

Re: Workplace Civility
Date: June 14, 2022
From: Dr. Sarah J. Pritchett, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources

INTRODUCTION

The Seattle School District is committed to a culturally responsive, safe, civil environment of mutual respect. Employees are expected to exhibit behaviors at work that contribute to a workplace culture that furthers our commitments to support students who are furthest away from educational justice and ensure access and provide excellence in education for every student. In working towards this end, all employees must make every effort to create and maintain a warm, welcoming, equitable, and inclusive environment in every aspect of the educational process (including but not limited to the classroom, school sponsored activities, in their interactions with other employees, our students, vendors, school communities at large, and throughout central office). Conversely, uncivil conduct, by employees like other forms of disruptive behavior, impacts staff and interferes with a student's ability to learn and the District's ability to support and educate its students. All employees are expected to interact, communicate and problem-solve with civility.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this guideline is:

- To reflect Seattle Public Schools' commitment to providing a welcoming and inclusive, safe environment for all students and employees in accordance with district-wide vision, values, and anti-racism initiatives;
- To resolve matters promptly, respectfully, positively and at the lowest level possible to ensure that adult issues do not interfere with student learning; and
- To provide our students with appropriate models for civil and respectful communication and problem-solving.

DEFINITIONS

Civility is defined as acting with due regard, courtesy or politeness towards others and always demonstrating respect in a formal and perfunctory manner. Civil conduct includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Treating others with dignity, courtesy, respect, politeness and consideration;
- Speaking in a manner appropriate for the circumstances;
- Being respectful of others' right to express their views, even if one individual disagrees; and
- Managing conflict with others in a respectful way.

"Uncivil conduct" encompasses a broad range of behaviors including, but not limited to, the following:

- Using vulgar, obscene, or profane gestures or words;
- Using insulting or disrespectful nonverbal behaviors toward or in connection with another;
- Unprofessionalism, for the purposes of this guideline, means behavior(s) uncharacteristic from a satisfactory employee of their profession. This encompasses behavioral competencies of that profession including its standards for effective communication, honesty/integrity, cooperation and more.
- Taunting, jeering, inciting others to taunt or jeer at an individual or group;
- Repeatedly interrupting another individual who is speaking at an appropriate time and place;
- Imposing personal demands at times or in settings where they conflict with assigned duties and cannot reasonably be met;
- Using personal epithets or slurs;
- Intimidating behavior that puts another in fear for their personal safety, including invading the personal space of an individual after being directed to move away, physically blocking an individual's exit from a room or location, remaining in a classroom or school area after a teacher or administrator in authority has directed one to leave, or other similar disruptive conduct;

- Violating the privacy of another individual's belongings (except for lawful searches by school officials conducted in connection with the administration of school rules and applicable laws)
- Discussing unwelcome intimate details of one's personal life;
- Humor that is sexual in nature or offensive to a reasonable person;
- Verbal or physical acts that may threaten, degrade, or humiliate;
- Humiliating, degrading, demeaning, belittling, insulting, or intimidating another person; and

"Uncivil conduct" does not include:

- The expression of controversial or differing viewpoints that may be offensive to some persons, so long as (1) the ideas are presented in a respectful manner and at a time and place that are appropriate, and (2) such expression does not materially disrupt, and may not be reasonably anticipated to disrupt, the educational process or the workplace;
- The failure of others to demonstrate friendship and friendliness amounting to more than the cordial and respectful relations and interactions required between colleagues;
- Regular supervisory-subordinate interactions, including but not limited to, criticism or feedback, corrective action, discipline, unsatisfactory evaluations or negative ratings, plans for improvement, or probation; and
- Passionate, loud expression with no intent to harm others or when the circumstances allow for such expression.

ADDRESSING UNCIVIL CONDUCT

Labor and Employee Relations shall be a resource to any employee whose working relationship to the individual perceived to have been uncivil creates an unusual obstacle to problem-solving. Supervisors are also encouraged to work in consultation with Labor and Employee Relations and keep them apprised of instances of uncivil conduct and the progress to resolve such conduct.

If employees perceive they, or another employee or Seattle Public Schools community member, have been treated in an uncivil manner by another employee of the Seattle School District, they should follow the steps outlined below:

Step 1:

If possible, consider cautioning an individual that their actions could be construed as uncivil conduct, in violation of District policy. If the conduct does not cease or uncivil conduct occurs, consider a reasonable and appropriate time, place and manner to speak directly and respectfully with the individual to address the incidence. If necessary, politely end a non-constructive conversation and approach the matter at another time. The purpose of this conversation should focus on the expectation of civility and requirements for achieving civil exchanges in the future. Your supervisor, Labor and Employee Relations and/or EAP can provide tools, coaching and resources to assist you in confronting uncivil conduct individually.

Step 2:

If direct, personal contact with the individual is not advised or if Step 1 does not produce a satisfactory result, the employee should ask a supervisor to facilitate a conversation with the individual perceived to have been uncivil. This facilitated conversation should focus on the expectation of civility and requirements for achieving civil exchanges in the future.

Supervisors have an obligation to address reports of uncivil behavior in a timely manner. Supervisors should document the outcome of any facilitated conversation.

Step 3:

At any time after Step 2 has been attempted, if it is determined that civil communications and appropriate problem-solving cannot be restored between the individuals affected, the employee's supervisor should help the employee identify and/or use appropriate problem solving procedures to establish requirements for further communications (i.e., the presence of a specified third person, restrictions on physical access to the employee's work space) in order to address the employee's immediate concerns. Supervisors should document any established requirements for further communications. *The* supervisor may also suggest such additional resources as mentoring, specific training, and/or written materials that address the employee's needs.

Step 4:

At any time after Step 3 has been implemented, if uncivil conduct toward an employee continues, Labor and Employee Relations should be consulted for further guidance and support.

Employees who engage in uncivil behavior may be subject to corrective action, discipline, and/or performance-based action. Severe or persistent acts of uncivil conduct may, violate school rules, or District Policies and Procedures.

This guideline is not intended to manage threatening or intimidating behavior which is serious enough to cause one to fear for their own safety.

Retaliation toward any person making proper use of District policies and procedures, including reporting allegations of uncivil conduct may result in corrective action or discipline.

Nothing in this section requires that the conduct be based on a protected characteristic under the District's Nondiscrimination & Affirmative Action Policy.

Messages, images, comments, or acts motivated by race; creed; color; religion; ancestry; national origin; age; economic status; gender; sexual orientation including gender expression or identity; pregnancy status; marital status; physical appearance; the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability; honorably discharged veteran or military status; the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability; or other distinguishing characteristics are investigated under the District's Non-discrimination policy (Board Policy No. 5010).

This guideline applies to all certificated and classified employees under RCW 28A.400.