



## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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# Groton Dunstable Regional School District

## BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN September 2022

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The Groton Dunstable Regional School District is committed to enhancing and sustaining a safe and healthy learning environment for all.

The Groton Dunstable Regional School District will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyber-bullying, and/or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. The District will promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and to restore the target's sense of safety. We will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement. The Groton Dunstable Regional School District affords all students the same protections regardless of their legal status under the law.

The Groton Dunstable Regional School District is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies and the community to prevent issues of bullying and violence. This Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan incorporates a comprehensive approach for preventing, intervening and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation.

The Groton Dunstable Regional School District Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan was developed to meet the requirements of M.G.L. c. 71, S370 and is modeled after the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Model Plan for dealing with bullying behaviors in our schools. The Plan includes strategies for identifying, reporting and responding to bullying behaviors. The words target instead of victim and aggressor instead of bully are used throughout this document to be consistent with language used by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

This plan reflects Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014, which amended G.L. c. 71, §370, the anti-bullying statute, and was signed into law on April 24, 2014. G.L. c. 71, §370, as amended, requires school districts, charter schools, approved private day or residential schools, and collaborative schools to "recognize" in their bullying prevention and intervention plans that certain enumerated categories of students may be more vulnerable to being targets of bullying based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics. As required, the plan includes specific steps to support these vulnerable students and provide all students the skills, knowledge and strategies they need to prevent or respond to bullying or harassment. Under the new law, school districts must notify parents and guardians of targets of bullying of the availability of the Department's problem resolution system and assist these parents and guardians in understanding the problem resolution process. Chapter 86 also addresses the data reporting and collection obligations of school districts, requiring the collection and reporting of the following data to the Department: 1) the number of reported allegations of bullying or retaliation; 2) the number and nature of substantiated incidents of bullying and retaliation; 3) the number of students disciplined for engaging in bullying or retaliation, and 4) other information required by the Department. Additionally, Chapter 86 requires school districts to administer a Department-developed student survey at least once every four years to assess "school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in schools."

## **PROHIBITION OF BULLYING, CYBER-BULLYING & RETALIATION**

Acts of bullying, which includes cyber-bullying, are prohibited:

(i) on school grounds and property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at school-sponsored or school-related activities, functions, or programs whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicles owned, leased, or used by a school district or school; or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, and

(ii) at a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the target or witnesses, infringes on their rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited.

## DEFINITIONS

Aggressor is a student or school staff member who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students or by a member of a school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional, of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that: (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property; (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. For the purposes of this section, bullying shall include cyber-bullying.

Cyber-Bullying as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyber-bullying shall also include (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Hostile Environment, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the student's education.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student or member of school staff who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying. If harassment (unwelcome conduct on the basis of race, age, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or religion) is alleged, the school will utilize the district's applicable harassment procedures to investigate.

School Staff (referred to as "School Staff" or "Staff") includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, contractors, or

paraprofessionals.

Target (referred to as Target or Victim) is a student against whom bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

## LEADERSHIP

Leadership at all levels play a critical role in developing and implementing the District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan ("Plan") in the context of other whole school and community efforts to promote a positive school climate.

*Public Involvement in Developing the Plan.* This Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation, and the District is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, this Plan was developed with input from various constituencies. This plan will be submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and posted on the Groton Dunstable Regional School District website.

The Plan will call for the involvement of different constituent groups as implementation proceeds.

*Assessing Needs and Resources.* The plan is the District's blueprint for enhancing capacity to prevent and respond to issues of bullying with the context of other healthy school climate initiatives. In order to inform decision making, the Groton Dunstable Leadership Team will develop a plan to assess the adequacy of our current programs; review current policies and procedures; review available data on bullying and behavioral incidents; and assess available resources including curricula, training, and behavioral health supports and services.

The District administration, with input from families and staff, will periodically review current programs including, but not limited to the following:

- Review of current policies and procedures;
- Review of available data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying and behavioral incidents;
- Assess available resources including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services;
- Review current and relevant articles and research on best methodology to prevent and intervene to address bullying and cyber-bullying;
- Review anti-bullying curricula and instructional guides;
- Maintain a resource bank of relevant materials for both parents and students;
- Review of the MA comprehensive Health and Wellness Curriculum Frameworks to provide a working curriculum context for anti-bullying curriculum; and
- Assess initial and periodic needs, by 1) surveying students, staff, parents, and guardians on school climate and school safety issues, and 2) collecting and analyzing building-specific data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying (e.g., focusing on identifying vulnerable populations and hot spots in school buildings, on school groups, or on school buses).

In 2022-2023, then at least once every four years, the District will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our schools.

Similar tools to the student survey can be used with staff and families to assist in determining school climate needs. This information will help identify patterns of behavior and areas of concern, and will inform decision making for prevention strategies including, but not limited to, adult supervision, professional development, age-appropriate curricula, and in-school support services. Methodologies, timelines and leadership roles will be determined on an annual basis.

