

The HCPSS Vision 2018 is one very simple but powerful sentence: Every student is inspired to learn and empowered to excel. It's only ten words, but found within is the overarching sentiment that students know that those who comprise the learning community (which includes teachers, counselors, administrators, and, especially, parents/guardians) believe in them and that we are all here to ensure that they can reach their goals; we want to inspire and empower excellence. However, we also recognize that sometimes there are hurdles to students' finding academic success. Some of these hurdles are easier to overcome (I need to study more, I need to ask my teacher questions, I need to better organize my time, etc.) while some are more challenging (I need basic necessities, I am struggling with my self-identity, I am confused about my place in the world). It is our job as educators (and, if you are reading this, count yourself within that group) to provide assistance for students when these hurdles arise.

Unfortunately, one of the larger obstacles towards academic success is situations regarding peer to peer conflict. If students do not feel safe and secure, both physically as well as emotionally, true and meaningful learning is an uphill battle. It is easy for us to see students in conflict and immediately bandy about the term "bullying," but it is important to note the difference between true bullying/harassment and normal peer conflict. The HCPSS website notes some key distinctions between the two, which I would like to include here:

| Normal Peer Conflict | Bullying/Harassment |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Peers have equal power or are friends with each other. | Imbalance of power between peers; not friends. |
| Conflict happens occasionally or rarely. | Repeated negative actions that happens often. |
| May be accidental. | Purposefully done. |
| May not be serious; no threat of harm. | Serious with threat of emotional or physical harm. |
| Equal emotional reaction from both peers. | Strong emotional reaction from victim and little or no emotional reaction from bully. |
| Not seeking power or attention and not trying to gain something. | Seeking power, control, or material things. |
| General remorse – will want to take responsibility. | No remorse – bully blames victim; no guilt from bully. |
| Effort on both sides to solve the problem. | No effort to solve the problem. |

A quick glance at the table helps clarify what is peer conflict, which all students (and people) engage in from time to time, and what is bullying or harassment. To determine bullying, it's important to note that it can "be verbal, physical or written conduct (which includes electronic communication) which creates a hostile educational environment by substantially interfering with a student's opportunities, performance, or physical or psychological well-being." (Adapted from HCPSS website).

At Howard High School, our top priority is student safety and security, along with all students accessing a top quality education. If you have a child who expresses to you that he/she is experiencing bullying or harassment, we at the school want to assist and help end the situation. For parents and students, there are a number of ways bullying and harassment may be reported, both in the school as well as at home. They include:

1) Having a conversation with a teacher, counselor, or administrator, either in person or over the phone.

2) Completing a BHI (Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation) Reporting Form and submitting it to an administrator either in person, by mail, or via email. This report can be found in our school's front office and student services (guidance) office, as well as on the HCPSS website.

3) Reporting the concern through the Sprigeo system introduced last year. This system allows for concerns to be reported online and sent directly to Central Office, which then ensures it gets in the hands of the appropriate schools and administrators. These reports may be made anonymously. One may access the Sprigeo system here: <http://report.sprigeo.com>.

Anyone of the aforementioned means of communication work effectively, but the Sprigeo report in particular is a great way for students who fear retaliation to report concerns anonymously in the privacy of their homes. It is important for victims, as well as bystanders, to help us all end bullying and harassment.

All reports of bullying and harassment are taken seriously by administration, and a thorough investigation will ensue once something has been brought to the school's attention. One philosophy that a colleague expressed to me is that "bullying occurs in elementary and middle school, but at high school it is harassment," and harassment comes with criminal charges as well as school consequences. The passage of Grace's Law in 2013 provides law enforcement with the means to pursue criminal charges against anyone who commits cyberbullying against someone under the age of 18. These charges may include up to a \$500 fine and/or one year imprisonment.

Fortunately, Howard High School is a rare place in which we have three key ingredients to a successful learning community: truly wonderful community involvement, school spirit, and dedicated and talented staff. Bullying and harassment are serious, but in actuality, rare occurrences here, and it is in no small part due to our student population which takes tremendous pride in their school and each other. Come to a football game or school play less than half an hour early and try to find a seat to see what I mean. What other school has students come out to mock trial competitions, It's Academic tapings, away volleyball games, Model UN Conferences, and any other of the hundreds of goings-on throughout the school year? As Mr. Novak says every morning, at Howard we "fill our day with PRIDE," and our students' actions reflect that all year long. When we stand up to bullying as a community, and use the resources and knowledge we have at our disposal, we are all #HowardStrong.