



## Barrow County School System

Boldly Committed to Student Success

September 23, 2019

Parents, Guardians, Students, and Staff Members of the Barrow County School System,

I have become increasingly aware that there have been some growing concerns among many in our schools and community with what is perceived to be a rise in several areas of negative student behaviors in our system. This has caused members of the leadership of the school system, our school administrators, and our Board of Education members to recently engage in some pointed discussion regarding these behaviors and the repercussions for students that make the poor choices to engage in them.

The mission of the Barrow County School System is “Ensuring an exceptional education that leads each student to become a high achieving and responsible citizen.”

The number one priority of the Barrow County School System is to provide a safe and orderly environment that is necessary for teaching and learning to take place.

We are highly committed to the following statements:

- All students have the fundamental right to be able to learn in an atmosphere that is safe and conducive to learning.
- All teachers have the fundamental right to teach in an atmosphere that is safe and conducive to teaching and learning.
- All staff members have the fundamental right to work in an atmosphere that is safe and conducive to productive and meaningful work.

With the above in mind, I am writing to inform you of the following immediate increased emphasis we will be placing in certain areas of our Student Code of Conduct and related disciplinary procedure implementation. While these options are already present in our current code of conduct as part of the lists of potential corrective items, we are narrowing the available disciplinary options at this point in order to provide a clear and direct message that these behaviors will not be tolerated or treated with minimal interventions.

## **School Buses**

### Fights and violence

Fighting and violence will not be tolerated in the Barrow County School System.

Fighting or otherwise committing a violent act on a Barrow County school bus will result in the following:

High School and middle school students will be suspended with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program for at least a semester and appropriate legal charges may be filed. A second fighting incident will result in a year's suspension with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program or expulsion from the school system as well as potential additional legal charges.

Elementary school students will be suspended from the bus for at least a semester.

### Other disruptions

All levels: Other disruptive incidents will result in 1 warning or 2 days off the bus depending on the severity of the incident. Any subsequent disruptions will result in bus suspension for at least a semester.

## **School Campuses**

### Fights and violence

Fighting and violence will not be tolerated in the Barrow County School System.

High school and middle school students involved in a fight or otherwise committing a violent act on campus or at a school event will be suspended with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program for at least a semester and appropriate legal charges may be filed. A second fighting incident will result in a year's suspension with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program or expulsion from the school system as well as potential additional legal charges.

Elementary students involved in a fight or otherwise committing a violent act will be suspended for a minimum of 3 days for the first offense and a second offense will result in further days of suspension.

### Cell phones and smart watches

All school levels (for schools that currently allow cell phone use on campus): No student has the right to bring any cell phone to school, and when students are allowed to do so they do so at

the discretion of their school administration. The third time a student is disciplined due to cell phone misuse of any kind, that student will not be allowed to be in possession of a “smart” cell phone (including smart watches) at school for the remainder of the school year.

Invading another person’s privacy by use of a cell phone, filming a student having a medical emergency or other students engaged in a fight or act of violence with a cell phone is never an approved use of cell phones at school and distributing any such video of a fight or act of violence will result in suspension with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program for at least a semester as well as the loss of “smart” cell phone (including smart watches) privileges at school for the rest of the student’s time in the Barrow County School System. Appropriate legal charges may also may be filed on students who post such videos to social media or otherwise distribute them.

Please note that we do recognize that many parents wish to have cell phone access to their children during after school hours or extracurricular activities. In cases in which a student has lost cell phone privileges, a standard voice only cellular phone (no internet, no camera, no texting, etc.) may be approved by the building administration on a case-by-case basis.

### **Bullying Anywhere Involving BCSS Students**

In the Barrow County School System our working definition of bullying is:

1. Any willful attempt or threat to inflict injury on another person, when accompanied by an apparent present ability to do so;
2. Any intentional display of force such as would give the victim reason to fear or expect immediate bodily harm; or
3. Any intentional written, verbal, or physical act, which a reasonable person would perceive as being intended to threaten, harass, or intimidate, that:
  - a. Causes another person substantial physical harm within the meaning of Code Section 16-5- 23.1 or visible bodily harm as such term is defined in Code Section 16-5-23.1;
  - b. Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education;
  - c. Is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening educational environment; or
  - d. Has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school.

**Please note:** It is incumbent upon parents and guardians as well as students to realize the differences between unkind actions and bullying. Not every incident of unkind or mean spirited actions rises to the level of bullying. In Georgia, the actions involved must also result in one of the four impacts specified above (a-d) in order to meet our State’s definition of bullying. This is a very important distinction that needs to be clearly understood by all parties. While we do not condone or accept bullying behaviors in the least, it is vitally important we correctly identify them.

Keeping that in mind, bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

According to Stopbullying.gov, in order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and will almost always include:

- **An Imbalance of Power:** Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- **Repetition:** Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying may include actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Resource: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/index.html>

Any administratively confirmed case of bullying based on the information presented above and which includes the requisite impact (a-d) will result in the following:

High school and middle school students will be suspended with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program for at least a semester. A second incident will result in a year's suspension with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program.

Elementary school students will be suspended for a minimum of 3 days for the first offense and a second incident will result in further days of suspension. The above consequences are in addition to any bullying prevention measures already in place at the student's school.

## **Vapes**

Vaping or the possession of any sort of vaping apparatus is not allowed on any BCSS property or vehicle. Consequences related to student possession of any sort of empty vaping apparatus or accessory are:

- 1st Offense, 1 day out of school suspension
- 2nd Offense, 3 days out of school suspension
- 3rd Offense, suspension with the option to attend the Alternative Education Program for at least a semester.

Other increased consequences may also be applied depending on what is actually being smoked or stored in the vape or pen (i.e. tobacco, marijuana, etc.) and/or whether the student used the vaping apparatus at school or any school activity or is under the influence of any unauthorized substance at school.

While we certainly do not want any of our students to be removed from the provided learning environments of any of our schools, we must realize that any actions taken by individuals that impede on the rights of others to participate in the best learning environment possible must be dealt with swiftly and decisively. This will be the norm in our schools and we will proactively and vigorously take measures to ensure the consistency of this ideal. Our school level administrators will support this and will increase their efforts to ensure these steps are taken.

Special education students will receive their required Individualized Education Plan due process rights for any potential incident covered in this letter, and all students being remanded to the Alternative Education Program will have an opportunity for due process through an independent hearing should their parents choose to exercise it.

In closing, I want to thank the vast majority of parents, students, and staff who choose to work together each and every day to make our schools positive learning environments where truly BOLD things can and do happen!

Dr. Chris McMichael  
Superintendent  
Barrow County School System