 F.3d

1279, 1287 (11th Cir. 2003). As the Tenth Circuit explained, “[w]here the victim is complaining about a fellow student’s action during school hours and on school grounds teachers may well possess the requisite control necessary to take corrective action to end the discrimination.” *Murrell*, 186 F.3d at 1248 (citation and internal quotation marks omitted); see also *Montgomery v. Independent Sch. Dist. No. 709*, 109 F. Supp. 2d 1081, 1099 (D. Minn. 2000).

Therefore, in student-on-student harassment cases, courts have found that notice to teachers and counselors can impose a duty on the school district to take appropriate action in response to the harassment. *E.g.*, *Murrell*, 186 F.3d at 1248; *J.B. v. Mead Sch. Dist. No. 354*, No. 08-CV-223-EFS, 2010 WL 5173164, at *5 (E.D. Wash. Dec. 10, 2010); *Montgomery*, 109 F. Supp. 2d at 1099; see also *Wilborn v. Southern Union State Cmty. Coll.*, 720 F. Supp. 2d 1274, 1305-1306 (M.D. Ala. 2010); but see *Snethen v. Board of Pub. Educ. for Savannah*, No. 4:06-CV-259, 2008 WL 766569, at *8 (S.D. Ga. Mar. 24, 2008). It is particularly important to treat a broad range of school officials as “appropriate persons” in cases involving students with emotional or intellectual disabilities, which may adversely affect the students’ ability to report harassment. Where there is a factual issue as to whether a specified employee is an “appropriate person” to receive notice of harassment, summary judgment is inappropriate. *Herndon v. College of*

Mainland, No. G-06-CV-0286, 2009 WL 367500, at *21 (S.D. Tex. Feb. 13, 2009); see also *Murrell*, 186 F.3d at 1248.

There is strong evidence in this case that counselors at MCHS were delegated authority to receive and respond to reports of student-on-student harassment. The Murray County School Board delegated supervisory authority over a school through the superintendent to MCHS principal Linder. Doc.212 at 134; Doc.212-10. Linder, in turn, delegated many responsibilities to other school officials, including assistant principals, IEP case managers, and counselors. Doc.212 at 135, 138-139; Doc.212-11. MCHS's *High School Parent Guidebook* specifically instructed parents that "[i]f your child complains that a student is bullying or harassing him/her in any way, notify the principal *or counselor*." Doc.118-2 at 6 (emphasis added). Linder (principal) and Thornbury (assistant principal) confirmed that students could report harassment to a counselor. Doc.205 at 41-42; Doc.222 at 35; Doc.222-1 at 11-12, 20-21. According to Thornbury, even a report of *daily* harassment, such as the one Tyler made to Gallman in December 2008, could be handled at the counselor level. Doc.205 at 79-80. Gallman also testified that if a student were upset about taunting, he or she could go either to a counselor or to the assistant principal in charge of discipline. Doc.208 at 20-22.

With respect to Tyler, Linder delegated matters relating to his disability and disability-related harassment to his IEP case manager, advisor, and counselor. Doc.222 at 31-32, 35-38, 46-47, 77; Doc.222-1 at 1. Linder stressed that she trusted all these individuals to resolve any reported harassment. Doc.222 at 35-38, 77; Doc.222-1 at 1. This delegation of authority is reflected in the testimony of her subordinates. Thornbury testified that Tyler's IEP team would have addressed any harassment and that Tyler could have reported harassment to his counselor. Doc.205 at 41-42, 57. According to Swilling, Tyler could have reported harassment to a teacher or his case manager. Doc.204 at 27. Tyler's ninth grade case manager, Bowers, testified that Tyler's counselor was his secondary contact person who could address any of his needs. Doc.207 at 18-19. When Bowers observed an incident of harassment, she took Tyler to the counselor's office to resolve the matter. Doc.207 at 30-32.

Thus, the record in this case reflects that the principal delegated authority to receive and respond to reports of harassment to other school officials, including Tyler's counselor. A jury, therefore, easily could find that the District had a duty to respond when Tyler reported to his counselor in December 2008 that he was being harassed every day. A reasonable jury therefore could find that the school district was deliberately indifferent when it failed to take any action once the

school counselor knew that past remedial measures had been ineffective against the persistent harassment.

CONCLUSION

The district court erred in holding that school officials satisfied their legal obligations under Section 504 and the ADA as a matter of law. This Court should reverse the district court's grant of summary judgment on these claims and allow the trier of fact to determine the contested, fact-bound issue of deliberate indifference.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

I hereby certify pursuant to Fed. R. App. 32(a)(7)(C), that the foregoing
BRIEF FOR THE UNITED STATES AS *AMICUS CURIAE* SUPPORTING
PLAINTIFFS-APPELLANTS AND URGING REVERSAL IN PART:

(1) complies with Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 32(a)(7)(B)(i)
because it contains 6997 words; and

(2) complies with the typeface requirements of Federal Rule of Appellate
Procedure 32(a)(5) and the type style requirements of Federal Rule of Appellate
Procedure 32(a)(6) because it has been prepared in proportionally-spaced typeface
using Word 2007, 14-point Times New Roman font.

s/ Erin Aslan
ERIN ASLAN
Attorney

Dated: September 28, 2012

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on September 28, 2012, I electronically filed the foregoing BRIEF FOR THE UNITED STATES AS *AMICUS CURIAE* SUPPORTING PLAINTIFFS-APPELLANTS AND URGING REVERSAL IN PART with the Clerk of the Court for the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit by using the appellate CM/ECF system, and that seven paper copies of the electronically-filed brief were sent to the Clerk of the Court by First Class mail.

I further certify that all counsel of record for the parties will be served via the appellate CM/ECF system, except that one paper copy of the brief was sent via First Class mail to:

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ADDENDUM



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

October 26, 2010

Dear Colleague:

In recent years, many state departments of education and local school districts have taken steps to reduce bullying in schools. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) fully supports these efforts. Bullying fosters a climate of fear and disrespect that can seriously impair the physical and psychological health of its victims and create conditions that negatively affect learning, thereby undermining the ability of students to achieve their full potential. The movement to adopt anti-bullying policies reflects schools' appreciation of their important responsibility to maintain a safe learning environment for all students. I am writing to remind you, however, that some student misconduct that falls under a school's anti-bullying policy also may trigger responsibilities under one or more of the federal antidiscrimination laws enforced by the Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). As discussed in more detail below, by limiting its response to a specific application of its anti-bullying disciplinary policy, a school may fail to properly consider whether the student misconduct also results in discriminatory harassment.

The statutes that OCR enforces include Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964¹ (Title VI), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972² (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973³ (Section 504); and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990⁴ (Title II). Section 504 and Title II prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.⁵ School districts may violate these civil rights statutes and the Department's implementing regulations when peer harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment and such harassment is encouraged, tolerated, not adequately addressed, or ignored by school employees.⁶ School personnel who understand their legal obligations to address harassment under these laws are in the best position to prevent it from occurring and to respond appropriately when it does. Although this letter focuses on the elementary and secondary school context, the legal principles also apply to postsecondary institutions covered by the laws and regulations enforced by OCR.

Some school anti-bullying policies already may list classes or traits on which bases bullying or harassment is specifically prohibited. Indeed, many schools have adopted anti-bullying policies that go beyond prohibiting bullying on the basis of traits expressly protected by the federal civil

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 2000d *et seq.*

² 20 U.S.C. § 1681 *et seq.*

³ 29 U.S.C. § 794.

⁴ 42 U.S.C. § 12131 *et seq.*

⁵ OCR also enforces the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 42 U.S.C. § 6101 *et seq.*, and the Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. § 7905. This letter does not specifically address those statutes.

⁶ The Department's regulations implementing these statutes are in 34 C.F.R. parts 100, 104, and 106. Under these federal civil rights laws and regulations, students are protected from harassment by school employees, other students, and third parties. This guidance focuses on peer harassment, and articulates the legal standards that apply in administrative enforcement and in court cases where plaintiffs are seeking injunctive relief.

rights laws enforced by OCR—race, color, national origin, sex, and disability—to include such bases as sexual orientation and religion. While this letter concerns your legal obligations under the laws enforced by OCR, other federal, state, and local laws impose additional obligations on schools.⁷ And, of course, even when bullying or harassment is not a civil rights violation, schools should still seek to prevent it in order to protect students from the physical and emotional harms that it may cause.

Harassing conduct may take many forms, including verbal acts and name-calling; graphic and written statements, which may include use of cell phones or the Internet; or other conduct that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating. Harassment does not have to include intent to harm, be directed at a specific target, or involve repeated incidents. Harassment creates a hostile environment when the conduct is sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent so as to interfere with or limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school. When such harassment is based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability, it violates the civil rights laws that OCR enforces.⁸

A school is responsible for addressing harassment incidents about which it knows or reasonably should have known.⁹ In some situations, harassment may be in plain sight, widespread, or well-known to students and staff, such as harassment occurring in hallways, during academic or physical education classes, during extracurricular activities, at recess, on a school bus, or through graffiti in public areas. In these cases, the obvious signs of the harassment are sufficient to put the school on notice. In other situations, the school may become aware of misconduct, triggering an investigation that could lead to the discovery of additional incidents that, taken together, may constitute a hostile environment. In all cases, schools should have well-publicized policies prohibiting harassment and procedures for reporting and resolving complaints that will alert the school to incidents of harassment.¹⁰

When responding to harassment, a school must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred. The specific steps in a school’s investigation will vary depending upon the nature of the allegations, the source of the complaint, the age of the student or students involved, the size and administrative structure of the school, and other factors. In all cases, however, the inquiry should be prompt, thorough, and impartial.

If an investigation reveals that discriminatory harassment has occurred, a school must take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the harassment, eliminate any hostile

⁷ For instance, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has jurisdiction over Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000c (Title IV), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, or national origin by public elementary and secondary schools and public institutions of higher learning. State laws also provide additional civil rights protections, so districts should review these statutes to determine what protections they afford (e.g., some state laws specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation).

⁸ Some conduct alleged to be harassment may implicate the First Amendment rights to free speech or expression. For more information on the First Amendment’s application to harassment, see the discussions in OCR’s Dear Colleague Letter: First Amendment (July 28, 2003), available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/firstamend.html>, and OCR’s *Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties* (Jan. 19, 2001) (*Sexual Harassment Guidance*), available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/shguide.html>.

⁹ A school has notice of harassment if a responsible employee knew, or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known, about the harassment. For a discussion of what a “responsible employee” is, see OCR’s *Sexual Harassment Guidance*.

¹⁰ Districts must adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee sex and disability discrimination complaints, and must notify students, parents, employees, applicants, and other interested parties that the district does not discriminate on the basis of sex or disability. See 28 C.F.R. § 35.106; 28 C.F.R. § 35.107(b); 34 C.F.R. § 104.7(b); 34 C.F.R. § 104.8; 34 C.F.R. § 106.8(b); 34 C.F.R. § 106.9.

environment and its effects, and prevent the harassment from recurring. These duties are a school's responsibility even if the misconduct also is covered by an anti-bullying policy, and regardless of whether a student has complained, asked the school to take action, or identified the harassment as a form of discrimination.

Appropriate steps to end harassment may include separating the accused harasser and the target, providing counseling for the target and/or harasser, or taking disciplinary action against the harasser. These steps should not penalize the student who was harassed. For example, any separation of the target from an alleged harasser should be designed to minimize the burden on the target's educational program (*e.g.*, not requiring the target to change his or her class schedule).

In addition, depending on the extent of the harassment, the school may need to provide training or other interventions not only for the perpetrators, but also for the larger school community, to ensure that all students, their families, and school staff can recognize harassment if it recurs and know how to respond. A school also may be required to provide additional services to the student who was harassed in order to address the effects of the harassment, particularly if the school initially delays in responding or responds inappropriately or inadequately to information about harassment. An effective response also may need to include the issuance of new policies against harassment and new procedures by which students, parents, and employees may report allegations of harassment (or wide dissemination of existing policies and procedures), as well as wide distribution of the contact information for the district's Title IX and Section 504/Title II coordinators.¹¹

Finally, a school should take steps to stop further harassment and prevent any retaliation against the person who made the complaint (or was the subject of the harassment) or against those who provided information as witnesses. At a minimum, the school's responsibilities include making sure that the harassed students and their families know how to report any subsequent problems, conducting follow-up inquiries to see if there have been any new incidents or any instances of retaliation, and responding promptly and appropriately to address continuing or new problems.

When responding to incidents of misconduct, schools should keep in mind the following:

- The label used to describe an incident (*e.g.*, bullying, hazing, teasing) does not determine how a school is obligated to respond. Rather, the nature of the conduct itself must be assessed for civil rights implications. So, for example, if the abusive behavior is on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability, and creates a hostile environment, a school is obligated to respond in accordance with the applicable federal civil rights statutes and regulations enforced by OCR.
- When the behavior implicates the civil rights laws, school administrators should look beyond simply disciplining the perpetrators. While disciplining the perpetrators is likely a necessary step, it often is insufficient. A school's responsibility is to eliminate the

¹¹ Districts must designate persons responsible for coordinating compliance with Title IX, Section 504, and Title II, including the investigation of any complaints of sexual, gender-based, or disability harassment. See 28 C.F.R. § 35.107(a); 34 C.F.R. § 104.7(a); 34 C.F.R. § 106.8(a).

hostile environment created by the harassment, address its effects, and take steps to ensure that harassment does not recur. Put differently, the unique effects of discriminatory harassment may demand a different response than would other types of bullying.

Below, I provide hypothetical examples of how a school's failure to recognize student misconduct as discriminatory harassment violates students' civil rights.¹² In each of the examples, the school was on notice of the harassment because either the school or a responsible employee knew or should have known of misconduct that constituted harassment. The examples describe how the school should have responded in each circumstance.

Title VI: Race, Color, or National Origin Harassment

- *Some students anonymously inserted offensive notes into African-American students' lockers and notebooks, used racial slurs, and threatened African-American students who tried to sit near them in the cafeteria. Some African-American students told school officials that they did not feel safe at school. The school investigated and responded to individual instances of misconduct by assigning detention to the few student perpetrators it could identify. However, racial tensions in the school continued to escalate to the point that several fights broke out between the school's racial groups.*

In this example, school officials failed to acknowledge the pattern of harassment as indicative of a racially hostile environment in violation of Title VI. Misconduct need not be directed at a particular student to constitute discriminatory harassment and foster a racially hostile environment. Here, the harassing conduct included overtly racist behavior (*e.g.*, racial slurs) and also targeted students on the basis of their race (*e.g.*, notes directed at African-American students). The nature of the harassment, the number of incidents, and the students' safety concerns demonstrate that there was a racially hostile environment that interfered with the students' ability to participate in the school's education programs and activities.

Had the school recognized that a racially hostile environment had been created, it would have realized that it needed to do more than just discipline the few individuals whom it could identify as having been involved. By failing to acknowledge the racially hostile environment, the school failed to meet its obligation to implement a more systemic response to address the unique effect that the misconduct had on the school climate. A more effective response would have included, in addition to punishing the perpetrators, such steps as reaffirming the school's policy against discrimination (including racial harassment), publicizing the means to report allegations of racial harassment, training faculty on constructive responses to racial conflict, hosting class discussions about racial harassment and sensitivity to students of other races, and conducting outreach to involve parents and students in an effort to identify problems and improve the school climate. Finally, had school officials responded appropriately

¹² Each of these hypothetical examples contains elements taken from actual cases.

and aggressively to the racial harassment when they first became aware of it, the school might have prevented the escalation of violence that occurred.¹³

- *Over the course of a school year, school employees at a junior high school received reports of several incidents of anti-Semitic conduct at the school. Anti-Semitic graffiti, including swastikas, was scrawled on the stalls of the school bathroom. When custodians discovered the graffiti and reported it to school administrators, the administrators ordered the graffiti removed but took no further action. At the same school, a teacher caught two ninth-graders trying to force two seventh-graders to give them money. The ninth-graders told the seventh-graders, “You Jews have all of the money, give us some.” When school administrators investigated the incident, they determined that the seventh-graders were not actually Jewish. The school suspended the perpetrators for a week because of the serious nature of their misconduct. After that incident, younger Jewish students started avoiding the school library and computer lab because they were located in the corridor housing the lockers of the ninth-graders. At the same school, a group of eighth-grade students repeatedly called a Jewish student “Drew the dirty Jew.” The responsible eighth-graders were reprimanded for teasing the Jewish student.*

The school administrators failed to recognize that anti-Semitic harassment can trigger responsibilities under Title VI. While Title VI does not cover discrimination based solely on religion,¹⁴ groups that face discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics may not be denied protection under Title VI on the ground that they also share a common faith. These principles apply not just to Jewish students, but also to students from any discrete religious group that shares, or is perceived to share, ancestry or ethnic characteristics (e.g., Muslims or Sikhs). Thus, harassment against students who are members of any religious group triggers a school’s Title VI responsibilities when the harassment is based on the group’s actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, rather than solely on its members’ religious practices. A school also has responsibilities under Title VI when its students are harassed based on their actual or perceived citizenship or residency in a country whose residents share a dominant religion or a distinct religious identity.¹⁵

In this example, school administrators should have recognized that the harassment was based on the students’ actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic identity as Jews (rather than on the students’ religious practices). The school was not relieved of its responsibilities under Title VI because the targets of one of the incidents were not actually Jewish. The harassment was still based on the perceived ancestry or ethnic characteristics of the targeted students. Furthermore, the harassment negatively affected the ability and willingness of Jewish students to participate fully in the school’s

¹³ More information about the applicable legal standards and OCR’s approach to investigating allegations of harassment on the basis of race, color, or national origin is included in *Racial Incidents and Harassment Against Students at Educational Institutions: Investigative Guidance*, 59 Fed. Reg. 11,448 (Mar. 10, 1994), available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/race394.html>.

¹⁴ As noted in footnote seven, DOJ has the authority to remedy discrimination based solely on religion under Title IV.

