

## **Responding to Harassment and Doxxing of Educators**

Over the past few years, school districts across the country have experienced an increase in violence and harassment directed toward educators by students, parents, community members, and even anonymous strangers. The American Psychological Association recently published a [study](#) finding that between July 2020 and June 2021, a third of teachers reported experiencing verbal harassment or threatened violence from students, and over 40% of school administrators reported such conduct from parents. This harassment often takes the form of verbal threats, online harassment, intimidation, and sexual harassment, and it can escalate to physical violence. Throughout the pandemic, educators have reported an increase in online harassment, including doxxing—the practice of publicly revealing another’s private or identifying information on the internet.

To minimize the risk of these forms of threats and harassment, NEA recommends that members take the following steps to prevent future incidents, especially before any media appearances that may attract unwanted attention from members of the public.

### **Preventative Steps:**

- **Create secure passwords** and use multi-factor authentication to prevent online accounts from being hacked.
- **Scrub private information from the internet.** Google yourself and search online white pages to see if any personal information (e.g., home address, cell phone number) is publicly available. Follow website opt-out procedures to remove information that you do not wish to share. Remove personal contact information from any public resume or CV.
- **Review privacy settings and content on social media accounts.** Ensure that only those who you wish to see your social media posts have access to do so. If you have a public profile, review old posts, keeping in mind that antagonistic members of the public may resurface posts or comments from any time period.
- **Consider speaking out anonymously.** If speaking with the press about an issue that may lead to harassment, consider whether speaking anonymously or under a pseudonym will achieve the same purpose.
- **Consider notifying friendly school officials** of events that might lead to public backlash, but only if prior notice would help them assist you in the event of harassment.

For educators currently experiencing threats or harassment, NEA recommends the following.

### **Protecting yourself online:**

- **Document the harassment** by taking screenshots of all threatening messages or posts, including a timestamp and URL, and logging other threatening communications such as

phone calls. This preserves evidence of the harassment for use in any civil or criminal proceedings or school disciplinary action.

- **Report to the relevant social media platforms.** Applications and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have mechanisms by which to report a specific post or account for content including harassment, hate speech, or doxxing. Often this function can be found by clicking a button for more options on the top right-hand corner of the post or account page. A detailed guide on how to report posts to each social media platform can be found [here](#). Anti-doxxing policies for major sites are included below:
  - [Twitter](#)
  - [Instagram](#)
  - [Google](#)
  - [Facebook/Meta](#)
  - [TikTok](#)
  - [LinkedIn](#)
- **Consider blocking or muting harassers on social media platforms.** The steps to block an account are generally similar to the above process for reporting an account. Blocking an account means that the account will not be able to send messages to you, and you will not see any posts (including prior posts) from that account. Muting is another option that will preserve messages but hide them from your view; a harasser will also not know if you have muted them.
- **Manage compromised personal information.** If your personal address or other identifying information is shared publicly without your consent, use the website or social media platform procedures to remove the information as quickly as possible. Change passwords if any online accounts have been compromised.

#### **Alerting your union:**

- **Reach out to your local affiliate.** Your local affiliate may be able to help you engage with your employer and connect you with information and resources specific to your state or locality. Your local can help you check your collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and school board policies for relevant protections. Work with your local to demand that your employer provide the required protections and to file a grievance if the employer fails to comply with the CBA.
- **Share your experience with NEA** by filling out this [form](#). Hearing directly from members about the threats and harassment they experience will help NEA connect members with appropriate resources and advocate for solutions to increased threats and harassment. NEA will not publicize any details of your experience without permission.

#### **Engaging with your employer:**

- **Report to school officials.** An employer has an affirmative obligation under federal law to investigate and address certain kinds of harassment, even from third parties—but only if the employer knows about the harassment. Immediately reporting any issues ensures that the school is responsible for taking steps to prevent further harassment.
- **Demand protections from CBA and school board policies.** CBAs may include anti-bullying or anti-harassment provisions. If the employer refuses to provide these protections after your request, file a grievance using procedures in the CBA. School board policies may also cover bullying and harassment, as well as workplace safety and abuse of school IT resources.
- **Know your rights under state tenure law.** State laws prevent dismissal of a tenured educator without cause. Tenure protections provide dismissed teachers with due process—notice and an opportunity to be heard, usually at a hearing before the school

board or an independent hearing officer. Reach out to your state or local affiliate to discuss what protections are available to you if you are dismissed.

- **File a state or federal discrimination complaint.** Federal and state laws require employers to protect employees from hostile work environments known to the employer and prohibit employers from retaliating against employees who report discrimination.
  - **Title VII** prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity), or religion. Other federal laws prohibit employment discrimination based on age, disability, and genetic information. State laws may provide further protections. Charges must be filed with the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#) or the equivalent state fair employment agency within 180 days of the discrimination.
  - **Title IX** prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs. A [complaint](#) must be filed with the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights within 180 days of the last act of discrimination.
- **Understand First Amendment protections.** The First Amendment protects public employees from retaliation for protected speech; however, on-duty speech is not generally protected. If you face dismissal or other disciplinary action as a result of your speech or advocacy, contact your state affiliate to discuss possible recourse.

#### **Interacting with law enforcement:**

- **Report to the FBI tip line.** Call 1-800-CALL-FBI or use the [online form](#). The FBI investigates violations of federal criminal law, including transmitting a threat through the U.S. mail or interstate commerce (including most online communications). 18 U.S.C. §§ 875, 876. Note that criminal complaints generally are not appropriate against students.
- **Report to local law enforcement.** State criminal laws may ban threats, harassment, cyberstalking, hate crimes, recording without permission, threats directed toward public school employees, or threats intended to influence school or government action. Some state criminal codes also include enhanced penalties for assault against an educator or other public employee. Note that criminal complaints generally are not appropriate against students.

#### **Other steps:**

- **Consider filing a civil lawsuit.** Consult a lawyer if you wish to discuss additional civil remedies available through litigation against the harasser or the school. Note that certain federal laws require filing a complaint with the EEOC prior to filing a lawsuit.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- The NEA [Harassment and Discrimination Toolkit](#) offers detailed information on characteristics protected by federal employment discrimination laws and advice for how educators should respond when facing discrimination or harassment.
- The PEN America [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) provides guidance on how to prepare for and respond to online harassment, including detailed instructions on creating and managing secure passwords, removing private information from online, and reporting offensive posts on various social media platforms.
- Crash Override offers a [Resource Center](#) that contains online security guides and suggestions on how to talk to police and employers about online harassment.