Additionally, the District will annually report bullying incident data to the Department.

Planning and Oversight. The Superintendent will designate District and/or building administrators to be responsible for the following:

- 1) Receiving reports on bullying;
- 2) Collecting and analyzing school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes;
- 3) Creating a process for recording and tracking incident report, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors;
- 4) Planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by law;
- 5) Planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors;
- 6) Choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or District will use;
- 7) Developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Plan, including Internet safety policy, and designating key staff to be in charge of implementation of them;
- 8) Amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct to make clear that bullying of students by school staff or other students will not be tolerated; and
- 9) Leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials; and reviewing and updating the plan.

Priority Statement. The Groton Dunstable Regional School District Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying, and each school in the District is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. District and Building Administrators are responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan.



Each school in the District expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

The Groton Dunstable Regional School District recognizes that certain student groups may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identify or expression, physical appearance, or disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The District will take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

The Groton Dunstable Regional School District will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore a target's sense of safety. We will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

This Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying. The Groton Dunstable Regional School District is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of bullying and violence. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation.

Groton Dunstable Regional School District Principals are responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan at their respective buildings.

## TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Groton Dunstable Regional School District will meet the requirements under M.G.L. c.71, S 370 to provide ongoing professional development for all staff, including but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals.

*Annual Staff Training on the Plan.* A review of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be included in our annual on-line mandatory training for all school personnel. This section will include staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the Principal, or designee, will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula offered at all grades throughout the District.

*Ongoing Professional Development.* The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for all staff to play a key role in creating a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. As required by M.G.L. c.71, 370, the content of school-wide and district-wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- (i) Developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- (ii) Developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- (iii) Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) Research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment;
- (v) Information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying; and
- (vi) Internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying.

Professional development will also address ways to prevent and respond to bullying or retaliation for students with disabilities that must be considered when developing students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This will include a particular focus on the needs of students with Autism and students whose disability affects social skills development.

Additional topics for professional development may include:

- Promoting and modeling the use of respectful language;
- Fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference;
- Building relationships and communicating with families;
- Managing classroom behaviors constructively;
- Using positive behavioral intervention strategies;
- Applying constructive disciplinary practices;
- Teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others;
- Engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making;

- Maintaining safe and caring classrooms for all students; and
- Engaging staff and those responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan to distinguish between acceptable managerial behaviors designed to correct misconduct, instill accountability in the school setting and bullying behaviors.

The District will also establish and maintain a team of trainers trained by the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) to serve as presenters to staff.

Professional development will include a review of current research on bullying and effective intervention; staff responsibilities under the law; an overview of the steps that the principal (or designee) will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation; and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades throughout the school building. Staff members hired after the start of the school year are required to participate in school-based training during the school year in which they are hired, unless they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last two years.

*Written Notice to Staff.* Each school will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties in the employee handbook.

## **ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES**

Creating a positive school climate requires that the underlying emotional needs of all students are addressed. These students include targets, aggressors or bystanders of bullying or cyber-bullying. In order to enhance the District's capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, available services should reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets and student aggressors. In addition, the emotional needs of these students' families must also be addressed.

This Plan includes strategies for providing supports and services necessary to meet these needs and enhance the District's capacity to effectively prevent, intervene and respond to bullying.

*Identifying Resources.* Resources for targets, aggressors, and their families may include, but are not limited to: adopting new curricula, reorganizing staff, establishing safety planning teams, and identifying other agencies that can provide services. A District Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Resource List will be published to the District website. The resource list will include a bibliography of anti-bullying resources including, but not limited to: the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Bullying Policy, the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan; instructional guides and materials; adopted related curricula, relevant articles for professional, student, and parent use; data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying and behavioral issues; parent and student brochures; curriculum and books that help foster a sense of positive and proactive school community and culture; relevant and useful web-sites; and linkages with community based organizations, including Community Service Agencies (CSA) for Medicaid eligible students. These will include resources that provide related services to student aggressors or targets and their families.

Materials will be research based or field-tested, age appropriate, well designed and user-friendly. Resources will be obtained from a variety of sources including, but not limited to, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, field expert recommendations, colleagues both within the District and other districts, parents, students, Law Enforcement, and the MA District Attorney.

Building-level and District-level administrators, in conjunction with counselors, nurses, school social workers, school psychologists, special educators, and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) will work to identify the school's capacity to provide services to provide counseling, case management and other services to targets, aggressors, bystanders and families.

The District will review current staffing and programs that support the creation of positive school environments by focusing on early interventions and intensive services. Once this mapping of resources is complete, the school or District can develop recommendations and action steps to fill resource and service gaps. This may include adopting new curricula, reorganizing staff, establishing safety planning teams, and identifying other agencies that can provide services.