¹⁵ More information about the applicable legal standards and OCR’s approach to investigating complaints of discrimination against members of religious groups is included in OCR’s Dear Colleague Letter: Title VI and Title IX Religious Discrimination in Schools and Colleges (Sept. 13, 2004), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/religious-rights2004.html>.

education programs and activities (e.g., by causing some Jewish students to avoid the library and computer lab). Therefore, although the discipline that the school imposed on the perpetrators was an important part of the school's response, discipline alone was likely insufficient to remedy a hostile environment. Similarly, removing the graffiti, while a necessary and important step, did not fully satisfy the school's responsibilities. As discussed above, misconduct that is not directed at a particular student, like the graffiti in the bathroom, can still constitute discriminatory harassment and foster a hostile environment. Finally, the fact that school officials considered one of the incidents "teasing" is irrelevant for determining whether it contributed to a hostile environment.

Because the school failed to recognize that the incidents created a hostile environment, it addressed each only in isolation, and therefore failed to take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the harassment and prevent its recurrence. In addition to disciplining the perpetrators, remedial steps could have included counseling the perpetrators about the hurtful effect of their conduct, publicly labeling the incidents as anti-Semitic, reaffirming the school's policy against discrimination, and publicizing the means by which students may report harassment. Providing teachers with training to recognize and address anti-Semitic incidents also would have increased the effectiveness of the school's response. The school could also have created an age-appropriate program to educate its students about the history and dangers of anti-Semitism, and could have conducted outreach to involve parents and community groups in preventing future anti-Semitic harassment.

Title IX: Sexual Harassment

- *Shortly after enrolling at a new high school, a female student had a brief romance with another student. After the couple broke up, other male and female students began routinely calling the new student sexually charged names, spreading rumors about her sexual behavior, and sending her threatening text messages and e-mails. One of the student's teachers and an athletic coach witnessed the name calling and heard the rumors, but identified it as "hazing" that new students often experience. They also noticed the new student's anxiety and declining class participation. The school attempted to resolve the situation by requiring the student to work the problem out directly with her harassers.*

Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which can include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Thus, sexual harassment prohibited by Title IX can include conduct such as touching of a sexual nature; making sexual comments, jokes, or gestures; writing graffiti or displaying or distributing sexually explicit drawings, pictures, or written materials; calling students sexually charged names; spreading sexual rumors; rating students on sexual activity or performance; or circulating, showing, or creating e-mails or Web sites of a sexual nature.

In this example, the school employees failed to recognize that the “hazing” constituted sexual harassment. The school did not comply with its Title IX obligations when it failed to investigate or remedy the sexual harassment. The conduct was clearly unwelcome, sexual (e.g., sexual rumors and name calling), and sufficiently serious that it limited the student’s ability to participate in and benefit from the school’s education program (e.g., anxiety and declining class participation).

The school should have trained its employees on the type of misconduct that constitutes sexual harassment. The school also should have made clear to its employees that they could not require the student to confront her harassers. Schools may use informal mechanisms for addressing harassment, but only if the parties agree to do so on a voluntary basis. Had the school addressed the harassment consistent with Title IX, the school would have, for example, conducted a thorough investigation and taken interim measures to separate the student from the accused harassers. An effective response also might have included training students and employees on the school’s policies related to harassment, instituting new procedures by which employees should report allegations of harassment, and more widely distributing the contact information for the district’s Title IX coordinator. The school also might have offered the targeted student tutoring, other academic assistance, or counseling as necessary to remedy the effects of the harassment.¹⁶

Title IX: Gender-Based Harassment

- *Over the course of a school year, a gay high school student was called names (including anti-gay slurs and sexual comments) both to his face and on social networking sites, physically assaulted, threatened, and ridiculed because he did not conform to stereotypical notions of how teenage boys are expected to act and appear (e.g., effeminate mannerisms, nontraditional choice of extracurricular activities, apparel, and personal grooming choices). As a result, the student dropped out of the drama club to avoid further harassment. Based on the student’s self-identification as gay and the homophobic nature of some of the harassment, the school did not recognize that the misconduct included discrimination covered by Title IX. The school responded to complaints from the student by reprimanding the perpetrators consistent with its anti-bullying policy. The reprimands of the identified perpetrators stopped the harassment by those individuals. It did not, however, stop others from undertaking similar harassment of the student.*

As noted in the example, the school failed to recognize the pattern of misconduct as a form of sex discrimination under Title IX. Title IX prohibits harassment of both male and female students regardless of the sex of the harasser—i.e., even if the harasser and target are members of the same sex. It also prohibits gender-based harassment, which may include acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical aggression, intimidation, or hostility based on sex or sex-stereotyping. Thus, it can be sex discrimination if students are harassed either for exhibiting what is perceived as a stereotypical characteristic for their

¹⁶ More information about the applicable legal standards and OCR’s approach to investigating allegations of sexual harassment is included in OCR’s *Sexual Harassment Guidance*, available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/shguide.html>.

sex, or for failing to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. Title IX also prohibits sexual harassment and gender-based harassment of all students, regardless of the actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of the harasser or target.

Although Title IX does not prohibit discrimination based solely on sexual orientation, Title IX does protect all students, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, from sex discrimination. When students are subjected to harassment on the basis of their LGBT status, they may also, as this example illustrates, be subjected to forms of sex discrimination prohibited under Title IX. The fact that the harassment includes anti-LGBT comments or is partly based on the target's actual or perceived sexual orientation does not relieve a school of its obligation under Title IX to investigate and remedy overlapping sexual harassment or gender-based harassment. In this example, the harassing conduct was based in part on the student's failure to act as some of his peers believed a boy should act. The harassment created a hostile environment that limited the student's ability to participate in the school's education program (e.g., access to the drama club). Finally, even though the student did not identify the harassment as sex discrimination, the school should have recognized that the student had been subjected to gender-based harassment covered by Title IX.

In this example, the school had an obligation to take immediate and effective action to eliminate the hostile environment. By responding to individual incidents of misconduct on an *ad hoc* basis only, the school failed to confront and prevent a hostile environment from continuing. Had the school recognized the conduct as a form of sex discrimination, it could have employed the full range of sanctions (including progressive discipline) and remedies designed to eliminate the hostile environment. For example, this approach would have included a more comprehensive response to the situation that involved notice to the student's teachers so that they could ensure the student was not subjected to any further harassment, more aggressive monitoring by staff of the places where harassment occurred, increased training on the scope of the school's harassment and discrimination policies, notice to the target and harassers of available counseling services and resources, and educating the entire school community on civil rights and expectations of tolerance, specifically as they apply to gender stereotypes. The school also should have taken steps to clearly communicate the message that the school does not tolerate harassment and will be responsive to any information about such conduct.¹⁷

Section 504 and Title II: Disability Harassment

- *Several classmates repeatedly called a student with a learning disability "stupid," "idiot," and "retard" while in school and on the school bus. On one occasion, these students tackled him, hit him with a school binder, and threw his personal items into the garbage. The student complained to his teachers and guidance counselor that he was continually being taunted and teased. School officials offered him counseling services and a*

¹⁷ Guidance on gender-based harassment is also included in OCR's *Sexual Harassment Guidance*, available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/shguide.html>.

psychiatric evaluation, but did not discipline the offending students. As a result, the harassment continued. The student, who had been performing well academically, became angry, frustrated, and depressed, and often refused to go to school to avoid the harassment.

In this example, the school failed to recognize the misconduct as disability harassment under Section 504 and Title II. The harassing conduct included behavior based on the student's disability, and limited the student's ability to benefit fully from the school's education program (e.g., absenteeism). In failing to investigate and remedy the misconduct, the school did not comply with its obligations under Section 504 and Title II.

Counseling may be a helpful component of a remedy for harassment. In this example, however, since the school failed to recognize the behavior as disability harassment, the school did not adopt a comprehensive approach to eliminating the hostile environment. Such steps should have at least included disciplinary action against the harassers, consultation with the district's Section 504/Title II coordinator to ensure a comprehensive and effective response, special training for staff on recognizing and effectively responding to harassment of students with disabilities, and monitoring to ensure that the harassment did not resume.¹⁸

I encourage you to reevaluate the policies and practices your school uses to address bullying¹⁹ and harassment to ensure that they comply with the mandates of the federal civil rights laws. For your convenience, the following is a list of online resources that further discuss the obligations of districts to respond to harassment prohibited under the federal antidiscrimination laws enforced by OCR:

- *Sexual Harassment: It's Not Academic* (Revised 2008):
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocrshpam.html>
- *Dear Colleague Letter: Sexual Harassment Issues* (2006):
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/sexhar-2006.html>
- *Dear Colleague Letter: Religious Discrimination* (2004):
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/religious-rights2004.html>
- *Dear Colleague Letter: First Amendment* (2003):
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/firstamend.html>

¹⁸ More information about the applicable legal standards and OCR's approach to investigating allegations of disability harassment is included in OCR's Dear Colleague Letter: Prohibited Disability Harassment (July 25, 2000), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/disabarassltr.html>.

¹⁹ For resources on preventing and addressing bullying, please visit <http://www.bullyinginfo.org>, a Web site established by a federal Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs. For information on the Department's bullying prevention resources, please visit the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools' Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS>. For information on regional Equity Assistance Centers that assist schools in developing and implementing policies and practices to address issues regarding race, sex, or national origin discrimination, please visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/equitycenters>.

- *Sexual Harassment Guidance* (Revised 2001):
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/shguide.html>
- *Dear Colleague Letter: Prohibited Disability Harassment* (2000):
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/disabharassltr.html>
- *Racial Incidents and Harassment Against Students* (1994):
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/race394.html>

Please also note that OCR has added new data items to be collected through its Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), which surveys school districts in a variety of areas related to civil rights in education. The CRDC now requires districts to collect and report information on allegations of harassment, policies regarding harassment, and discipline imposed for harassment. In 2009-10, the CRDC covered nearly 7,000 school districts, including all districts with more than 3,000 students. For more information about the CRDC data items, please visit <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/whatsnew.html>.

OCR is committed to working with schools, students, students' families, community and advocacy organizations, and other interested parties to ensure that students are not subjected to harassment. Please do not hesitate to contact OCR if we can provide assistance in your efforts to address harassment or if you have other civil rights concerns.

For the OCR regional office serving your state, please visit: <http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OCR/contactus.cfm>, or call OCR's Customer Service Team at 1-800-421-3481.

I look forward to continuing our work together to ensure equal access to education, and to promote safe and respectful school climates for America's students.

Sincerely,

/s/

Russlynn Ali
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights



Print

Close Window

Prohibited Disability Harassment

Reminder of Responsibilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

July 25, 2000

Dear Colleague:

On behalf of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in the U.S. Department of Education, we are writing to you about a vital issue that affects students in school - harassment based on disability. Our purpose in writing is to develop greater awareness of this issue, to remind interested persons of the legal and educational responsibilities that institutions have to prevent and appropriately respond to disability harassment, and to suggest measures that school officials should take to address this very serious problem. This letter is not an exhaustive legal analysis. Rather, it is intended to provide a useful overview of the existing legal and educational principles related to this important issue.

Why Disability Harassment Is Such an Important Issue

Through a variety of sources, both OCR and OSERS have become aware of concerns about disability harassment in elementary and secondary schools and colleges and universities. In a series of conference calls with OSERS staff, for example, parents, disabled persons, and advocates for students with disabilities raised disability harassment as an issue that was very important to them. OCR's complaint workload has reflected a steady pace of allegations regarding this issue, while the number of court cases involving allegations of disability harassment has risen. OCR and OSERS recently conducted a joint focus group where we heard about the often devastating effects on students of disability harassment that ranged from abusive jokes, crude name-calling, threats, and bullying, to sexual and physical assault by teachers and other students.

We take these concerns very seriously. Disability harassment can have a profound impact on students, raise safety concerns, and erode efforts to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to the myriad benefits that an education offers. Indeed, harassment can seriously interfere with the ability of students with disabilities to receive the education critical to their advancement. We are committed to doing all that we can to help prevent and respond to disability harassment and lessen the harm of any harassing conduct that has occurred. We seek your support in a joint effort to address this critical issue and to promote such efforts among educators who deal with students daily.

What Laws Apply to Disability Harassment

Schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions have a responsibility to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. This responsibility is based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II), which are enforced by OCR. Section 504 covers all schools, school districts, and colleges and universities receiving federal funds.¹ Title II covers all state and local entities, including school districts and public institutions of higher education, whether or not they receive federal funds.² Disability harassment is a form of discrimination prohibited by Section 504 and Title II.³ Both

Section 504 and Title II provide parents and students with grievance procedures and due process remedies at the local level. Individuals and organizations also may file complaints with OCR.

States and school districts also have a responsibility under Section 504, Title II, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ⁴ which is enforced by OSERS, to ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to eligible students with disabilities. Disability harassment may result in a denial of FAPE under these statutes. Parents may initiate administrative due process procedures under IDEA, Section 504, or Title II to address a denial of FAPE, including a denial that results from disability harassment. Individuals and organizations also may file complaints with OCR, alleging a denial of FAPE that results from disability harassment. In addition, an individual or organization may file a complaint alleging a violation of IDEA under separate procedures with the state educational agency.⁵ State compliance with IDEA, including compliance with FAPE requirements, is monitored by OSERS' Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Harassing conduct also may violate state and local civil rights, child abuse, and criminal laws. Some of these laws may impose obligations on educational institutions to contact or coordinate with state or local agencies or police with respect to disability harassment in some cases; failure to follow appropriate procedures under these laws could result in action against an educational institution. Many states and educational institutions also have addressed disability harassment in their general anti-harassment policies.⁶

Disability Harassment May Deny a Student an Equal Opportunity to Education under Section 504 or Title II

Disability harassment under Section 504 and Title II is intimidation or abusive behavior toward a student based on disability that creates a hostile environment by interfering with or denying a student's participation in or receipt of benefits, services, or opportunities in the institution's program. Harassing conduct may take many forms, including verbal acts and name-calling, as well as nonverbal behavior, such as graphic and written statements, or conduct that is physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating.

When harassing conduct is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates a hostile environment, it can violate a student's rights under the Section 504 and Title II regulations. A hostile environment may exist even if there are no tangible effects on the student where the harassment is serious enough to adversely affect the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the educational program. Examples of harassment that could create a hostile environment follow.

- Several students continually remark out loud to other students during class that a student with dyslexia is "retarded" or "deaf and dumb" and does not belong in the class; as a result, the harassed student has difficulty doing work in class and her grades decline.
- A student repeatedly places classroom furniture or other objects in the path of classmates who use wheelchairs, impeding the classmates' ability to enter the classroom.
- A teacher subjects a student to inappropriate physical restraint because of conduct related to his disability, with the result that the student tries to avoid school through increased absences.⁷
- A school administrator repeatedly denies a student with a disability access to lunch, field trips, assemblies, and extracurricular activities as punishment for taking time off from school for required related to the student's disability.
- A professor repeatedly belittles and criticizes a student with a disability for using accommodations in class, with the result that the student is so discouraged that she has great difficulty performing in class and learning.
- Students continually taunt or belittle a student with mental retardation by mocking and intimidating him so he does not participate in class.

When disability harassment limits or denies a student's ability to participate in or benefit from an educational institution's programs or activities, the institution must respond effectively. Where the

institution learns that disability harassment may have occurred, the institution must investigate the incident(s) promptly and respond appropriately.

Disability Harassment Also May Deny a Free Appropriate Public Education

Disability harassment that adversely affects an elementary or secondary student's education may also be a denial of FAPE under the IDEA, as well as Section 504 and Title II. The IDEA was enacted to ensure that recipients of IDEA funds make available to students with disabilities the appropriate special education and related services that enable them to access and benefit from public education. The specific services to be provided a student with a disability are set forth in the student's individualized education program (IEP), which is developed by a team that includes the student's parents, teachers and, where appropriate, the student. Harassment of a student based on disability may decrease the student's ability to benefit from his or her education and amount to a denial of FAPE.

How to Prevent and Respond to Disability Harassment

Schools, school districts, colleges, and universities have a legal responsibility to prevent and respond to disability harassment. As a fundamental step, educational institutions must develop and disseminate an official policy statement prohibiting discrimination based on disability and must establish grievance procedures that can be used to address disability harassment.⁸ A clear policy serves a preventive purpose by notifying students and staff that disability harassment is unacceptable, violates federal law, and will result in disciplinary action. The responsibility to respond to disability harassment, when it does occur, includes taking prompt and effective action to end the harassment and prevent it from recurring and, where appropriate, remedying the effects on the student who was harassed.

The following measures are ways to both prevent and eliminate harassment:

- Creating a campus environment that is aware of disability concerns and sensitive to disability harassment; weaving these issues into the curriculum or programs outside the classroom.
- Encouraging parents, students, employees, and community members to discuss disability harassment and to report it when they become aware of it.
- Widely publicizing anti-harassment statements and procedures for handling discrimination complaints, because this information makes students and employees aware of what constitutes harassment, that such conduct is prohibited, that the institution will not tolerate such behavior, and that effective action, including disciplinary action, where appropriate, will be taken.
- Providing appropriate, up-to-date, and timely training for staff and students to recognize and handle potential harassment.
- Counseling both person(s) who have been harmed by harassment and person(s) who have been responsible for the harassment of others.
- Implementing monitoring programs to follow up on resolved issues of disability harassment.
- Regularly assessing and, as appropriate, modifying existing disability harassment policies and procedures for addressing the issue, to ensure effectiveness.

Technical Assistance Is Available

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley has emphasized the importance of ensuring that schools are safe and free of harassment. Students can not learn in an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, or ridicule. For students with disabilities, harassment can inflict severe harm. Teachers and administrators must take emphatic action to ensure that these students are able to learn in an atmosphere free from harassment.

Disability harassment is preventable and can not be tolerated. Schools, colleges, and universities should address the issue of disability harassment not just when but before incidents occur. As noted above, awareness can be an important element in preventing harassment in the first place.

The Department of Education is committed to working with schools, parents, disability advocacy organizations, and other interested parties to ensure that no student is ever subjected to such conduct, and that where such conduct occurs, prompt and effective action is taken. For more information, you may contact OCR or OSEP through 1-800-USA-LEARN or 1-800-437-0833 for TTY services. You also may directly contact one of the OCR enforcement offices listed on the enclosure or OSEP, by calling (202) 205-5507 or (202) 245-7468 for TTY services.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Norma V. Cantu,
Assistant Secretary for
Civil Rights

Judith E. Heumann,
Assistant Secretary
Office of Special Education
and Rehabilitative Services

¹ Section 504 provides: "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability . . . shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." 29 U.S.C. § 794(a). See 34 CFR Part 104 (Section 504 implementing regulations).

