# School Board formulating  policy on 'cyber bullying'

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While technology has opened many educational doors, the Northern Ozaukee School District wants to make sure students and employees are protected from its abuses.

The School Board gave a first reading to a policy last week on how to deal with "cyber bullying," the practice of using access to the electronic networking to intimidate or embarrass others.

If adopted, the new wording would be added to a seven-page policy enacted in 2008 governing the use of computers, e-mail and the Internet. The restrictions would apply to students and staff.

"In light of what is coming up in our society, we felt that adding this to our policy would be a smart move," said board member Tom Hoffmann, chairman of the Policy Committee.

Coincidentally, the topic of "cyber bullying" was discussed in detail last month during a presentation for parents by Wisconsin Department of Justice Special Agent Eric Szatkowski on abuses of the Internet.

The proposed policy amendment identifies what is meant by "cyber bullying," and outlines how school officials will deal with such infractions.

"Any form of harassment using electronic devices, commonly known as 'cyber bullying,' by students, employees or third-party users of district property is strictly prohibited and will result in discipline," the policy states.

"Cyber bullying" is further described as the use of an electronic message, image or blog "that defames, intimidates, harasses or is otherwise intended to harm, insult, threaten or humiliate another person."

The policy says students should report violations to a teacher or principal.

"The district may discipline students, up to and including expulsion, and may discipline employees up to and including dismissal, for any violation," according to the policy.

If serious enough, incidents may also be reported to law-enforcement authorities for prosecution.

The existing policy already prevents students and staff from using district computers to access Web sites that contain such things as erotic images, racial slurs, derogatory gender-related comments and information designed to cause harm to others.

The first reading of the policy change was made without comment from the board. Final approval is expected at the board's December meeting.