



Wyoming Department of Education

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MEMORANDUM NO. 2008-003

TO: School District Superintendents

FROM: Jim McBride, Ed.D. 

DATE: January 4, 2008

SUBJECT: Reports of Racially-Motivated Harassment and Violence in Public Schools

IMPORTANT REMINDER

The U.S. Department of Justice has become concerned about the incidents of swastikas, racial slurs, spray painting, and noose-hanging occurring on school property around the country. In addition, it has received various reports of disparate discipline.

These incidents may constitute violations of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000c-6. This law empowers the federal government to take action, if necessary, to prohibit discrimination by recipients of federal assistance. It is in our mutual interest to avoid federal involvement in local educational matters wherever reasonably possible.

The Department of Education (WDE) has been asked to remind districts that:

1. Superintendents have the responsibility to “promptly identify, investigate, and respond, in an appropriate manner, to all such incidents” that occur on their campuses.
2. When it is determined that actual discrimination has occurred, prompt and effective remedial action is required.
3. Fairly applied discipline is important in all cases.
4. If an incident occurs that is potentially criminal in nature, “school officials should report it to the local police department or the local office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.”

It is therefore important to ensure that district policy manuals reflect these concerns, in addition to complete and updated procedures that allow districts to adequately handle domestic terrorism, growing gang threats, the problem of repeat offenders, and school safety issues relevant to teachers, parents and the local community. In the event of an incident, it will be necessary to have procedures in place ahead of time.

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I urge you to take advantage of a quality peer-to-peer or adult-to-peer mentor program to build greater connectivity, empathy, and relationships with our students. Small investments of time and money up front will yield large dividends down the road including higher graduation rates, safer schools, and improvement on how these students view authority.

A successful mentor program does demand commitment, but such one-on-one involvement serves the student through higher academic achievement, lower discipline problems in school, and a resiliency that serves for the rest of his or her life.

I believe we are truly greater than the problems that confront us. I express my unreserved confidence in you and thank you for your diligent efforts. They are greatly appreciated.

Please call Bruce Hayes at 307-777-6198 if you have any questions. You can also access <http://wySchoolSafety.preved.org> for information on mentor programs.

JM:BH