² Title II provides that "no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity." 42 U.S.C. § 12132. See 28 CFR Part 35 (Title II implementing regulations).

³ The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has issued policy guidance on discriminatory harassment based on race (see 59 Fed. Reg. 11448 (Mar. 10, 1994),) and sex (see 62 Fed. Reg. 12034 (Mar. 13, 1997),). These policies make clear that school personnel who understand their legal obligations to address harassment are in the best position to recognize and prevent harassment, and to lessen the harm to students if, despite their best efforts, harassment occurs. In addition, OCR recently collaborated with the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) to produce a guide to raise awareness of, and provide examples of effective practices for dealing with, hate crimes and harassment in schools, including harassment based on disability. See "Protecting Students from Harassment and Hate Crime, A Guide for Schools," U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, and the National Association of Attorneys General (Jan. 1999) (OCR/NAAG Harassment Guide), Appendix A: Sample School Policies. The OCR/NAAG Harassment Guide may be accessed on the internet at www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/archives/Harassment/. These documents are a good resource for understanding the general principle of discriminatory harassment. The policy guidance on sexual harassment will be clarified to explain how OCR's longstanding regulatory requirements continue to apply in this area in light of recent Supreme Court decisions addressing the sexual harassment of students.

⁴ 20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq.

⁵ 34 C.F.R. § 300.660 et seq.

⁶ For more information regarding the requirements of state and local laws, consult the OCR/NAAG Harassment Guide, cited in footnote 3 above.


[7](#) Appropriate classroom discipline is permissible, generally, if it is of a type that is applied to all students or is consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504, including the student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan.

[8](#) Section 504 (at 34 CFR § 104.7) and Title II (at 28 CFR § 35.107(a)) require that institutions have published internal policies and grievance procedures to address issues of discrimination on the basis of disability, which includes disability harassment. While there need not be separate grievance procedures designed specifically for disability harassment, the grievance procedures that are available must be effective in resolving problems of this nature.

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**REVISED SEXUAL HARASSMENT GUIDANCE:
HARASSMENT OF STUDENTS
BY SCHOOL EMPLOYEES, OTHER STUDENTS,
OR THIRD PARTIES**

TITLE IX



January 2001

**U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights**

PREAMBLE

Summary

The Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education (Department), issues a new document (revised guidance) that replaces the 1997 document entitled “Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties,” issued by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) on March 13, 1997 (1997 guidance). We revised the guidance in limited respects in light of subsequent Supreme Court cases relating to sexual harassment in schools.

The revised guidance reaffirms the compliance standards that OCR applies in investigations and administrative enforcement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) regarding sexual harassment. The revised guidance re-grounds these standards in the Title IX regulations, distinguishing them from the standards applicable to private litigation for money damages and clarifying their regulatory basis as distinct from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) agency law. In most other respects the revised guidance is identical to the 1997 guidance. Thus, we intend the revised guidance to serve the same purpose as the 1997 guidance. It continues to provide the principles that a school¹ should use to recognize and effectively respond to sexual harassment of students in its program as a condition of receiving Federal financial assistance.

Purpose and Scope of the Revised Guidance

In March 1997, we published in the Federal Register “Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties.” 62 FR 12034. We issued the guidance pursuant to our authority under Title IX, and our Title IX implementing regulations, to eliminate discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance. It was grounded in longstanding legal authority establishing that sexual harassment of students can be a form of sex discrimination covered by Title IX. The guidance was the product of extensive consultation with interested parties, including students, teachers, school administrators, and researchers. We also made the document available for public comment.

Since the issuance of the 1997 guidance, the Supreme Court (Court) has issued several important decisions in sexual harassment cases, including two decisions specifically addressing sexual harassment of students under Title IX: Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District (Gebser), 524 U.S. 274 (1998), and Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education (Davis), 526 U.S. 629 (1999). The Court held in Gebser that a school can be liable for monetary damages if a teacher sexually harasses a student, an

¹ As in the 1997 guidance, the revised guidance uses the term “school” to refer to all schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions that receive Federal funds from the Department.

official who has authority to address the harassment has actual knowledge of the harassment, and that official is deliberately indifferent in responding to the harassment. In Davis, the Court announced that a school also may be liable for monetary damages if one student sexually harasses another student in the school's program and the conditions of Gebser are met.

The Court was explicit in Gebser and Davis that the liability standards established in those cases are limited to private actions for monetary damages. See, e.g., Gebser, 524 U.S. 283, and Davis, 526 U.S. at 639. The Court acknowledged, by contrast, the power of Federal agencies, such as the Department, to "promulgate and enforce requirements that effectuate [Title IX's] nondiscrimination mandate," even in circumstances that would not give rise to a claim for money damages. See, Gebser, 524 U.S. at 292.

In an August 1998 letter to school superintendents and a January 1999 letter to college and university presidents, the Secretary of Education informed school officials that the Gebser decision did not change a school's obligations to take reasonable steps under Title IX and the regulations to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment as a condition of its receipt of Federal funding. The Department also determined that, although in most important respects the substance of the 1997 guidance was reaffirmed in Gebser and Davis, certain areas of the 1997 guidance could be strengthened by further clarification and explanation of the Title IX regulatory basis for the guidance.

On November 2, 2000, we published in the Federal Register a notice requesting comments on the proposed revised guidance (62 FR 66092). A detailed explanation of the Gebser and Davis decisions, and an explanation of the proposed changes in the guidance, can be found in the preamble to the proposed revised guidance. In those decisions and a third opinion, Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services, Inc. (Oncale), 523 U.S. 75 (1998) (a sexual harassment case decided under Title VII), the Supreme Court confirmed several fundamental principles we articulated in the 1997 guidance. In these areas, no changes in the guidance were necessary. A notice regarding the availability of this final document appeared in the Federal Register on January 19, 2001.

Enduring Principles from the 1997 Guidance

It continues to be the case that a significant number of students, both male and female, have experienced sexual harassment, which can interfere with a student's academic performance and emotional and physical well-being. Preventing and remedying sexual harassment in schools is essential to ensuring a safe environment in which students can learn. As with the 1997 guidance, the revised guidance applies to students at every level of education. School personnel who understand their obligations under Title IX, e.g., understand that sexual harassment can be sex discrimination in violation of Title IX, are in the best position to prevent harassment and to lessen the harm to students if, despite their best efforts, harassment occurs.

One of the fundamental aims of both the 1997 guidance and the revised guidance has been to emphasize that, in addressing allegations of sexual harassment, the good judgment and common sense of teachers and school administrators are important elements of a response that meets the requirements of Title IX.

A critical issue under Title IX is whether the school recognized that sexual harassment has occurred and took prompt and effective action calculated to end the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects. If harassment has occurred, doing nothing is always the wrong response. However, depending on the circumstances, there may be more than one right way to respond. The important thing is for school employees or officials to pay attention to the school environment and not to hesitate to respond to sexual harassment in the same reasonable, commonsense manner as they would to other types of serious misconduct.

It is also important that schools not overreact to behavior that does not rise to the level of sexual harassment. As the Department stated in the 1997 guidance, a kiss on the cheek by a first grader does not constitute sexual harassment. School personnel should consider the age and maturity of students in responding to allegations of sexual harassment.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of having well- publicized and effective grievance procedures in place to handle complaints of sex discrimination, including sexual harassment complaints. Nondiscrimination policies and procedures are required by the Title IX regulations. In fact, the Supreme Court in Gebser specifically affirmed the Department’s authority to enforce this requirement administratively in order to carry out Title IX’s nondiscrimination mandate. 524 U.S. at 292. Strong policies and effective grievance procedures are essential to let students and employees know that sexual harassment will not be tolerated and to ensure that they know how to report it.

Analysis of Comments Received Concerning the Proposed Revised Guidance and the Resulting Changes

In response to the Assistant Secretary’s invitation to comment, OCR received approximately 11 comments representing approximately 15 organizations and individuals. Commenters provided specific suggestions regarding how the revised guidance could be clarified. Many of these suggested changes have been incorporated. Significant and recurring issues are grouped by subject and discussed in the following sections:

Distinction Between Administrative Enforcement and Private Litigation for Monetary Damages

In Gebser and Davis, the Supreme Court addressed for the first time the appropriate standards for determining when a school district is liable under Title IX for money damages in a private lawsuit brought by or on behalf of a student who has been sexually harassed. As explained in the preamble to the proposed revised guidance, the Court was explicit in Gebser and Davis that the liability standards established in these cases are limited to private actions for monetary damages. See, e.g., Gebser, 524 U.S. at 283, and Davis, 526 U.S. at 639. The Gebser Court recognized and contrasted lawsuits for money damages with the incremental nature of administrative enforcement of Title IX. In Gebser, the Court was concerned with the possibility of a money damages award against a school for harassment about which it had not known. In contrast, the process of administrative enforcement requires enforcement agencies such as OCR to make schools

aware of potential Title IX violations and to seek voluntary corrective action before pursuing fund termination or other enforcement mechanisms.

Commenters uniformly agreed with OCR that the Court limited the liability standards established in Gebser and Davis to private actions for monetary damages. See, e.g., Gebser, 524 U.S. 283, and Davis, 526 U.S. at 639. Commenters also agreed that the administrative enforcement standards reflected in the 1997 guidance remain valid in OCR enforcement actions.² Finally, commenters agreed that the proposed revisions provided important clarification to schools regarding the standards that OCR will use and that schools should use to determine compliance with Title IX as a condition of the receipt of Federal financial assistance in light of Gebser and Davis.

Harassment by Teachers and Other School Personnel

Most commenters agreed with OCR's interpretation of its regulations regarding a school's responsibility for harassment of students by teachers and other school employees. These commenters agreed that Title IX's prohibitions against discrimination are not limited to official policies and practices governing school programs and activities. A school also engages in sex-based discrimination if its employees, in the context of carrying out their day-to-day job responsibilities for providing aid, benefits, or services to students (such as teaching, counseling, supervising, and advising students) deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the schools program on the basis of sex. Under the Title IX regulations, the school is responsible for discrimination in these cases, whether or not it knew or should have known about it, because the discrimination occurred as part of the school's undertaking to provide nondiscriminatory aid, benefits, and services to students. The revised guidance distinguishes these cases from employee harassment that, although taking place in a school's program, occurs outside of the context of the employee's provision of aid, benefits, and services to students. In these latter cases, the school's responsibilities are not triggered until the school knew or should have known about the harassment.

One commenter expressed concern that it was inappropriate ever to find a school out of compliance for harassment about which it knew nothing. We reiterate that, although a school may in some cases be responsible for harassment caused by an employee that occurred before other responsible employees of the school knew or should have known about it, OCR always provides the school with actual notice and the opportunity to take appropriate corrective action before issuing a finding of violation. This is consistent with the Court's underlying concern in Gebser and Davis.

Most commenters acknowledged that OCR has provided useful factors to determine whether harassing conduct took place "in the context of providing aid, benefits, or services." However, some commenters stated that additional clarity and examples regarding the issue were needed. Commenters also suggested clarifying

² It is the position of the United States that the standards set out in OCR's guidance for finding a violation and seeking voluntary corrective action also would apply to private actions for injunctive and other equitable relief. See brief of the United States as Amicus Curiae in Davis v. Monroe County.

references to quid pro quo and hostile environment harassment as these two concepts, though useful, do not determine the issue of whether the school itself is considered responsible for the harassment. We agree with these concerns and have made significant revisions to the sections “Harassment that Denies or Limits a Student’s Ability to Participate in or Benefit from the Education Program” and “Harassment by Teachers and Other Employees” to clarify the guidance in these respects.

Gender-based Harassment, Including Harassment Predicated on Sex-stereotyping

Several commenters requested that we expand the discussion and include examples of gender-based harassment predicated on sex stereotyping. Some commenters also argued that gender-based harassment should be considered sexual harassment, and that we have “artificially” restricted the guidance only to harassment in the form of conduct of a sexual nature, thus, implying that gender-based harassment is of less concern and should be evaluated differently.

We have not further expanded this section because, while we are also concerned with the important issue of gender-based harassment, we believe that harassment of a sexual nature raises unique and sufficiently important issues that distinguish it from other types of gender-based harassment and warrants its own guidance.

Nevertheless, we have clarified this section of the guidance in several ways. The guidance clarifies that gender-based harassment, including that predicated on sex-stereotyping, is covered by Title IX if it is sufficiently serious to deny or limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the program. Thus, it can be discrimination on the basis of sex to harass a student on the basis of the victim’s failure to conform to stereotyped notions of masculinity and femininity. Although this type of harassment is not covered by the guidance, if it is sufficiently serious, gender-based harassment is a school’s responsibility, and the same standards generally will apply. We have also added an endnote regarding Supreme Court precedent for the proposition that sex stereotyping can constitute sex discrimination.

Several commenters also suggested that we state that sexual and non-sexual (but gender-based) harassment should not be evaluated separately in determining whether a hostile environment exists. We note that both the proposed revised guidance and the final revised guidance indicate in several places that incidents of sexual harassment and non-sexual, gender-based harassment can be combined to determine whether a hostile environment has been created. We also note that sufficiently serious harassment of a sexual nature remains covered by Title IX, as explained in the guidance, even though the hostile environment may also include taunts based on sexual orientation.

Definition of Harassment

One commenter urged OCR to provide distinct definitions of sexual harassment to be used in administrative enforcement as distinguished from criteria used to maintain private actions for monetary damages. We disagree. First, as discussed in the preamble to the proposed revised guidance, the definition of hostile environment sexual harassment used by the Court in Davis is consistent with the definition found in the proposed guidance. Although the terms used by the Court in Davis are in some ways different from

the words used to define hostile environment harassment in the 1997 guidance (see, e.g., 62 FR 12041, “conduct of a sexual nature is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive to limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the education program, or to create a hostile or abusive educational environment”), the definitions are consistent. Both the Court’s and the Department’s definitions are contextual descriptions intended to capture the same concept -- that under Title IX, the conduct must be sufficiently serious that it adversely affects a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the school’s program. In determining whether harassment is actionable, both Davis and the Department tell schools to look at the “constellation of surrounding circumstances, expectations, and relationships” (526 U.S. at 651 (citing Oncale)), and the Davis Court cited approvingly to the underlying core factors described in the 1997 guidance for evaluating the context of the harassment. Second, schools benefit from consistency and simplicity in understanding what is sexual harassment for which the school must take responsive action. A multiplicity of definitions would not serve this purpose.

Several commenters suggested that we develop a unique Title IX definition of harassment that does not rely on Title VII and that takes into account the special relationship of schools to students. Other commenters, by contrast, commended OCR for recognizing that Gebser and Davis did not alter the definition of hostile environment sexual harassment found in OCR’s 1997 guidance, which derives from Title VII caselaw, and asked us to strengthen the point. While Gebser and Davis made clear that Title VII agency principles do not apply in determining liability for money damages under Title IX, the Davis Court also indicated, through its specific references to Title VII caselaw, that Title VII remains relevant in determining what constitutes hostile environment sexual harassment under Title IX. We also believe that the factors described in both the 1997 guidance and the revised guidance to determine whether sexual harassment has occurred provide the necessary flexibility for taking into consideration the age and maturity of the students involved and the nature of the school environment.

Effective Response

One commenter suggested that the change in the guidance from “appropriate response” to “effective response” implies a change in OCR policy that requires omniscience of schools. We disagree. Effectiveness has always been the measure of an adequate response under Title IX. This does not mean a school must overreact out of fear of being judged inadequate. Effectiveness is measured based on a reasonableness standard. Schools do not have to know beforehand that their response will be effective. However, if their initial steps are ineffective in stopping the harassment, reasonableness may require a series of escalating steps.

The Relationship Between FERPA and Title IX

In the development of both the 1997 guidance and the current revisions to the guidance, commenters raised concerns about the interrelation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. 1232g, and Title IX. The concerns relate to two issues: (1) the harassed student’s right to information about the outcome of a sexual harassment complaint against another student, including information about sanctions imposed on a student found guilty of harassment; and (2) the due process rights of

individuals, including teachers, accused of sexual harassment by a student, to obtain information about the identity of the complainant and the nature of the allegations.

FERPA generally forbids disclosure of information from a student's "education record" without the consent of the student (or the student's parent). Thus, FERPA may be relevant when the person found to have engaged in harassment is another student, because written information about the complaint, investigation, and outcome is part of the harassing student's education record. Title IX is also relevant because it is an important part of taking effective responsive action for the school to inform the harassed student of the results of its investigation and whether it counseled, disciplined, or otherwise sanctioned the harasser. This information can assure the harassed student that the school has taken the student's complaint seriously and has taken steps to eliminate the hostile environment and prevent the harassment from recurring.

The Department currently interprets FERPA as not conflicting with the Title IX requirement that the school notify the harassed student of the outcome of its investigation, i.e., whether or not harassment was found to have occurred, because this information directly relates to the victim. It has been the Department's position that there is a potential conflict between FERPA and Title IX regarding disclosure of sanctions, and that FERPA generally prevents a school from disclosing to a student who complained of harassment information about the sanction or discipline imposed upon a student who was found to have engaged in that harassment.³

There is, however, an additional statutory provision that may apply to this situation. In 1994, as part of the Improving America's Schools Act, Congress amended the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) -- of which FERPA is a part -- to state that nothing in GEPA "shall be construed to affect the applicability of ... title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972..."⁴ The Department interprets this provision to mean that FERPA continues to apply in the context of Title IX enforcement, but if there is a direct conflict between requirements of FERPA and requirements of Title IX, such that enforcement of FERPA would interfere with the primary purpose of Title IX to eliminate sex-based discrimination in schools, the requirements of Title IX override any conflicting FERPA provisions. The Department is in the process of developing a consistent approach and specific factors for implementing this provision. OCR and the Department's Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) intend to issue joint guidance, discussing specific areas of potential conflict between FERPA and Title IX.

³ Exceptions include the case of a sanction that directly relates to the person who was harassed (e.g., an order that the harasser stay away from the harassed student), or sanctions related to offenses for which there is a statutory exception, such as crimes of violence or certain sex offenses in postsecondary institutions.

⁴ 20 U.S.C. 1221(d). A similar amendment was originally passed in 1974 but applied only to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibiting race discrimination by recipients). The 1994 amendments also extended 20 U.S.C. 1221(d) to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (prohibiting disability-based discrimination by recipients) and to the Age Discrimination Act.

