

## **High-tech bullying a no-no in schools, Temple adds to student handbook**

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Temple school district has added an online harassment code to its district Student Code of Conduct, aimed at keeping students from putting harmful comments on social networking sites and sending insulting messages.

A student can be punished for using someone's name, without their consent, with the intent to "harm, defraud, intimidate, or threaten," according to the language of the section.

TISD has had anti-bullying language in its code of conduct for several years. Students guilty of bullying can be punished by a number of different methods, including expulsion, depending upon the severity of the incidents.

Online harassment "has not been a problem that I am aware of," said TISD superintendent Dr. Robin Battershell. "This is part of the anti-bullying policies, but this is a new addition - it is a preventative measure."

Dr. John Hancock, TISD director of student services, said the district has worked on one issue involving a student inappropriately using Internet in the past, but did not go into detail about the circumstances.

"This is really about addressing the inappropriate use of technology," Hancock said. "It will give us the opportunity to have a number of measures in place."

The district's legal council helped develop the language of the code, he said.

In an interview last year, Hancock said anti-bullying policies became popular for districts across the country after the Columbine High School shootings, in Littleton, Colo., in 1999.

"That's when things changed," he said. "That's when people took notice because the kids that committed those murders thought that they were victims of bullying."

The new code states that a student can also be punished if they send "electronic mail, instant messages, text messages, or similar communications that reference a name, domain address, phone number, or item without obtaining a person's consent, with the

intent to cause a recipient to reasonably believe that the other person authorized the communication, or with the intent to harm or defraud someone.”

In an interview last month, Dr. Patricia Sulak, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Scott & White and professor at Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine, who is nationally known for her research on women’s health issues and sex education programs for adolescents, said technology changes have made it easier for students to get into trouble.

“We are almost too connected today,” Sulak said. “It’s really incredible. It seems like there’s no privacy, and everyone’s sending things back and forth.”

#### Other changes

TISD also updated the code of conduct to include corporal punishment information. In May, the district’s school board approved corporal punishment, which could include spanking or paddling.

According to the policy, students should be told why the corporal punishment would be administered, and it may only be administered with the consent of a principal or designee.

The principal must also approve the instrument used for the punishment, and the action itself must be conducted in the presence of a professional TISD employee, and out of view of other students.

Hancock said male teachers would not be allowed to carry out punishment on female students.

The district will allow parents to request that their children not be administered the punishment, although they will face other discipline measures consistent with the offense.

#### Electronic handbooks

The district has also decided to make copies of the code of conduct available on the district’s Web site at the beginning of the school year. Students will no longer be given hard copies of the handbook, unless a request is made.

“There are a number of forms we send home at the beginning of every year for parents to sign,” Hancock said. “That will not change. The students will still be given forms, and we’re still expecting them to be signed, or a parent to request a hard copy of the handbook.”

Hancock said the decision to move to the electronic copies was made so students wouldn’t have to take home “bulky handbooks.”

The district Web site is [www.tisd.org](http://www.tisd.org).