FERPA is also relevant when a student accuses a teacher or other employee of sexual harassment, because written information about the allegations is contained in the student's education record. The potential conflict arises because, while FERPA protects the privacy of the student accuser, the accused individual may need the name of the accuser and information regarding the nature of the allegations in order to defend against the charges. The 1997 guidance made clear that neither FERPA nor Title IX override any federally protected due process rights of a school employee accused of sexual harassment.

Several commenters urged the Department to expand and strengthen this discussion. They argue that in many instances a school's failure to provide information about the name of the student accuser and the nature of the allegations seriously undermines the fairness of the investigative and adjudicative process. They also urge the Department to include a discussion of the need for confidentiality as to the identity of the individual accused of harassment because of the significant harm that can be caused by false accusations. We have made several changes to the guidance, including an additional discussion regarding the confidentiality of a person accused of harassment and a new heading entitled "Due Process Rights of the Accused," to address these concerns.

**REVISED SEXUAL HARASSMENT GUIDANCE:
HARASSMENT OF STUDENTS¹
BY SCHOOL EMPLOYEES, OTHER STUDENTS, OR THIRD PARTIES**

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I. Introduction

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) and the Department of Education's (Department) implementing regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in federally assisted education programs and activities.² The Supreme Court, Congress, and Federal executive departments and agencies, including the Department, have recognized that sexual harassment of students can constitute discrimination prohibited by Title IX.³ This guidance focuses on a school's⁴ fundamental compliance responsibilities under Title IX and the Title IX regulations to address sexual harassment of students as a condition of continued receipt of Federal funding. It describes the regulatory basis for a school's compliance responsibilities under Title IX, outlines the circumstances under which sexual harassment may constitute discrimination prohibited by the statute and regulations, and provides information about actions that schools should take to prevent sexual harassment or to address it effectively if it does occur.⁵

II. Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature.⁶ Sexual harassment of a student can deny or limit, on the basis of sex, the student's ability to participate in or to receive benefits, services, or opportunities in the school's program. Sexual harassment of students is, therefore, a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX under the circumstances described in this guidance.

It is important to recognize that Title IX's prohibition against sexual harassment does not extend to legitimate nonsexual touching or other nonsexual conduct. For example, a high school athletic coach hugging a student who made a goal or a kindergarten teacher's consoling hug for a child with a skinned knee will not be considered sexual harassment.⁷ Similarly, one student's demonstration of a sports maneuver or technique requiring contact with another student will not be considered sexual harassment. However, in some circumstances, nonsexual conduct may take on sexual connotations and rise to the level of sexual harassment. For example, a teacher's repeatedly hugging and putting his or her arms around students under inappropriate circumstances could create a hostile environment.

III. Applicability of Title IX

Title IX applies to all public and private educational institutions that receive Federal funds, i.e., recipients, including, but not limited to, elementary and secondary schools, school districts, proprietary schools, colleges, and universities. The guidance uses the terms "recipients" and "schools" interchangeably to refer to all of those institutions. The "education program or activity" of a school includes all of the school's operations.⁸ This means that Title IX protects students in connection with all of the academic, educational, extra-curricular, athletic, and other programs of the school,

whether they take place in the facilities of the school, on a school bus, at a class or training program sponsored by the school at another location, or elsewhere.

A student may be sexually harassed by a school employee,⁹ another student, or a non-employee third party (e.g., a visiting speaker or visiting athletes). Title IX protects any “person” from sex discrimination. Accordingly, both male and female students are protected from sexual harassment¹⁰ engaged in by a school’s employees, other students, or third parties. Moreover, Title IX prohibits sexual harassment regardless of the sex of the harasser, i.e., even if the harasser and the person being harassed are members of the same sex.¹¹ An example would be a campaign of sexually explicit graffiti directed at a particular girl by other girls.¹²

Although Title IX does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation,¹³ sexual harassment directed at gay or lesbian students that is sufficiently serious to limit or deny a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the school’s program constitutes sexual harassment prohibited by Title IX under the circumstances described in this guidance.¹⁴ For example, if a male student or a group of male students target a gay student for physical sexual advances, serious enough to deny or limit the victim’s ability to participate in or benefit from the school’s program, the school would need to respond promptly and effectively, as described in this guidance, just as it would if the victim were heterosexual. On the other hand, if students heckle another student with comments based on the student’s sexual orientation (e.g., “gay students are not welcome at this table in the cafeteria”), but their actions do not involve conduct of a sexual nature, their actions would not be sexual harassment covered by Title IX.¹⁵

Though beyond the scope of this guidance, gender-based harassment, which may include acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical aggression, intimidation, or hostility based on sex or sex-stereotyping,¹⁶ but not involving conduct of a sexual nature, is also a form of sex discrimination to which a school must respond, if it rises to a level that denies or limits a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the educational program.¹⁷ For example, the repeated sabotaging of female graduate students’ laboratory experiments by male students in the class could be the basis of a violation of Title IX. A school must respond to such harassment in accordance with the standards and procedures described in this guidance.¹⁸ In assessing all related circumstances to determine whether a hostile environment exists, incidents of gender-based harassment combined with incidents of sexual harassment could create a hostile environment, even if neither the gender-based harassment alone nor the sexual harassment alone would be sufficient to do so.¹⁹

IV. Title IX Regulatory Compliance Responsibilities

As a condition of receiving funds from the Department, a school is required to comply with Title IX and the Department’s Title IX regulations, which spell out prohibitions against sex discrimination. The law is clear that sexual harassment may constitute sex discrimination under Title IX.²⁰

Recipients specifically agree, as a condition for receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department, to comply with Title IX and the Department’s Title IX regulations. The regulatory provision requiring this agreement, known as an assurance of

compliance, specifies that recipients must agree that education programs or activities operated by the recipient will be operated in compliance with the Title IX regulations, including taking any action necessary to remedy its discrimination or the effects of its discrimination in its programs.²¹

The regulations set out the basic Title IX responsibilities a recipient undertakes when it accepts Federal financial assistance, including the following specific obligations.²² A recipient agrees that, in providing any aid, benefit, or service to students, it will not, on the basis of sex—

- Treat one student differently from another in determining whether the student satisfies any requirement or condition for the provision of any aid, benefit, or service;²³
- Provide different aid, benefits, or services or provide aid, benefits, or services in a different manner;²⁴
- Deny any student any such aid, benefit, or service;²⁵
- Subject students to separate or different rules of behavior, sanctions, or other treatment;²⁶
- Aid or perpetuate discrimination against a student by providing significant assistance to any agency, organization, or person that discriminates on the basis of sex in providing any aid, benefit, or service to students;²⁷ and
- Otherwise limit any student in the enjoyment of any right, privilege, advantage, or opportunity.²⁸

For the purposes of brevity and clarity, this guidance generally summarizes this comprehensive list by referring to a school's obligation to ensure that a student is not denied or limited in the ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program on the basis of sex.

The regulations also specify that, if a recipient discriminates on the basis of sex, the school must take remedial action to overcome the effects of the discrimination.²⁹

In addition, the regulations establish procedural requirements that are important for the prevention or correction of sex discrimination, including sexual harassment. These requirements include issuance of a policy against sex discrimination³⁰ and adoption and publication of grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints of sex discrimination.³¹ The regulations also require that recipients designate at least one employee to coordinate compliance with the regulations, including coordination of investigations of complaints alleging noncompliance.³²

To comply with these regulatory requirements, schools need to recognize and respond to sexual harassment of students by teachers and other employees, by other students, and by third parties. This guidance explains how the requirements of the Title IX regulations apply to situations involving sexual harassment of a student and outlines measures that schools should take to ensure compliance.

V. Determining a School's Responsibilities

In assessing sexually harassing conduct, it is important for schools to recognize that two distinct issues are considered. The first issue is whether, considering the types of harassment discussed in the following section, the conduct denies or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the program based on sex. If it does, the second issue is the nature of the school's responsibility to address that conduct. As discussed in a following section, this issue depends in part on the identity of the harasser and the context in which the harassment occurred.

A. Harassment that Denies or Limits a Student's Ability to Participate in or Benefit from the Education Program

This guidance moves away from specific labels for types of sexual harassment.³³ In each case, the issue is whether the harassment rises to a level that it denies or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program based on sex. However, an understanding of the different types of sexual harassment can help schools determine whether or not harassment has occurred that triggers a school's responsibilities under, or violates, Title IX or its regulations.

The type of harassment traditionally referred to as quid pro quo harassment occurs if a teacher or other employee conditions an educational decision or benefit on the student's submission to unwelcome sexual conduct.³⁴ Whether the student resists and suffers the threatened harm or submits and avoids the threatened harm, the student has been treated differently, or the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program has been denied or limited, on the basis of sex in violation of the Title IX regulations.³⁵

By contrast, sexual harassment can occur that does not explicitly or implicitly condition a decision or benefit on submission to sexual conduct. Harassment of this type is generally referred to as hostile environment harassment.³⁶ This type of harassing conduct requires a further assessment of whether or not the conduct is sufficiently serious to deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program based on sex.³⁷

Teachers and other employees can engage in either type of harassment. Students and third parties are not generally given responsibility over other students and, thus, generally can only engage in hostile environment harassment.

1. Factors Used to Evaluate Hostile Environment Sexual Harassment

As outlined in the following paragraphs, OCR considers a variety of related factors to determine if a hostile environment has been created, i.e., if sexually harassing conduct by an employee, another student, or a third party is sufficiently serious that it denies or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program based on sex. OCR considers the conduct from both a subjective³⁸ and objective³⁹ perspective. In evaluating the severity and pervasiveness of the conduct, OCR considers all relevant circumstances, i.e., "the constellation of surrounding circumstances, expectations, and relationships."⁴⁰ Schools should also use these factors to evaluate conduct in order to draw commonsense distinctions between conduct that constitutes

sexual harassment and conduct that does not rise to that level. Relevant factors include the following:

- The degree to which the conduct affected one or more students' education. OCR assesses the effect of the harassment on the student to determine whether it has denied or limited the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program. For example, a student's grades may go down or the student may be forced to withdraw from school because of the harassing behavior.⁴¹ A student may also suffer physical injuries or mental or emotional distress.⁴² In another situation, a student may have been able to keep up his or her grades and continue to attend school even though it was very difficult for him or her to do so because of the teacher's repeated sexual advances. Similarly, a student may be able to remain on a sports team, despite experiencing great difficulty performing at practices and games from the humiliation and anger caused by repeated sexual advances and intimidation by several team members that create a hostile environment. Harassing conduct in these examples would alter a reasonable student's educational environment and adversely affect the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program on the basis of sex.

A hostile environment can occur even if the harassment is not targeted specifically at the individual complainant.⁴³ For example, if a student, group of students, or a teacher regularly directs sexual comments toward a particular student, a hostile environment may be created not only for the targeted student, but also for others who witness the conduct.

- The type, frequency, and duration of the conduct. In most cases, a hostile environment will exist if there is a pattern or practice of harassment, or if the harassment is sustained and nontrivial.⁴⁴ For instance, if a young woman is taunted by one or more young men about her breasts or genital area or both, OCR may find that a hostile environment has been created, particularly if the conduct has gone on for some time, or takes place throughout the school, or if the taunts are made by a number of students. The more severe the conduct, the less the need to show a repetitive series of incidents; this is particularly true if the harassment is physical. For instance, if the conduct is more severe, e.g., attempts to grab a female student's breasts or attempts to grab any student's genital area or buttocks, it need not be as persistent to create a hostile environment. Indeed, a single or isolated incident of sexual harassment may, if sufficiently severe, create a hostile environment.⁴⁵ On the other hand, conduct that is not severe will not create a hostile environment, e.g., a comment by one student to another student that she has a nice figure. Indeed, depending on the circumstances, this may not even be conduct of a sexual nature.⁴⁶ Similarly, because students date one another, a request for a date or a gift of flowers, even if unwelcome, would not create a hostile environment. However, there may be circumstances in which repeated, unwelcome requests for dates or similar conduct could create a hostile environment. For example, a person, who has been refused previously, may request dates in an intimidating or threatening manner.
- The identity of and relationship between the alleged harasser and the subject or subjects of the harassment. A factor to be considered, especially in cases involving allegations of sexual harassment of a student by a school employee, is the identity of

and relationship between the alleged harasser and the subject or subjects of the harassment. For example, due to the power a professor or teacher has over a student, sexually based conduct by that person toward a student is more likely to create a hostile environment than similar conduct by another student.⁴⁷

- The number of individuals involved. Sexual harassment may be committed by an individual or a group. In some cases, verbal comments or other conduct from one person might not be sufficient to create a hostile environment, but could be if done by a group. Similarly, while harassment can be directed toward an individual or a group,⁴⁸ the effect of the conduct toward a group may vary, depending on the type of conduct and the context. For certain types of conduct, there may be “safety in numbers.” For example, following an individual student and making sexual taunts to him or her may be very intimidating to that student, but, in certain circumstances, less so to a group of students. On the other hand, persistent unwelcome sexual conduct still may create a hostile environment if directed toward a group.
- The age and sex of the alleged harasser and the subject or subjects of the harassment. For example, in the case of younger students, sexually harassing conduct is more likely to be intimidating if coming from an older student.⁴⁹
- The size of the school, location of the incidents, and context in which they occurred. Depending on the circumstances of a particular case, fewer incidents may have a greater effect at a small college than at a large university campus. Harassing conduct occurring on a school bus may be more intimidating than similar conduct on a school playground because the restricted area makes it impossible for students to avoid their harassers.⁵⁰ Harassing conduct in a personal or secluded area, such as a dormitory room or residence hall, can have a greater effect (e.g., be seen as more threatening) than would similar conduct in a more public area. On the other hand, harassing conduct in a public place may be more humiliating. Each incident must be judged individually.
- Other incidents at the school. A series of incidents at the school, not involving the same students, could — taken together — create a hostile environment, even if each by itself would not be sufficient.⁵¹
- Incidents of gender-based, but nonsexual harassment. Acts of verbal, nonverbal or physical aggression, intimidation or hostility based on sex, but not involving sexual activity or language, can be combined with incidents of sexual harassment to determine if the incidents of sexual harassment are sufficiently serious to create a sexually hostile environment.⁵²

It is the totality of the circumstances in which the behavior occurs that is critical in determining whether a hostile environment exists. Consequently, in using the factors discussed previously to evaluate incidents of alleged harassment, it is always important to use common sense and reasonable judgement in determining whether a sexually hostile environment has been created.

2. Welcomeness

The section entitled “Sexual Harassment” explains that in order for conduct of a sexual nature to be sexual harassment, it must be unwelcome. Conduct is unwelcome if

the student did not request or invite it and “regarded the conduct as undesirable or offensive.”⁵³ Acquiescence in the conduct or the failure to complain does not always mean that the conduct was welcome.⁵⁴ For example, a student may decide not to resist sexual advances of another student or may not file a complaint out of fear. In addition, a student may not object to a pattern of demeaning comments directed at him or her by a group of students out of a concern that objections might cause the harassers to make more comments. The fact that a student may have accepted the conduct does not mean that he or she welcomed it.⁵⁵ Also, the fact that a student willingly participated in conduct on one occasion does not prevent him or her from indicating that the same conduct has become unwelcome on a subsequent occasion. On the other hand, if a student actively participates in sexual banter and discussions and gives no indication that he or she objects, then the evidence generally will not support a conclusion that the conduct was unwelcome.⁵⁶

If younger children are involved, it may be necessary to determine the degree to which they are able to recognize that certain sexual conduct is conduct to which they can or should reasonably object and the degree to which they can articulate an objection. Accordingly, OCR will consider the age of the student, the nature of the conduct involved, and other relevant factors in determining whether a student had the capacity to welcome sexual conduct.

Schools should be particularly concerned about the issue of welcomeness if the harasser is in a position of authority. For instance, because students may be encouraged to believe that a teacher has absolute authority over the operation of his or her classroom, a student may not object to a teacher’s sexually harassing comments during class; however, this does not necessarily mean that the conduct was welcome. Instead, the student may believe that any objections would be ineffective in stopping the harassment or may fear that by making objections he or she will be singled out for harassing comments or other retaliation.

In addition, OCR must consider particular issues of welcomeness if the alleged harassment relates to alleged “consensual” sexual relationships between a school’s adult employees and its students. If elementary students are involved, welcomeness will not be an issue: OCR will never view sexual conduct between an adult school employee and an elementary school student as consensual. In cases involving secondary students, there will be a strong presumption that sexual conduct between an adult school employee and a student is not consensual. In cases involving older secondary students, subject to the presumption,⁵⁷ OCR will consider a number of factors in determining whether a school employee’s sexual advances or other sexual conduct could be considered welcome.⁵⁸ In addition, OCR will consider these factors in all cases involving postsecondary students in making those determinations.⁵⁹ The factors include the following:

- The nature of the conduct and the relationship of the school employee to the student, including the degree of influence (which could, at least in part, be affected by the student’s age), authority, or control the employee has over the student.
- Whether the student was legally or practically unable to consent to the sexual conduct in question. For example, a student’s age could affect his or her ability to do so. Similarly, certain types of disabilities could affect a student’s ability to do so.

If there is a dispute about whether harassment occurred or whether it was welcome — in a case in which it is appropriate to consider whether the conduct would be welcome — determinations should be made based on the totality of the circumstances. The following types of information may be helpful in resolving the dispute:

- Statements by any witnesses to the alleged incident.
- Evidence about the relative credibility of the allegedly harassed student and the alleged harasser. For example, the level of detail and consistency of each person's account should be compared in an attempt to determine who is telling the truth. Another way to assess credibility is to see if corroborative evidence is lacking where it should logically exist. However, the absence of witnesses may indicate only the unwillingness of others to step forward, perhaps due to fear of the harasser or a desire not to get involved.
- Evidence that the alleged harasser has been found to have harassed others may support the credibility of the student claiming the harassment; conversely, the student's claim will be weakened if he or she has been found to have made false allegations against other individuals.
- Evidence of the allegedly harassed student's reaction or behavior after the alleged harassment. For example, were there witnesses who saw the student immediately after the alleged incident who say that the student appeared to be upset? However, it is important to note that some students may respond to harassment in ways that do not manifest themselves right away, but may surface several days or weeks after the harassment. For example, a student may initially show no signs of having been harassed, but several weeks after the harassment, there may be significant changes in the student's behavior, including difficulty concentrating on academic work, symptoms of depression, and a desire to avoid certain individuals and places at school.
- Evidence about whether the student claiming harassment filed a complaint or took other action to protest the conduct soon after the alleged incident occurred. However, failure to immediately complain may merely reflect a fear of retaliation or a fear that the complainant may not be believed rather than that the alleged harassment did not occur.
- Other contemporaneous evidence. For example, did the student claiming harassment write about the conduct and his or her reaction to it soon after it occurred (e.g., in a diary or letter)? Did the student tell others (friends, parents) about the conduct (and his or her reaction to it) soon after it occurred?

B. Nature of the School's Responsibility to Address Sexual Harassment

A school has a responsibility to respond promptly and effectively to sexual harassment. In the case of harassment by teachers or other employees, the nature of this responsibility depends in part on whether the harassment occurred in the context of the employee's provision of aid, benefits, or services to students.

1. Harassment by Teachers and Other Employees

Sexual harassment of a student by a teacher or other school employee can be discrimination in violation of Title IX.⁶⁰ Schools are responsible for taking prompt and effective action to stop the harassment and prevent its recurrence. A school also may be responsible for remedying the effects of the harassment on the student who was harassed. The extent of a recipient's responsibilities if an employee sexually harasses a student is determined by whether or not the harassment occurred in the context of the employee's provision of aid, benefits, or services to students.

A recipient is responsible under the Title IX regulations for the nondiscriminatory provision of aid, benefits, and services to students. Recipients generally provide aid, benefits, and services to students through the responsibilities they give to employees. If an employee who is acting (or who reasonably appears to be acting) in the context of carrying out these responsibilities over students engages in sexual harassment – generally this means harassment that is carried out during an employee's performance of his or her responsibilities in relation to students, including teaching, counseling, supervising, advising, and transporting students – and the harassment denies or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from a school program on the basis of sex,⁶¹ the recipient is responsible for the discriminatory conduct.⁶² The recipient is, therefore, also responsible for remedying any effects of the harassment on the victim, as well as for ending the harassment and preventing its recurrence. This is true whether or not the recipient has “notice” of the harassment. (As explained in the section on “Notice of Employee, Peer, or Third Party Harassment,” for purposes of this guidance, a school has notice of harassment if a responsible school employee actually knew or, in the exercise of reasonable care, should have known about the harassment.) Of course, under OCR's administrative enforcement, recipients always receive actual notice and the opportunity to take appropriate corrective action before any finding of violation or possible loss of federal funds.

Whether or not sexual harassment of a student occurred within the context of an employee's responsibilities for providing aid, benefits, or services is determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account a variety of factors. If an employee conditions the provision of an aid, benefit, or service that the employee is responsible for providing on a student's submission to sexual conduct, i.e., conduct traditionally referred to as quid pro quo harassment, the harassment is clearly taking place in the context of the employee's responsibilities to provide aid, benefits, or services. In other situations, i.e., when an employee has created a hostile environment, OCR will consider the following factors in determining whether or not the harassment has taken place in this context, including:

- The type and degree of responsibility given to the employee, including both formal and informal authority, to provide aids, benefits, or services to students, to direct and control student conduct, or to discipline students generally;
- the degree of influence the employee has over the particular student involved, including in the circumstances in which the harassment took place;
- where and when the harassment occurred;
- the age and educational level of the student involved; and

- as applicable, whether, in light of the student's age and educational level and the way the school is run, it would be reasonable for the student to believe that the employee was in a position of responsibility over the student, even if the employee was not.

These factors are applicable to all recipient educational institutions, including elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Elementary and secondary schools, however, are typically run in a way that gives teachers, school officials, and other school employees a substantial degree of supervision, control, and disciplinary authority over the conduct of students.⁶³ Therefore, in cases involving allegations of harassment of elementary and secondary school-age students by a teacher or school administrator during any school activity,⁶⁴ consideration of these factors will generally lead to a conclusion that the harassment occurred in the context of the employee's provision of aid, benefits, or services.

For example, a teacher sexually harasses an eighth-grade student in a school hallway. Even if the student is not in any of the teacher's classes and even if the teacher is not designated as a hall monitor, given the age and educational level of the student and the status and degree of influence of teachers in elementary and secondary schools, it would be reasonable for the student to believe that the teacher had at least informal disciplinary authority over students in the hallways. Thus, OCR would consider this an example of conduct that is occurring in the context of the employee's responsibilities to provide aid, benefits, or services.

Other examples of sexual harassment of a student occurring in the context of an employee's responsibilities for providing aid, benefits, or services include, but are not limited to -- a faculty member at a university's medical school conditions an intern's evaluation on submission to his sexual advances and then gives her a poor evaluation for rejecting the advances; a high school drama instructor does not give a student a part in a play because she has not responded to sexual overtures from the instructor; a faculty member withdraws approval of research funds for her assistant because he has rebuffed her advances; a journalism professor who supervises a college newspaper continually and inappropriately touches a student editor in a sexual manner, causing the student to resign from the newspaper staff; and a teacher repeatedly asks a ninth grade student to stay after class and attempts to engage her in discussions about sex and her personal experiences while they are alone in the classroom, causing the student to stop coming to class. In each of these cases, the school is responsible for the discriminatory conduct, including taking prompt and effective action to end the harassment, prevent it from recurring, and remedy the effects of the harassment on the victim.

Sometimes harassment of a student by an employee in the school's program does not take place in the context of the employee's provision of aid, benefits, or services, but nevertheless is sufficiently serious to create a hostile educational environment. An example of this conduct might occur if a faculty member in the history department at a university, over the course of several weeks, repeatedly touches and makes sexually suggestive remarks to a graduate engineering student while waiting at a stop for the university shuttle bus, riding on the bus, and upon exiting the bus. As a result, the student stops using the campus shuttle and walks the very long distances between her classes. In this case, the school is not directly responsible for the harassing conduct because it did not occur in the context of the employee's responsibilities for the provision

of aid, benefits, or services to students. However, the conduct is sufficiently serious to deny or limit the student in her ability to participate in or benefit from the recipient's program. Thus, the school has a duty, upon notice of the harassment,⁶⁵ to take prompt and effective action to stop the harassment and prevent its recurrence.

If the school takes these steps, it has avoided violating Title IX. If the school fails to take the necessary steps, however, its failure to act has allowed the student to continue to be subjected to a hostile environment that denies or limits the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program. The school, therefore, has engaged in its own discrimination. It then becomes responsible, not just for stopping the conduct and preventing it from happening again, but for remedying the effects of the harassment on the student that could reasonably have been prevented if the school had responded promptly and effectively. (For related issues, see the sections on "OCR Case Resolution" and "Recipient's Response.")

2. Harassment by Other Students or Third Parties

If a student sexually harasses another student and the harassing conduct is sufficiently serious to deny or limit the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the program, and if the school knows or reasonably should know⁶⁶ about the harassment, the school is responsible for taking immediate effective action to eliminate the hostile environment and prevent its recurrence.⁶⁷ As long as the school, upon notice of the harassment, responds by taking prompt and effective action to end the harassment and prevent its recurrence, the school has carried out its responsibility under the Title IX regulations. On the other hand, if, upon notice, the school fails to take prompt, effective action, the school's own inaction has permitted the student to be subjected to a hostile environment that denies or limits the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program on the basis of sex.⁶⁸ In this case, the school is responsible for taking effective corrective actions to stop the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and remedy the effects on the victim that could reasonably have been prevented had it responded promptly and effectively.

Similarly, sexually harassing conduct by third parties, who are not themselves employees or students at the school (e.g., a visiting speaker or members of a visiting athletic team), may also be of a sufficiently serious nature to deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the education program. As previously outlined in connection with peer harassment, if the school knows or should know⁶⁹ of the harassment, the school is responsible for taking prompt and effective action to eliminate the hostile environment and prevent its recurrence.

The type of appropriate steps that the school should take will differ depending on the level of control that the school has over the third party harasser.⁷⁰ For example, if athletes from a visiting team harass the home school's students, the home school may not be able to discipline the athletes. However, it could encourage the other school to take appropriate action to prevent further incidents; if necessary, the home school may choose not to invite the other school back. (This issue is discussed more fully in the section on "Recipient's Response.")

If, upon notice, the school fails to take prompt and effective corrective action, its own failure has permitted the student to be subjected to a hostile environment that limits

the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the education program.⁷¹ In this case, the school is responsible for taking corrective actions to stop the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and remedy the effects on the victim that could reasonably have been prevented had the school responded promptly and effectively.

C. Notice of Employee, Peer, or Third Party Harassment

As described in the section on “Harassment by Teachers and Other Employees,” schools may be responsible for certain types of employee harassment that occurred before the school otherwise had notice of the harassment. On the other hand, as described in that section and the section on “Harassment by Other Students or Third Parties,” in situations involving certain other types of employee harassment, or harassment by peers or third parties, a school will be in violation of the Title IX regulations if the school “has notice” of a sexually hostile environment and fails to take immediate and effective corrective action.⁷²

A school has notice if a responsible employee “knew, or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known,” about the harassment.⁷³ A responsible employee would include any employee who has the authority to take action to redress the harassment, who has the duty to report to appropriate school officials sexual harassment or any other misconduct by students or employees, or an individual who a student could reasonably believe has this authority or responsibility.⁷⁴ Accordingly, schools need to ensure that employees are trained so that those with authority to address harassment know how to respond appropriately, and other responsible employees know that they are obligated to report harassment to appropriate school officials. Training for employees should include practical information about how to identify harassment and, as applicable, the person to whom it should be reported.

A school can receive notice of harassment in many different ways. A student may have filed a grievance with the Title IX coordinator⁷⁵ or complained to a teacher or other responsible employee about fellow students harassing him or her. A student, parent, or other individual may have contacted other appropriate personnel, such as a principal, campus security, bus driver, teacher, affirmative action officer, or staff in the office of student affairs. A teacher or other responsible employee of the school may have witnessed the harassment. The school may receive notice about harassment in an indirect manner, from sources such as a member of the school staff, a member of the educational or local community, or the media. The school also may have learned about the harassment from flyers about the incident distributed at the school or posted around the school. For the purposes of compliance with the Title IX regulations, a school has a duty to respond to harassment about which it reasonably should have known, i.e., if it would have learned of the harassment if it had exercised reasonable care or made a “reasonably diligent inquiry.”⁷⁶

For example, in some situations if the school knows of incidents of harassment, the exercise of reasonable care should trigger an investigation that would lead to a discovery of additional incidents.⁷⁷ In other cases, the pervasiveness of the harassment may be enough to conclude that the school should have known of the hostile environment — if the harassment is widespread, openly practiced, or well-known to students and staff

(such as sexual harassment occurring in the hallways, graffiti in public areas, or harassment occurring during recess under a teacher’s supervision.)⁷⁸

If a school otherwise knows or reasonably should know of a hostile environment and fails to take prompt and effective corrective action, a school has violated Title IX even if the student has failed to use the school’s existing grievance procedures or otherwise inform the school of the harassment.

D. The Role of Grievance Procedures

Schools are required by the Title IX regulations to adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of sex discrimination complaints, including complaints of sexual harassment, and to disseminate a policy against sex discrimination.⁷⁹ (These issues are discussed in the section on “Prompt and Equitable Grievance Procedures.”) These procedures provide a school with a mechanism for discovering sexual harassment as early as possible and for effectively correcting problems, as required by the Title IX regulations. By having a strong policy against sex discrimination and accessible, effective, and fairly applied grievance procedures, a school is telling its students that it does not tolerate sexual harassment and that students can report it without fear of adverse consequences.

Without a disseminated policy and procedure, a student does not know either of the school’s policy against and obligation to address this form of discrimination, or how to report harassment so that it can be remedied. If the alleged harassment is sufficiently serious to create a hostile environment and it is the school’s failure to comply with the procedural requirements of the Title IX regulations that hampers early notification and intervention and permits sexual harassment to deny or limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the school’s program on the basis of sex,⁸⁰ the school will be responsible under the Title IX regulations, once informed of the harassment, to take corrective action, including stopping the harassment, preventing its recurrence, and remedying the effects of the harassment on the victim that could reasonably have been prevented if the school’s failure to comply with the procedural requirements had not hampered early notification.

VI. OCR Case Resolution

If OCR is asked to investigate or otherwise resolve incidents of sexual harassment of students, including incidents caused by employees, other students, or third parties, OCR will consider whether — (1) the school has a disseminated policy prohibiting sex discrimination under Title IX⁸¹ and effective grievance procedures;⁸² (2) the school appropriately investigated or otherwise responded to allegations of sexual harassment;⁸³ and (3) the school has taken immediate and effective corrective action responsive to the harassment, including effective actions to end the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects.⁸⁴ (Issues related to appropriate investigative and corrective actions are discussed in detail in the section on “Recipient’s Response.”)

If the school has taken, or agrees to take, each of these steps, OCR will consider the case against the school resolved and will take no further action, other than monitoring compliance with an agreement, if any, between the school and OCR. This is true in cases

in which the school was in violation of the Title IX regulations (e.g., a teacher sexually harassed a student in the context of providing aid, benefits, or services to students), as well as those in which there has been no violation of the regulations (e.g., in a peer sexual harassment situation in which the school took immediate, reasonable steps to end the harassment and prevent its recurrence). This is because, even if OCR identifies a violation, Title IX requires OCR to attempt to secure voluntary compliance.⁸⁵ Thus, because a school will have the opportunity to take reasonable corrective action before OCR issues a formal finding of violation, a school does not risk losing its Federal funding solely because discrimination occurred.

VII. Recipient's Response

Once a school has notice of possible sexual harassment of students — whether carried out by employees, other students, or third parties — it should take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred and take prompt and effective steps

reasonably calculated to end any harassment, eliminate a hostile environment if one has been created, and prevent harassment from occurring again. These steps are the school's responsibility whether or not the student who was harassed makes a complaint or otherwise asks the school to take action.⁸⁶ As described in the next section, in appropriate circumstances the school will also be responsible for taking steps to remedy the effects of the harassment on the individual student or students who were harassed. What constitutes a reasonable response to information about possible sexual harassment will differ depending upon the circumstances.

A. Response to Student or Parent Reports of Harassment; Response to Direct Observation of Harassment by a Responsible Employee

If a student or the parent of an elementary or secondary student provides information or complains about sexual harassment of the student, the school should initially discuss what actions the student or parent is seeking in response to the harassment. The school should explain the avenues for informal and formal action, including a description of the grievance procedure that is available for sexual harassment complaints and an explanation of how the procedure works. If a responsible school employee has directly observed sexual harassment of a student, the school should contact the student who was harassed (or the parent, depending upon the age of the student),⁸⁷ explain that the school is responsible for taking steps to correct the harassment, and provide the same information described in the previous sentence.

Regardless of whether the student who was harassed, or his or her parent, decides to file a formal complaint or otherwise request action on the student's behalf (including in cases involving direct observation by a responsible employee), the school must promptly investigate to determine what occurred and then take appropriate steps to resolve the situation. The specific steps in an investigation will vary depending upon the nature of the allegations, the source of the complaint, the age of the student or students involved, the size and administrative structure of the school, and other factors. However, in all cases the inquiry must be prompt, thorough, and impartial. (Requests by the student who

was harassed for confidentiality or for no action to be taken, responding to notice of harassment from other sources, and the components of a prompt and equitable grievance procedure are discussed in subsequent sections of this guidance.)

It may be appropriate for a school to take interim measures during the investigation of a complaint. For instance, if a student alleges that he or she has been sexually assaulted by another student, the school may decide to place the students immediately in separate classes or in different housing arrangements on a campus, pending the results of the school's investigation. Similarly, if the alleged harasser is a teacher, allowing the student to transfer to a different class may be appropriate. In cases involving potential criminal conduct, school personnel should determine whether appropriate law enforcement authorities should be notified. In all cases, schools should make every effort to prevent disclosure of the names of all parties involved -- the complainant, the witnesses, and the accused -- except to the extent necessary to carry out an investigation.

If a school determines that sexual harassment has occurred, it should take reasonable, timely, age-appropriate, and effective corrective action, including steps tailored to the specific situation.⁸⁸ Appropriate steps should be taken to end the harassment. For example, school personnel may need to counsel, warn, or take disciplinary action against the harasser, based on the severity of the harassment or any record of prior incidents or both.⁸⁹ A series of escalating consequences may be necessary if the initial steps are ineffective in stopping the harassment.⁹⁰ In some cases, it may be appropriate to further separate the harassed student and the harasser, e.g., by changing housing arrangements⁹¹ or directing the harasser to have no further contact with the harassed student. Responsive measures of this type should be designed to minimize, as much as possible, the burden on the student who was harassed. If the alleged harasser is not a student or employee of the recipient, OCR will consider the level of control the school has over the harasser in determining what response would be appropriate.⁹²

Steps should also be taken to eliminate any hostile environment that has been created. For example, if a female student has been subjected to harassment by a group of other students in a class, the school may need to deliver special training or other interventions for that class to repair the educational environment. If the school offers the student the option of withdrawing from a class in which a hostile environment occurred, the school should assist the student in making program or schedule changes and ensure that none of the changes adversely affect the student's academic record. Other measures may include, if appropriate, directing a harasser to apologize to the harassed student. If a hostile environment has affected an entire school or campus, an effective response may need to include dissemination of information, the issuance of new policy statements, or other steps that are designed to clearly communicate the message that the school does not tolerate harassment and will be responsive to any student who reports that conduct.

In some situations, a school may be required to provide other services to the student who was harassed if necessary to address the effects of the harassment on that student.⁹³ For example, if an instructor gives a student a low grade because the student failed to respond to his sexual advances, the school may be required to make arrangements for an independent reassessment of the student's work, if feasible, and change the grade accordingly; make arrangements for the student to take the course again

with a different instructor; provide tutoring; make tuition adjustments; offer reimbursement for professional counseling; or take other measures that are appropriate to the circumstances. As another example, if a school delays responding or responds inappropriately to information about harassment, such as a case in which the school ignores complaints by a student that he or she is being sexually harassed by a classmate, the school will be required to remedy the effects of the harassment that could have been prevented had the school responded promptly and effectively.

Finally, a school should take steps to prevent any further harassment⁹⁴ and to prevent any retaliation against the student who made the complaint (or was the subject of the harassment), against the person who filed a complaint on behalf of a student, or against those who provided information as witnesses.⁹⁵ At a minimum, this includes making sure that the harassed students and their parents know how to report any subsequent problems and making follow-up inquiries to see if there have been any new incidents or any retaliation. To prevent recurrences, counseling for the harasser may be appropriate to ensure that he or she understands what constitutes harassment and the effects it can have. In addition, depending on how widespread the harassment was and whether there have been any prior incidents, the school may need to provide training for the larger school community to ensure that students, parents, and teachers can recognize harassment if it recurs and know how to respond.⁹⁶

B. Confidentiality

The scope of a reasonable response also may depend upon whether a student, or parent of a minor student, reporting harassment asks that the student's name not be disclosed to the harasser or that nothing be done about the alleged harassment. In all cases, a school should discuss confidentiality standards and concerns with the complainant initially. The school should inform the student that a confidentiality request may limit the school's ability to respond. The school also should tell the student that Title IX prohibits retaliation and that, if he or she is afraid of reprisals from the alleged harasser, the school will take steps to prevent retaliation and will take strong responsive actions if retaliation occurs. If the student continues to ask that his or her name not be revealed, the school should take all reasonable steps to investigate and respond to the complaint consistent with the student's request as long as doing so does not prevent the school from responding effectively to the harassment and preventing harassment of other students.

OCR enforces Title IX consistent with the federally protected due process rights of public school students and employees. Thus, for example, if a student, who was the only student harassed, insists that his or her name not be revealed, and the alleged harasser could not respond to the charges of sexual harassment without that information, in evaluating the school's response, OCR would not expect disciplinary action against an alleged harasser.

At the same time, a school should evaluate the confidentiality request in the context of its responsibility to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students. The factors that a school may consider in this regard include the seriousness of the alleged harassment, the age of the student harassed, whether there have been other complaints or reports of harassment against the alleged harasser, and the rights of the

accused individual to receive information about the accuser and the allegations if a formal proceeding with sanctions may result.⁹⁷

Similarly, a school should be aware of the confidentiality concerns of an accused employee or student. Publicized accusations of sexual harassment, if ultimately found to be false, may nevertheless irreparably damage the reputation of the accused. The accused individual's need for confidentiality must, of course, also be evaluated based on the factors discussed in the preceding paragraph in the context of the school's responsibility to ensure a safe environment for students.

Although a student's request to have his or her name withheld may limit the school's ability to respond fully to an individual complaint of harassment, other means may be available to address the harassment. There are steps a recipient can take to limit the effects of the alleged harassment and prevent its recurrence without initiating formal action against the alleged harasser or revealing the identity of the complainant. Examples include conducting sexual harassment training for the school site or academic department where the problem occurred, taking a student survey concerning any problems with harassment, or implementing other systemic measures at the site or department where the alleged harassment has occurred.

In addition, by investigating the complaint to the extent possible — including by reporting it to the Title IX coordinator or other responsible school employee designated pursuant to Title IX — the school may learn about or be able to confirm a pattern of harassment based on claims by different students that they were harassed by the same individual. In some situations there may be prior reports by former students who now might be willing to come forward and be identified, thus providing a basis for further corrective action. In instances affecting a number of students (for example, a report from a student that an instructor has repeatedly made sexually explicit remarks about his or her personal life in front of an entire class), an individual can be put on notice of allegations of harassing behavior and counseled appropriately without revealing, even indirectly, the identity of the student who notified the school. Those steps can be very effective in preventing further harassment.

C. Response to Other Types of Notice

The previous two sections deal with situations in which a student or parent of a student who was harassed reports or complains of harassment or in which a responsible school employee directly observes sexual harassment of a student. If a school learns of harassment through other means, for example, if information about harassment is received from a third party (such as from a witness to an incident or an anonymous letter or telephone call), different factors will affect the school's response. These factors include the source and nature of the information; the seriousness of the alleged incident; the specificity of the information; the objectivity and credibility of the source of the report; whether any individuals can be identified who were subjected to the alleged harassment; and whether those individuals want to pursue the matter. If, based on these factors, it is reasonable for the school to investigate and it can confirm the allegations, the considerations described in the previous sections concerning interim measures and appropriate responsive action will apply.

For example, if a parent visiting a school observes a student repeatedly harassing a group of female students and reports this to school officials, school personnel can speak with the female students to confirm whether that conduct has occurred and whether they view it as unwelcome. If the school determines that the conduct created a hostile environment, it can take reasonable, age-appropriate steps to address the situation. If on the other hand, the students in this example were to ask that their names not be disclosed or indicate that they do not want to pursue the matter, the considerations described in the previous section related to requests for confidentiality will shape the school's response.

In a contrasting example, a student newspaper at a large university may print an anonymous letter claiming that a professor is sexually harassing students in class on a daily basis, but the letter provides no clue as to the identity of the professor or the department in which the conduct is allegedly taking place. Due to the anonymous source and lack of specificity of the information, a school would not reasonably be able to investigate and confirm these allegations. However, in response to the anonymous letter, the school could submit a letter or article to the newspaper reiterating its policy against sexual harassment, encouraging persons who believe that they have been sexually harassed to come forward, and explaining how its grievance procedures work.

VIII. Prevention

A policy specifically prohibiting sexual harassment and separate grievance procedures for violations of that policy can help ensure that all students and employees understand the nature of sexual harassment and that the school will not tolerate it. Indeed, they might even bring conduct of a sexual nature to the school's attention so that the school can address it before it becomes sufficiently serious as to create a hostile environment. Further, training for administrators, teachers, and staff and age-appropriate classroom information for students can help to ensure that they understand what types of conduct can cause sexual harassment and that they know how to respond.

IX. Prompt and Equitable Grievance Procedures

Schools are required by the Title IX regulations to adopt and publish a policy against sex discrimination and grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints of discrimination on the basis of sex.⁹⁸ Accordingly, regardless of whether harassment occurred, a school violates this requirement of the Title IX regulations if it does not have those procedures and policy in place.⁹⁹

A school's sex discrimination grievance procedures must apply to complaints of sex discrimination in the school's education programs and activities filed by students against school employees, other students, or third parties.¹⁰⁰ Title IX does not require a school to adopt a policy specifically prohibiting sexual harassment or to provide separate grievance procedures for sexual harassment complaints. However, its nondiscrimination policy and grievance procedures for handling discrimination complaints must provide effective means for preventing and responding to sexual harassment. Thus, if, because of the lack of a policy or procedure specifically addressing sexual harassment, students are unaware of what kind of conduct constitutes sexual harassment or that such conduct is

prohibited sex discrimination, a school's general policy and procedures relating to sex discrimination complaints will not be considered effective.¹⁰¹

OCR has identified a number of elements in evaluating whether a school's grievance procedures are prompt and equitable, including whether the procedures provide for —

- Notice to students, parents of elementary and secondary students, and employees of the procedure, including where complaints may be filed;
- Application of the procedure to complaints alleging harassment carried out by employees, other students, or third parties;
- Adequate, reliable, and impartial investigation of complaints, including the opportunity to present witnesses and other evidence;
- Designated and reasonably prompt timeframes for the major stages of the complaint process;
- Notice to the parties of the outcome of the complaint;¹⁰² and
- An assurance that the school will take steps to prevent recurrence of any harassment and to correct its discriminatory effects on the complainant and others, if appropriate.¹⁰³

Many schools also provide an opportunity to appeal the findings or remedy, or both. In addition, because retaliation is prohibited by Title IX, schools may want to include a provision in their procedures prohibiting retaliation against any individual who files a complaint or participates in a harassment inquiry.

Procedures adopted by schools will vary considerably in detail, specificity, and components, reflecting differences in audiences, school sizes and administrative structures, State or local legal requirements, and past experience. In addition, whether complaint resolutions are timely will vary depending on the complexity of the investigation and the severity and extent of the harassment. During the investigation it is a good practice for schools to inform students who have alleged harassment about the status of the investigation on a periodic basis.

A grievance procedure applicable to sexual harassment complaints cannot be prompt or equitable unless students know it exists, how it works, and how to file a complaint. Thus, the procedures should be written in language appropriate to the age of the school's students, easily understood, and widely disseminated. Distributing the procedures to administrators, or including them in the school's administrative or policy manual, may not by itself be an effective way of providing notice, as these publications are usually not widely circulated to and understood by all members of the school community. Many schools ensure adequate notice to students by having copies of the procedures available at various locations throughout the school or campus; publishing the procedures as a separate document; including a summary of the procedures in major publications issued by the school, such as handbooks and catalogs for students, parents of elementary and secondary students, faculty, and staff; and identifying individuals who can explain how the procedures work.

A school must designate at least one employee to coordinate its efforts to comply with and carry out its Title IX responsibilities.¹⁰⁴ The school must notify all of its students and employees of the name, office address, and telephone number of the employee or employees designated.¹⁰⁵ Because it is possible that an employee designated to handle Title IX complaints may himself or herself engage in harassment, a school may want to designate more than one employee to be responsible for handling complaints in order to ensure that students have an effective means of reporting harassment.¹⁰⁶ While a school may choose to have a number of employees responsible for Title IX matters, it is also advisable to give one official responsibility for overall coordination and oversight of all sexual harassment complaints to ensure consistent practices and standards in handling complaints. Coordination of recordkeeping (for instance, in a confidential log maintained by the Title IX coordinator) will also ensure that the school can and will resolve recurring problems and identify students or employees who have multiple complaints filed against them.¹⁰⁷ Finally, the school must make sure that all designated employees have adequate training as to what conduct constitutes sexual harassment and are able to explain how the grievance procedure operates.¹⁰⁸

Grievance procedures may include informal mechanisms for resolving sexual harassment complaints to be used if the parties agree to do so.¹⁰⁹ OCR has frequently advised schools, however, that it is not appropriate for a student who is complaining of harassment to be required to work out the problem directly with the individual alleged to be harassing him or her, and certainly not without appropriate involvement by the school (e.g., participation by a counselor, trained mediator, or, if appropriate, a teacher or administrator). In addition, the complainant must be notified of the right to end the informal process at any time and begin the formal stage of the complaint process. In some cases, such as alleged sexual assaults, mediation will not be appropriate even on a voluntary basis. Title IX also permits the use of a student disciplinary procedure not designed specifically for Title IX grievances to resolve sex discrimination complaints, as long as the procedure meets the requirement of affording a complainant a “prompt and equitable” resolution of the complaint.

In some instances, a complainant may allege harassing conduct that constitutes both sex discrimination and possible criminal conduct. Police investigations or reports may be useful in terms of fact gathering. However, because legal standards for criminal investigations are different, police investigations or reports may not be determinative of whether harassment occurred under Title IX and do not relieve the school of its duty to respond promptly and effectively.¹¹⁰ Similarly, schools are cautioned about using the results of insurance company investigations of sexual harassment allegations. The purpose of an insurance investigation is to assess liability under the insurance policy, and the applicable standards may well be different from those under Title IX. In addition, a school is not relieved of its responsibility to respond to a sexual harassment complaint filed under its grievance procedure by the fact that a complaint has been filed with OCR.¹¹¹

X. Due Process Rights of the Accused

A public school's employees have certain due process rights under the United States Constitution. The Constitution also guarantees due process to students in public and State-supported schools who are accused of certain types of infractions. The rights established under Title IX must be interpreted consistent with any federally guaranteed due process rights involved in a complaint proceeding. Furthermore, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) does not override federally protected due process rights of persons accused of sexual harassment. Procedures that ensure the Title IX rights of the complainant, while at the same time according due process to both parties involved, will lead to sound and supportable decisions. Of course, schools should ensure that steps to accord due process rights do not restrict or unnecessarily delay the protections provided by Title IX to the complainant. In both public and private schools, additional or separate rights may be created for employees or students by State law, institutional regulations and policies, such as faculty or student handbooks, and collective bargaining agreements. Schools should be aware of these rights and their legal responsibilities to individuals accused of harassment.

XI. First Amendment

In cases of alleged harassment, the protections of the First Amendment must be considered if issues of speech or expression are involved.¹¹² Free speech rights apply in the classroom (e.g., classroom lectures and discussions)¹¹³ and in all other education programs and activities of public schools (e.g., public meetings and speakers on campus; campus debates, school plays and other cultural events¹¹⁴; and student newspapers, journals, and other publications¹¹⁵). In addition, First Amendment rights apply to the speech of students and teachers.¹¹⁶

Title IX is intended to protect students from sex discrimination, not to regulate the content of speech. OCR recognizes that the offensiveness of a particular expression as perceived by some students, standing alone, is not a legally sufficient basis to establish a sexually hostile environment under Title IX.¹¹⁷ In order to establish a violation of Title IX, the harassment must be sufficiently serious to deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the education program.¹¹⁸

Moreover, in regulating the conduct of its students and its faculty to prevent or redress discrimination prohibited by Title IX (e.g., in responding to harassment that is sufficiently serious as to create a hostile environment), a school must formulate, interpret, and apply its rules so as to protect academic freedom and free speech rights. For instance, while the First Amendment may prohibit a school from restricting the right of students to express opinions about one sex that may be considered derogatory, the school can take steps to denounce those opinions and ensure that competing views are heard. The age of the students involved and the location or forum may affect how the school can respond consistently with the First Amendment.¹¹⁹ As an example of the application of free speech rights to allegations of sexual harassment, consider the following:

Example 1: In a college level creative writing class, a professor's required reading list includes excerpts from literary classics that contain descriptions of explicit

sexual conduct, including scenes that depict women in submissive and demeaning roles. The professor also assigns students to write their own materials, which are read in class. Some of the student essays contain sexually derogatory themes about women. Several female students complain to the Dean of Students that the materials and related classroom discussion have created a sexually hostile environment for women in the class. What must the school do in response?

Answer: Academic discourse in this example is protected by the First Amendment even if it is offensive to individuals. Thus, Title IX would not require the school to discipline the professor or to censor the reading list or related class discussion.

Example 2: A group of male students repeatedly targets a female student for harassment during the bus ride home from school, including making explicit sexual comments about her body, passing around drawings that depict her engaging in sexual conduct, and, on several occasions, attempting to follow her home off the bus. The female student and her parents complain to the principal that the male students' conduct has created a hostile environment for girls on the bus and that they fear for their daughter's safety. What must a school do in response?

Answer: Threatening and intimidating actions targeted at a particular student or group of students, even though they contain elements of speech, are not protected by the First Amendment. The school must take prompt and effective actions, including disciplinary action if necessary, to stop the harassment and prevent future harassment.

Endnotes

¹ This guidance does not address sexual harassment of employees, although that conduct may be prohibited by Title IX. 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.; 34 CFR part 106, subpart E. If employees file Title IX sexual harassment complaints with OCR, the complaints will be processed pursuant to the Procedures for Complaints of Employment Discrimination Filed Against Recipients of Federal Financial Assistance. 28 CFR 42.604. Employees are also protected from discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For information about Title VII and sexual harassment, see the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s (EEOC’s) Guidelines on Sexual Harassment, 29 CFR 1604.11, for information about filing a Title VII charge with the EEOC, see 29 CFR 1601.7–1607.13, or see the EEOC’s website at www.eeoc.gov.

² 20 U.S.C. 1681; 34 CFR part 106.

³ See, e.g., Davis v. Monroe County Bd. of Educ., 526 U.S. 629, 649-50 (1999); Gebser v. Lago Vista Ind. Sch. Dist., 524 U.S. 274, 281 (1998); Franklin v. Gwinnett County Pub. Sch., 503 U.S. 60, 75 (1992); S. REP. NO. 100-64, 100th Cong., 1st Sess. 14 (1987); Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties (1997 guidance), 62 FR 12034 (1997).

⁴ As described in the section on “Applicability,” this guidance applies to all levels of education.

⁵ For practical information about steps that schools can take to prevent and remedy all types of harassment, including sexual harassment, see “Protecting Students from Harassment and Hate Crime, A Guide for Schools,” which we issued jointly with the National Association of Attorneys General. This Guide is available at our web site at: www.ed.gov/pubs/Harassment.

⁶ See, e.g., Davis, 526 U.S. at 653 (alleged conduct of a sexual nature that would support a sexual harassment claim included verbal harassment and “numerous acts of objectively offensive touching;” Franklin, 503 U.S. at 63 (conduct of a sexual nature found to support a sexual harassment claim under Title IX included kissing, sexual intercourse); Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57, 60-61 (1986) (demands for sexual favors, sexual advances, fondling, indecent exposure, sexual intercourse, rape, sufficient to raise hostile environment claim under Title VII); Ellison v. Brady, 924 F.2d 872, 873-74, 880 (9th Cir. 1991) (allegations sufficient to state sexual harassment claim under Title VII included repeated requests for dates, letters making explicit references to sex and describing the harasser’s feelings for plaintiff); Lipsett v. University of Puerto Rico, 864 F.2d 881, 904-5 (1st Cir. 1988) (sexually derogatory comments, posting of sexually explicit drawing of plaintiff, sexual advances may support sexual harassment claim); Kadiki v. Virginia Commonwealth University, 892 F.Supp. 746, 751 (E.D. Va. 1995)

(professor's spanking of university student may constitute sexual conduct under Title IX); Doe v. Petaluma, 830 F.Supp. 1560, 1564-65 (N.D. Cal. 1996) (sexually derogatory taunts and innuendo can be the basis of a harassment claim); Denver School Dist. #2, OCR Case No. 08-92-1007 (same to allegations of vulgar language and obscenities, pictures of nude women on office walls and desks, unwelcome touching, sexually offensive jokes, bribery to perform sexual acts, indecent exposure); Nashoba Regional High School, OCR Case No. 01-92-1377 (same as to year-long campaign of derogatory, sexually explicit graffiti and remarks directed at one student).

⁷ See also Shoreline School Dist., OCR Case No. 10-92-1002 (a teacher's patting a student on the arm, shoulder, and back, and restraining the student when he was out of control, not conduct of a sexual nature); Dartmouth Public Schools, OCR Case No. 01-90-1058 (same as to contact between high school coach and students); San Francisco State University, OCR Case No. 09-94-2038 (same as to faculty advisor placing her arm around a graduate student's shoulder in posing for a picture); Analy Union High School Dist., OCR Case No. 09-92-1249 (same as to drama instructor who put his arms around both male and female students who confided in him).

⁸ 20 U.S.C. 1687 (codification of the amendment to Title IX regarding scope of jurisdiction, enacted by the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987). See 65 FR 68049 (November 13, 2000) (Department's amendment of the Title IX regulations to incorporate the statutory definition of "program or activity").

⁹ If a school contracts with persons or organizations to provide benefits, services, or opportunities to students as part of the school's program, and those persons or employees of those organizations sexually harass students, OCR will consider the harassing individual in the same manner that it considers the school's employees, as described in this guidance. (See section on "Harassment by Teachers and Other Employees.") See Brown v. Hot, Sexy, and Safer Products, Inc., 68 F.3d 525, 529 (1st Cir. 1995) (Title IX sexual harassment claim brought for school's role in permitting contract consultant hired by it to create allegedly hostile environment).

In addition, if a student engages in sexual harassment as an employee of the school, OCR will consider the harassment under the standards described for employees. (See section on "Harassment by Teachers and Other Employees.") For example, OCR would consider it harassment by an employee if a student teaching assistant who is responsible for assigning grades in a course, i.e., for providing aid, benefits, or services to students under the recipient's program, required a student in his or her class to submit to sexual advances in order to obtain a certain grade in the class.

¹⁰ Cf. John Does 1 v. Covington County Sch. Bd., 884 F.Supp. 462, 464-65 (M.D. Ala. 1995) (male students alleging that a teacher sexually harassed and abused them stated cause of action under Title IX).

¹¹ Title IX and the regulations implementing it prohibit discrimination "on the basis of sex;" they do not restrict protection from sexual harassment to those circumstances in

which the harasser only harasses members of the opposite sex. See 34 CFR 106.31. In Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services, Inc. the Supreme Court held unanimously that sex discrimination consisting of same-sex sexual harassment can violate Title VII's prohibition against discrimination because of sex. 523 U.S. 75, 82 (1998). The Supreme Court's holding in Oncale is consistent with OCR policy, originally stated in its 1997 guidance, that Title IX prohibits sexual harassment regardless of whether the harasser and the person being harassed are members of the same sex. 62 FR 12039. See also Kinman v. Omaha Public School Dist., 94 F.3d 463, 468 (8th Cir. 1996), rev'd on other grounds, 171 F.3d 607 (1999) (female student's allegation of sexual harassment by female teacher sufficient to raise a claim under Title IX); Doe v. Petaluma, 830 F.Supp. 1560, 1564-65, 1575 (N.D. Cal. 1996) (female junior high student alleging sexual harassment by other students, including both boys and girls, sufficient to raise a claim under Title IX); John Does 1, 884 F.Supp. at 465 (same as to male students' allegations of sexual harassment and abuse by a male teacher.) It can also occur in certain situations if the harassment is directed at students of both sexes. Chiapuzo v. BLT Operating Corp., 826 F.Supp. 1334, 1337 (D.Wyo. 1993) (court found that if males and females were subject to harassment, but harassment was based on sex, it could violate Title VII); but see Holman v. Indiana, 211 F.3d 399, 405 (7th Cir. 2000) (if male and female both subjected to requests for sex, court found it could not violate Title VII).

In many circumstances, harassing conduct will be on the basis of sex because the student would not have been subjected to it at all had he or she been a member of the opposite sex; e.g., if a female student is repeatedly propositioned by a male student or employee (or, for that matter, if a male student is repeatedly propositioned by a male student or employee.) In other circumstances, harassing conduct will be on the basis of sex if the student would not have been affected by it in the same way or to the same extent had he or she been a member of the opposite sex; e.g., pornography and sexually explicit jokes in a mostly male shop class are likely to affect the few girls in the class more than it will most of the boys.

In yet other circumstances, the conduct will be on the basis of sex in that the student's sex was a factor in or affected the nature of the harasser's conduct or both. Thus, in Chiapuzo, a supervisor made demeaning remarks to both partners of a married couple working for him, e.g., as to sexual acts he wanted to engage in with the wife and how he would be a better lover than the husband. In both cases, according to the court, the remarks were based on sex in that they were made with an intent to demean each member of the couple because of his or her respective sex. 826 F.Supp. at 1337. See also Steiner v. Showboat Operating Co., 25 F.3d 1459, 1463-64 (9th Cir. 1994), cert. denied, 115 S.Ct. 733 (1995); but see Holman, 211 F.3d at 405 (finding that if male and female both subjected to requests for sex, Title VII could not be violated).

¹² Nashoba Regional High School, OCR Case No. 01-92-1397. In Conejo Valley School Dist., OCR Case No. 09-93-1305, female students allegedly taunted another female student about engaging in sexual activity; OCR found that the alleged comments were sexually explicit and, if true, would be sufficiently severe, persistent, and pervasive to create a hostile environment.

¹³ See Williamson v. A.G. Edwards & Sons, Inc., 876 F.2d 69, 70 (8th Cir. 1989, cert. denied) 493 U.S. 1089 (1990); DeSantis v. Pacific Tel. & Tel. Co., Inc., 608 F.2d 327, 329-30 (9th Cir. 1979)(same); Blum v. Gulf Oil Corp., 597 F.2d 936, 938 (5th Cir. 1979)(same).

¹⁴ It should be noted that some State and local laws may prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Also, under certain circumstances, courts may permit redress for harassment on the basis of sexual orientation under other Federal legal authority. See Nabozny v. Podlesny, 92 F.3d 446, 460 (7th Cir. 1996) (holding that a gay student could maintain claims alleging discrimination based on both gender and sexual orientation under the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution in a case in which a school district failed to protect the student to the same extent that other students were protected from harassment and harm by other students due to the student's gender and sexual orientation).

¹⁵ However, sufficiently serious sexual harassment is covered by Title IX even if the hostile environment also includes taunts based on sexual orientation.

¹⁶ See also, Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins, 490 U.S. 228, 251 (1989) (plurality opinion) (where an accounting firm denied partnership to a female candidate, the Supreme Court found Title VII prohibits an employer from evaluating employees by assuming or insisting that they match the stereotype associated with their sex).

¹⁷ See generally Gebser; Davis; See also Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57, 65-66 (1986); Harris v. Forklift Systems Inc., 510 U.S. 14, 22 (1993); see also Hicks v. Gates Rubber Co., 833 F.2d 1406, 1415 (10th Cir. 1987) (concluding that harassment based on sex may be discrimination whether or not it is sexual in nature); McKinney v. Dole, 765 F.2d 1129, 1138 (D.C. Cir. 1985) (physical, but nonsexual, assault could be sex-based harassment if shown to be unequal treatment that would not have taken place but for the employee's sex); Cline v. General Electric Capital Auto Lease, Inc., 757 F.Supp. 923, 932-33 (N.D. Ill. 1991).

¹⁸ See, e.g., sections on "Harassment by Teachers and Other Employees," "Harassment by Other Students or Third Parties," "Notice of Employee, Peer, or Third Party Harassment," "Factors Used to Evaluate a Hostile Environment," "Recipient's Response," and "Prompt and Equitable Grievance Procedures."

¹⁹ See Lipsett, 864 F.2d at 903-905 (general antagonism toward women, including stated goal of eliminating women from surgical program, statements that women shouldn't be in the program, and assignment of menial tasks, combined with overt sexual harassment); Harris, 510 U.S. at 23; Andrews v. City of Philadelphia, 895 F.2d 1469, 1485-86 (3rd Cir. 1990) (court directed trial court to consider sexual conduct as well as theft of female employees' files and work, destruction of property, and anonymous phone calls in determining if there had been sex discrimination); see also Hall v. Gus Construction Co., 842 F.2d 1010, 1014 (8th Cir. 1988) (affirming that harassment due to the employee's sex

may be actionable even if the harassment is not sexual in nature); Hicks, 833 F.2d at 1415; Eden Prairie Schools, Dist. #272, OCR Case No. 05-92-1174 (the boys made lewd comments about male anatomy and tormented the girls by pretending to stab them with rubber knives; while the stabbing was not sexual conduct, it was directed at them because of their sex, i.e., because they were girls).

²⁰ Davis, 526 U.S. at 650 (“Having previously determined that ‘sexual harassment’ is ‘discrimination’ in the school context under Title IX, we are constrained to conclude that student-on-student sexual harassment, if sufficiently severe, can likewise rise to the level of discrimination actionable under the statute.”); Franklin, 503 U.S. at 75 (“Unquestionably, Title IX placed on the [school] the duty not to discriminate on the basis of sex, and ‘when a supervisor sexually harasses a subordinate because of the subordinate’s sex, that supervisor “discriminate[s]” on the basis of sex.’ ... We believe the same rule should apply when a teacher sexually harasses and abuses a student.” (citation omitted)).

OCR’s longstanding interpretation of its regulations is that sexual harassment may constitute a violation. 34 CFR 106.31; See Sexual Harassment Guidance, 62 FR 12034 (1997). When Congress enacted the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 to amend Title IX to restore institution-wide coverage over federally assisted education programs and activities, the legislative history indicated not only that Congress was aware that OCR interpreted its Title IX regulations to prohibit sexual harassment, but also that one of the reasons for passing the Restoration Act was to enable OCR to investigate and resolve cases involving allegations of sexual harassment. S. REP. NO. 64, 100th Cong., 1st Sess. at 12 (1987). The examples of discrimination that Congress intended to be remedied by its statutory change included sexual harassment of students by professors, id. at 14, and these examples demonstrate congressional recognition that discrimination in violation of Title IX can be carried out by school employees who are providing aid, benefits, or services to students. Congress also intended that if discrimination occurred, recipients needed to implement effective remedies. S. REP. NO. 64 at 5.

²¹ 34 CFR 106.4.

²² These are the basic regulatory requirements. 34 CFR 106.31(a)(b). Depending upon the facts, sexual harassment may also be prohibited by more specific regulatory prohibitions. For example, if a college financial aid director told a student that she would not get the student financial assistance for which she qualified unless she slept with him, that also would be covered by the regulatory provision prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in financial assistance, 34 CFR 106.37(a).

²³ 34 CFR 106.31(b)(1).

²⁴ 34 CFR 106.31(b)(2).

²⁵ 34 CFR 106.31(b)(3).

²⁶ 34 CFR 106.31(b)(4).

²⁷ 34 CFR 106.31(b)(6).

²⁸ 34 CFR 106.31(b)(7).

²⁹ 34 CFR 106.3(a).

³⁰ 34 CFR 106.9.

³¹ 34 CFR 106.8(b).

³² 34 CFR 106.8(a).

³³ The 1997 guidance referred to quid pro quo harassment and hostile environment harassment. 62 FR 12038–40.

³⁴ See Alexander v. Yale University, 459 F.Supp. 1, 4 (D.Conn. 1977), aff'd, 631 F.2d 178 (2nd Cir. 1980)(stating that a claim “that academic advancement was conditioned upon submission to sexual demands constitutes [a claim of] sex discrimination in education...”); Crandell v. New York College, Osteopathic Medicine, 87 F.Supp.2d 304, 318 (S.D.N.Y. 2000) (finding that allegations that a supervisory physician demanded that a student physician spend time with him and have lunch with him or receive a poor evaluation, in light of the totality of his alleged sexual comments and other inappropriate behavior, constituted a claim of quid pro quo harassment); Kadiki, 892 F.Supp. at 752 (reexamination in a course conditioned on college student’s agreeing to be spanked should she not attain a certain grade may constitute quid pro quo harassment).

³⁵ 34 CFR 106.31(b).

³⁶ Davis, 526 U.S. at 651 (confirming, by citing approvingly both to Title VII cases (Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57,67 (1986) (finding that hostile environment claims are cognizable under Title VII), and Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services, Inc., 523 U.S. 75, 82 (1998)) and OCR’s 1997 guidance, 62 FR at 12041-42, that determinations under Title IX as to what conduct constitutes hostile environment sexual harassment may continue to rely on Title VII caselaw).

³⁷ 34 CFR 106.31(b). See Davis, 526 U.S. at 650 (concluding that allegations of student-on-student sexual harassment that is “so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it can be said to deprive the victims of access to the educational opportunities or benefits” supports a claim for money damages in an implied right of action).

³⁸ In Harris, the Supreme Court explained the requirement for considering the “subjective perspective” when determining the existence of a hostile environment. The Court stated— “... if the victim does not subjectively perceive the environment to be abusive, the

conduct has not actually altered the conditions of the victim's employment, and there is no Title VII violation." 510 U.S. at 21-22.

³⁹ See Davis, 526 U.S. at 650 (conduct must be "objectively offensive" to trigger liability for money damages); Elgamil v. Syracuse University, 2000 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12598 at 17 (N.D.N.Y. 2000) (citing Harris); Booher v. Board of Regents, 1998 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 11404 at 25 (E.D. Ky. 1998) (same). See Oncale, 523 U.S. at 81, in which the Court "emphasized ... that the objective severity of harassment should be judged from the perspective of a reasonable person in the [victim's] position, considering 'all the circumstances,'" and citing Harris, 510 U.S. at 20, in which the Court indicated that a "reasonable person" standard should be used to determine whether sexual conduct constituted harassment. This standard has been applied under Title VII to take into account the sex of the subject of the harassment, see, e.g., Ellison, 924 F.2d at 878-79 (applying a "reasonable woman" standard to sexual harassment), and has been adapted to sexual harassment in education under Title IX, Patricia H. v. Berkeley Unified School Dist., 830 F.Supp. 1288, 1296 (N.D. Cal. 1993) (adopting a "reasonable victim" standard and referring to OCR's use of it).

⁴⁰ See Davis, 526 U.S. at 651, citing both Oncale, 523 U.S. at 82, and OCR's 1997 guidance (62 FR 12041-12042).

⁴¹ See, e.g., Davis, 526 U.S. at 634 (as a result of the harassment, student's grades dropped and she wrote a suicide note); Doe v. Petaluma, 830 F. Supp. at 1566 (student so upset about harassment by other students that she was forced to transfer several times, including finally to a private school); Modesto City Schools, OCR Case No. 09-93-1391 (evidence showed that one girl's grades dropped while the harassment was occurring); Weaverville Elementary School, OCR Case No. 09-91-1116 (students left school due to the harassment). Compare with College of Alameda, OCR Case No. 09-90-2104 (student not in instructor's class and no evidence of any effect on student's educational benefits or service, so no hostile environment).

⁴² Doe v. Petaluma, 830 F.Supp. at 1566.

⁴³ See Waltman v. Int'l Paper Co., 875 F.2d 468, 477 (5th Cir. 1989) (holding that although not specifically directed at the plaintiff, sexually explicit graffiti on the walls was "relevant to her claim"); Monteiro v. Tempe Union High School, 158 F.3d 1022, 1033-34 (9th Cir. 1998) (Title VI racial harassment case, citing Waltman; see also Hall, 842 F. 2d at 1015 (evidence of sexual harassment directed at others is relevant to show hostile environment under Title VII).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Elgmil 2000 U.S. Dist. LEXIS at 19 ("in order to be actionable, the incidents of harassment must occur in concert or with a regularity that can reasonably be termed pervasive"); Andrews, 895 F.2d at 1484 ("Harassment is pervasive when 'incidents of harassment occur either in concert or with regularity'"); Moylan v. Maries County, 792 F.2d 746, 749 (8th Cir. 1986).

⁴⁵ 34 CFR 106.31(b). See Vance v. Spencer County Public School District, 231 F.3d 253 (6th Cir. 2000); Doe v. School Admin. Dist. No. 19, 66 F.Supp.2d 57, 62 (D. Me. 1999). See also statement of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC): “The Commission will presume that the unwelcome, intentional touching of [an employee’s] intimate body areas is sufficiently offensive to alter the conditions of her working environment and constitute a violation of Title VII. More so than in the case of verbal advances or remarks, a single unwelcome physical advance can seriously poison the victim’s working environment.” EEOC Policy Guidance on Current Issues of Sexual Harassment, 17. Barrett v. Omaha National Bank, 584 F. Supp. 22, 30 (D. Neb. 1983), aff’d, 726 F. 2d 424 (8th Cir. 1984) (finding that hostile environment was created under Title VII by isolated events, i.e., occurring while traveling to and during a two-day conference, including the co-worker’s talking to plaintiff about sexual activities and touching her in an offensive manner while they were inside a vehicle from which she could not escape).

⁴⁶ See also Ursuline College, OCR Case No. 05-91-2068 (a single incident of comments on a male student’s muscles arguably not sexual; however, assuming they were, not severe enough to create a hostile environment).

⁴⁷ Davis, 526 U.S. at 653 (“The relationship between the harasser and the victim necessarily affects the extent to which the misconduct can be said to breach Title IX’s guarantee of equal access to educational benefits and to have a systemic effect on a program or activity. Peer harassment, in particular, is less likely to satisfy these requirements than is teacher student harassment.”); Patricia H., 830 F. Supp. at 1297 (stating that the “grave disparity in age and power” between teacher and student contributed to the creation of a hostile environment); Summerfield Schools, OCR Case No. 15-92-1929 (“impact of the ... remarks was heightened by the fact that the coach is an adult in a position of authority”); cf. Doe v. Taylor I.S.D., 15 F.3d 443, 460 (5th Cir. 1994) (Sec. 1983 case; taking into consideration the influence that the teacher had over the student by virtue of his position of authority to find that a sexual relationship between a high school teacher and a student was unlawful).

⁴⁸ See, e.g., McKinney, 765 F.2d at 1138-49; Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards, 760 F. Supp. 1486, 1522 (M.D. Fla. 1991).

⁴⁹ Cf. Patricia H., 830 F. Supp. at 1297.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Barrett, 584 F. Supp. at 30 (finding harassment occurring in a car from which the victim could not escape particularly severe).

⁵¹ See Hall, 842 F. 2d at 1015 (stating that “evidence of sexual harassment directed at employees other than the plaintiff is relevant to show a hostile environment”) (citing Hicks, 833 F. 2d, 1415-16). Cf. Midwest City-Del City Public Schools, OCR Case No. 06-92-1012 (finding of racially hostile environment based in part on several racial incidents at school shortly before incidents in complaint, a number of which involved the same student involved in the complaint).

⁵² In addition, incidents of racial or national origin harassment directed at a particular individual may also be aggregated with incidents of sexual or gender harassment directed at that individual in determining the existence of a hostile environment. Hicks, 833 F.2d at 1416; Jefferies v. Harris County Community Action Ass’n, 615 F.2d 1025, 1032 (5th Cir. 1980).

⁵³ Does v. Covington Sch. Bd. of Educ., 930 F.Supp. 554, 569 (M.D. Ala. 1996); Henson v. City of Dundee, 682 F.2d 897, 903 (11th Cir. 1982).

⁵⁴ See Meritor Savings Bank, 477 U.S. at 68. “[T]he fact that sex-related conduct was ‘voluntary,’ in the sense that the complainant was not forced to participate against her will, is not a defense to a sexual harassment suit brought under Title VII.... The correct inquiry is whether [the subject of the harassment] by her conduct indicated that the alleged sexual advances were unwelcome, not whether her actual participation in sexual intercourse was voluntary.”

⁵⁵ Lipsett, 864 F.2d at 898 (while, in some instances, a person may have the responsibility for telling the harasser “directly” that the conduct is unwelcome, in other cases a “consistent failure to respond to suggestive comments or gestures may be sufficient....”); Danna v. New York Tel. Co., 752 F.Supp. 594, 612 (despite a female employee’s own foul language and participation in graffiti writing, her complaints to management indicated that the harassment was not welcome); see also Carr v. Allison Gas Turbine Div. GMC., 32 F.3d 1007, 1011 (7th Cir. 1994) (finding that cursing and dirty jokes by a female employee did not show that she welcomed the sexual harassment, given her frequent complaints about it: “Even if ... [the employee’s] testimony that she talked and acted as she did [only] in an effort to be one of the boys is ... discounted, her words and conduct cannot be compared to those of the men and used to justify their conduct.... The asymmetry of positions must be considered. She was one woman; they were many men. Her use of [vulgar] terms ... could not be deeply threatening....”).

⁵⁶ See Reed v. Shepard, 939 F.2d 484, 486-87, 491-92 (7th Cir. 1991) (no harassment found under Title VII in a case in which a female employee not only tolerated, but also instigated the suggestive joking activities about which she was now complaining); Weinsheimer v. Rockwell Int’l Corp., 754 F.Supp. 1559, 1563-64 (M.D. Fla. 1990) (same, in case in which general shop banter was full of vulgarity and sexual innuendo by men and women alike, and plaintiff contributed her share to this atmosphere.) However, even if a student participates in the sexual banter, OCR may in certain circumstances find that the conduct was nevertheless unwelcome if, for example, a teacher took an active role in the sexual banter and a student reasonably perceived that the teacher expected him or her to participate.

⁵⁷ The school bears the burden of rebutting the presumption.

⁵⁸ Of course, nothing in Title IX would prohibit a school from implementing policies prohibiting sexual conduct or sexual relationships between students and adult employees.

⁵⁹ See note 58.

⁶⁰ Gebser, 524 U.S. at 281 (“Franklin ... establishes that a school district can be held liable in damages [in an implied action under Title IX] in cases involving a teacher’s sexual harassment of a student....”; 34 CFR 106.31; See 1997 Sexual Harassment Guidance, 62 FR 12034.

⁶¹ See Davis, 526 U.S. at 653 (stating that harassment of a student by a teacher is more likely than harassment by a fellow student to constitute the type of effective denial of equal access to educational benefits that can breach the requirements of Title IX).

⁶² 34 CFR 106.31(b). Cf. Gebser, 524 U.S. at 283-84 (Court recognized in an implied right of action for money damages for teacher sexual harassment of a student that the question of whether a violation of Title IX occurred is a separate question from the scope of appropriate remedies for a violation).

⁶³ Davis, 526 U.S. at 646.

⁶⁴ See section on “Applicability of Title IX” for scope of coverage.

⁶⁵ See section on “Notice of Employee, Peer, or Third Party Harassment.”

⁶⁶ See section on “Notice of Employee, Peer, or Third Party Harassment.”

⁶⁷ 34 CFR 106.31(b).

⁶⁸ 34 CFR 106.31(b).

⁶⁹ See section on “Notice of Employee, Peer, or Third Party Harassment.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Davis, 526 U.S. at 646.

⁷¹ 34 CFR 106.31(b).

⁷² 34 CFR 106.31(b).

⁷³ Consistent with its obligation under Title IX to protect students, cf. Gebser, 524 U.S. at 287, OCR interprets its regulations to ensure that recipients take reasonable action to address, rather than neglect, reasonably obvious discrimination. Cf. Gebser, 524 U.S. at 287-88; Davis, 526 U.S. at 650 (actual notice standard for obtaining money damages in private lawsuit).

⁷⁴ Whether an employee is a responsible employee or whether it would be reasonable for a student to believe the employee is, even if the employee is not, will vary depending on

factors such as the age and education level of the student, the type of position held by the employee, and school practices and procedures, both formal and informal. The Supreme Court held that a school will only be liable for money damages in a private lawsuit where there is actual notice to a school official with the authority to address the alleged discrimination and take corrective action. Gebser, 524 U.S. at 290, and Davis, 526 U.S. at 642. The concept of a “responsible employee” under our guidance is broader. That is, even if a responsible employee does not have the authority to address the discrimination and take corrective action, he or she does have the obligation to report it to appropriate school officials.

⁷⁵ The Title IX regulations require that recipients designate at least one employee to coordinate its efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under the regulations, including complaint investigations. 34 CFR 106.8(a).

⁷⁶ 34 CFR 106.31. See Yates v. Avco Corp., 819 F.2d 630, 636 (6th Cir. 1987); Katz v. Dole, 709 F.2d 251, 256 (4th Cir. 1983).

⁷⁷ For example, a substantiated report indicating that a high school coach has engaged in inappropriate physical conduct of a sexual nature in several instances with different students may suggest a pattern of conduct that should trigger an inquiry as to whether other students have been sexually harassed by that coach. See also Doe v. School Administrative Dist. No. 19, 66 F.Supp.2d 57, 63-64 and n.6 (D.Me. 1999) (in a private lawsuit for money damages under Title IX in which a high school principal had notice that a teacher may be engaging in a sexual relationship with one underage student and did not investigate, and then the same teacher allegedly engaged in sexual intercourse with another student, who did not report the incident, the court indicated that the school’s knowledge of the first relationship may be sufficient to serve as actual notice of the second incident).

⁷⁸ Cf. Katz, 709 F.2d at 256 (finding that the employer “should have been aware of the problem both because of its pervasive character and because of [the employee’s] specific complaints ...”); Smolsky v. Consolidated Rail Corp., 780 F.Supp. 283, 293 (E.D. Pa. 1991), reconsideration denied, 785 F.Supp. 71 (E.D. Pa. 1992) “where the harassment is apparent to all others in the work place, supervisors and coworkers, this may be sufficient to put the employer on notice of the sexual harassment” under Title VII); Jensen v. Eveleth Taconite Co., 824 F.Supp. 847, 887 (D.Minn. 1993); “[s]exual harassment ... was so pervasive that an inference of knowledge arises The acts of sexual harassment detailed herein were too common and continuous to have escaped Eveleth Mines had its management been reasonably alert.”); Cummings v. Walsh Construction Co., 561 F.Supp. 872, 878 (S.D. Ga. 1983) (“... allegations not only of the [employee] registering her complaints with her foreman ... but also that sexual harassment was so widespread that defendant had constructive notice of it” under Title VII); but see Murray v. New York Univ. College of Dentistry, 57 F.3d 243, 250-51 (2nd Cir. 1995) (concluding that other students’ knowledge of the conduct was not enough to charge the school with notice, particularly because these students may not have been aware that the conduct was offensive or abusive).

⁷⁹ 34 CFR 106.9 and 106.8(b).

⁸⁰ 34 CFR 106.8(b) and 106.31(b).

⁸¹ 34 CFR 106.9.

⁸² 34 CFR 106.8(b).

⁸³ 34 CFR 106.31.

⁸⁴ 34 CFR 106.31 and 106.3. Gebser, 524 U.S. at 288 (“In the event of a violation, [under OCR’s administrative enforcement scheme] a funding recipient may be required to take ‘such remedial action as [is] deem[ed] necessary to overcome the effects of [the] discrimination.’ §106.3.”).

⁸⁵ 20 U.S.C. 1682. In the event that OCR determines that voluntary compliance cannot be secured, OCR may take steps that may result in termination of Federal funding through administrative enforcement, or, alternatively, OCR may refer the case to the Department of Justice for judicial enforcement.

⁸⁶ Schools have an obligation to ensure that the educational environment is free of discrimination and cannot fulfill this obligation without determining if sexual harassment complaints have merit.

⁸⁷ In some situations, for example, if a playground supervisor observes a young student repeatedly engaging in conduct toward other students that is clearly unacceptable under the school’s policies, it may be appropriate for the school to intervene without contacting the other students. It still may be necessary for the school to talk with the students (and parents of elementary and secondary students) afterwards, e.g., to determine the extent of the harassment and how it affected them.

⁸⁸ Gebser, 524 U.S. at 288; Bundy v. Jackson, 641 F.2d 934, 947 (D.C. Cir. 1981) (employers should take corrective and preventive measures under Title VII); accord, Jones v. Flagship Int’l, 793 F.2d 714, 719-720 (5th Cir. 1986) (employer should take prompt remedial action under Title VII).

⁸⁹ See Doe ex rel. Doe v. Dallas Indep. Sch. Dist., 220 F.3d 380 (5th Cir. 2000) (citing Waltman); Waltman, 875 F.2d at 479 (appropriateness of employer’s remedial action under Title VII will depend on the “severity and persistence of the harassment and the effectiveness of any initial remedial steps”); Dornhecker v. Malibu Grand Prix Corp., 828 F.2d 307, 309-10 (5th Cir. 1987); holding that a company’s quick decision to remove the harasser from the victim was adequate remedial action).

⁹⁰ See Intlekofer v. Turnage, 973 F.2d 773, 779-780 (9th Cir. 1992)(holding that the employer’s response was insufficient and that more severe disciplinary action was

necessary in situations in which counseling, separating the parties, and warnings of possible discipline were ineffective in ending the harassing behavior).

⁹¹ Offering assistance in changing living arrangements is one of the actions required of colleges and universities by the Campus Security Act in cases of rape and sexual assault. See 20 U.S.C. 1092(f).

⁹² See section on “Harassment by Other Students or Third Parties.”

⁹³ University of California at Santa Cruz, OCR Case No. 09-93-2141 (extensive individual and group counseling); Eden Prairie Schools, Dist. #272, OCR Case No. 05-92-1174 (counseling).

⁹⁴ Even if the harassment stops without the school’s involvement, the school may still need to take steps to prevent or deter any future harassment — to inform the school community that harassment will not be tolerated. Wills v. Brown University, 184 F.3d 20, 28 (1st Cir. 1999) (difficult problems are posed in balancing a student’s request for anonymity or limited disclosure against the need to prevent future harassment); Fuller v. City of Oakland, 47 F.3d 1522, 1528-29 (9th Cir. 1995) (Title VII case).

⁹⁵ 34 CFR 106.8(b) and 106.71, incorporating by reference 34 CFR 100.7(e). The Title IX regulations prohibit intimidation, threats, coercion, or discrimination against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title IX.

⁹⁶ Tacoma School Dist. No. 10, OCR Case No. 10-94-1079 (due to the large number of students harassed by an employee, the extended period of time over which the harassment occurred, and the failure of several of the students to report the harassment, the school committed as part of corrective action plan to providing training for students); Los Medanos College, OCR Case No. 09-84-2092 (as part of corrective action plan, school committed to providing sexual harassment seminar for campus employees); Sacramento City Unified School Dist., OCR Case No. 09-83-1063 (same as to workshops for management and administrative personnel and in-service training for non-management personnel).

⁹⁷ In addition, if information about the incident is contained in an “education record” of the student alleging the harassment, as defined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. 1232g, the school should consider whether FERPA would prohibit the school from disclosing information without the student’s consent. Id. In evaluating whether FERPA would limit disclosure, the Department does not interpret FERPA to override any federally protected due process rights of a school employee accused of harassment.

⁹⁸ 34 CFR 106.8(b). This requirement has been part of the Title IX regulations since their inception in 1975. Thus, schools have been required to have these procedures in place since that time. At the elementary and secondary level, this responsibility generally lies

with the school district. At the postsecondary level, there may be a procedure for a particular campus or college or for an entire university system.

⁹⁹ Fenton Community High School Dist. #100, OCR Case 05-92-1104.

¹⁰⁰ While a school is required to have a grievance procedure under which complaints of sex discrimination (including sexual harassment) can be filed, the same procedure may also be used to address other forms of discrimination.

¹⁰¹ See generally Meritor, 477 U.S. at 72-73 (holding that “mere existence of a grievance procedure” for discrimination does not shield an employer from a sexual harassment claim).

¹⁰² The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) does not prohibit a student from learning the outcome of her complaint, i.e., whether the complaint was found to be credible and whether harassment was found to have occurred. It is the Department’s current position under FERPA that a school cannot release information to a complainant regarding disciplinary action imposed on a student found guilty of harassment if that information is contained in a student’s education record unless — (1) the information directly relates to the complainant (e.g., an order requiring the student harasser not to have contact with the complainant); or (2) the harassment involves a crime of violence or a sex offense in a postsecondary institution. See note 97. If the alleged harasser is a teacher, administrator, or other non-student employee, FERPA would not limit the school’s ability to inform the complainant of any disciplinary action taken.

¹⁰³ The section in the guidance on “Recipient’s Response” provides examples of reasonable and appropriate corrective action.

¹⁰⁴ 34 CFR 106.8(a).

¹⁰⁵ Id.

¹⁰⁶ See Meritor, 477 U.S. at 72-73.

¹⁰⁷ University of California, Santa Cruz, OCR Case No. 09-93-2131. This is true for formal as well as informal complaints. See University of Maine at Machias, OCR Case No. 01-94-6001 (school’s new procedures not found in violation of Title IX in part because they require written records for informal as well as formal resolutions). These records need not be kept in a student’s or employee’s individual file, but instead may be kept in a central confidential location.

¹⁰⁸ For example, in Cape Cod Community College, OCR Case No. 01-93-2047, the College was found to have violated Title IX in part because the person identified by the school as the Title IX coordinator was unfamiliar with Title IX, had no training, and did not even realize he was the coordinator.

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, in University of Maine at Machias, OCR Case No. 01-94-6001, OCR found the school's procedures to be inadequate because only formal complaints were investigated. While a school isn't required to have an established procedure for resolving informal complaints, they nevertheless must be addressed in some way. However, if there are indications that the same individual may be harassing others, then it may not be appropriate to resolve an informal complaint without taking steps to address the entire situation.

¹¹⁰ Academy School Dist. No 20, OCR Case No. 08-93-1023 (school's response determined to be insufficient in a case in which it stopped its investigation after complaint filed with police); Mills Public School Dist., OCR Case No. 01-93-1123, (not sufficient for school to wait until end of police investigation).

¹¹¹ Cf. EEOC v. Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities, 957 F.2d 424 (7th Cir. 1992), cert. denied, 506 U.S. 906 (1992).

¹¹² The First Amendment applies to entities and individuals that are State actors. The receipt of Federal funds by private schools does not directly subject those schools to the U.S. Constitution. See Rendell-Baker v. Kohn, 457 U.S. 830, 840 (1982). However, all actions taken by OCR must comport with First Amendment principles, even in cases involving private schools that are not directly subject to the First Amendment.

¹¹³ See, e.g., George Mason University, OCR Case No. 03-94-2086 (law professor's use of a racially derogatory word, as part of an instructional hypothetical regarding verbal torts, did not constitute racial harassment); Portland School Dist. 1J, OCR Case No. 10-94-1117 (reading teacher's choice to substitute a less offensive term for a racial slur when reading an historical novel aloud in class constituted an academic decision on presentation of curriculum, not racial harassment).

¹¹⁴ See Iota Xi Chapter of Sigma Chi Fraternity v. George Mason University, 993 F.2d 386 (4th Cir. 1993) (fraternity skit in which white male student dressed as an offensive caricature of a black female constituted student expression).

¹¹⁵ See Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, OCR Case No. 04-92-2054 (no discrimination in case in which campus newspaper, which welcomed individual opinions of all sorts, printed article expressing one student's viewpoint on white students on campus.)

¹¹⁶ Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Community Sch. Dist., 393 U.S. 503, 506 (1969) (neither students nor teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of expression at the schoolhouse gates); Cf. Cohen v. San Bernardino Valley College, 92 F.3d 968, 972 (9th Cir. 1996) (holding that a college professor could not be punished for his longstanding teaching methods, which included discussion of controversial subjects such as obscenity and consensual sex with children, under an unconstitutionally vague sexual harassment policy); George Mason University, OCR Case No. 03-94-2086 (law professor's use of a

racially derogatory word, as part of an instructional hypothetical regarding verbal torts, did not constitute racial harassment.)

¹¹⁷ See, e.g., University of Illinois, OCR Case No. 05-94-2104 (fact that university's use of Native American symbols was offensive to some Native American students and employees was not dispositive, in and of itself, in assessing a racially hostile environment claim under Title VI.)

¹¹⁸ See Meritor, 477 U.S. at 67 (the "mere utterance of an ethnic or racial epithet which engenders offensive feelings in an employee" would not affect the conditions of employment to a sufficient degree to violate Title VII), quoting Henson, 682 F.2d at 904; cf. R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul, 505 U.S. 377, 389 (1992) (citing with approval EEOC's sexual harassment guidelines); Monteiro, 158 F.3d at 1032-34 (9th Cir. 1998) (citing with approval OCR's racial harassment investigative guidance).

¹¹⁹ Compare Bethel School Dist. No. 403 v. Fraser, 478 U.S. 675, 685 (1986) (Court upheld discipline of high school student for making lewd speech to student assembly, noting that "[t]he undoubted freedom to advocate unpopular and controversial issues in schools must be balanced against the society's countervailing interest in teaching students the boundaries of socially appropriate behavior."), with Iota Xi, 993 F.2d 386 (holding that, notwithstanding a university's mission to create a culturally diverse learning environment and its substantial interest in maintaining a campus free of discrimination, it could not punish students who engaged in an offensive skit with racist and sexist overtones).