Through the Student Support Teams (SSTs), Case Management Teams, or through guidance counselor recommendation, the following resources can be accessed in the Groton Dunstable

Regional School District to assist in creating a positive school environment. When necessary, counseling, or referrals to community mental health clinics (e.g., Community Health Links) will also be available.

*Counseling and Other Services.* Culturally and linguistically appropriate resources are available in all schools including but not limited to staff that will identify linkages to community-based organizations, develop safety plans for students who have been targets of bullying or retaliation, provide social skills programming to prevent bullying, and offer interventions services for students for exhibiting bullying behaviors through positive behavior support plans, social skills groups and individually focused curricula.

School counselors, social workers, BCBAs, nurses, special educators and administrators currently provide a variety of skill-based services to students within the educational setting that include on-going emotional support, risk assessment, crisis intervention, and help with community based counseling referrals when appropriate. Designated educators meet with parents and teachers as needed to collaboratively address students' academic, emotional and behavioral concerns.

The District provides linguistically appropriate resources to identified families. Designated staff maintains up-to-date information on community-based mental health referrals, outside agencies and services for Medicaid eligible students.

Designated educators work collaboratively to develop behavior plans and provide social skill groups for students. They also work to support parents, conduct parent workshops and inform parents of outside resources to enhance parenting skills and provide for the needs of children.

Services offered at various schools include, but are not limited to:

- One-on-one and small group counseling;
- Case management services;
- Individual curriculum;
- Social skills groups;
- Parent-educator conferences and meetings;
- Transition planning;
- Behavior plan development;
- Classroom observations;
- Consultation to student's Teams.

*Students with Disabilities.* As required by M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, when the IEP Team determines the student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her disability, the Team will consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

*Referral to Outside Services.* Each school will establish referral protocols for referring students and families to outside services. Referrals will comply with relevant laws and policies. Current

local referral protocols will be evaluated to assess their relevance to the Plan, and revised as needed.

## ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Specific Bullying Prevention Approaches. The District will adopt age-appropriate bullying prevention curricula (e.g., Second Step), which is informed by current research, that emphasizes the following approaches:

- Using scripts and role play to develop skills;
- Empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students or school staff engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- Helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- Emphasizing cyber-safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- Enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and
- Engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference.

In conjunction with each of these initiatives, students will be taught about the student-related sections in this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

Bullying prevention, cyber-bullying and internet safety curricula for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District will be provided to all students in grades Preschool-12. Specific programming has been determined by the available materials and resources, along with what school and community data indicate are needed. The schedule for implementing this curriculum is as follows:

Grades Preschool – 8	· Second Step (Pilot 2022-2023)
Grades 9-12	· Incorporate into Health and Wellness Curriculum · Incorporate into Student Assemblies

General Teaching Approaches that Support Bullying Prevention Efforts. The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of the District's bullying intervention and prevention initiatives:

- Setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
- Creating safe school and classroom climate/environments for all students, including for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

students, and homeless students;

- Using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- Using positive behavioral supports;
- Encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- Modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- Using positive approaches to behavioral health, including collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution training, teamwork, and positive behavioral supports that aid in social and emotional development;
- Using the Internet safely; and
- Supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.



## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION**

*Reporting Bullying or Retaliation.* Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing. A school staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee (or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor) any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or District staff members, may be made anonymously. The school or District may make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, a voicemail box, a dedicated mailing address, and an email address.

Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. The school may: 1) include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents or guardians; 2) make it available in the school's main office, the counseling office, the school nurse's office, and other locations determined by the principal or designee; and 3) post it on the school's website. The Incident Reporting Form will be made available in the most prevalent language(s) of origin of students and parents or guardians.

At the beginning of each school year, the school or District will provide the school community, including administrators, staff, students, and parents or guardians, with written notice of its policies for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the principal or other designated school official identified to receive bullying reports will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks.

### Reporting by Staff

A staff member will report immediately to the principal or designee (or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor) when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report to the principal or designee does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school or District policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

### Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others

The school or District expects students, parents or guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the principal or designee. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action

will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Students, parents or guardians, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member, or with the Principal or designee, or Superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor.

### Responding to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation

*Safety.* Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Principal, or designee, will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target, and altering the aggressor’s schedule and access to the target. The Principal, or designee, will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The Principal, or designee, will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying or retaliation a student who has reported bullying or retaliation, a student who has witnessed bullying or retaliation, a student who provides information during an investigation, or a student who has reliable information about a reported act of bullying or retaliation.

Upon receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, the Principal, or designee, will confer with the complainant (person who reported alleged bullying) to obtain an understanding and statement of the facts alleged. If, based on the facts alleged, the Principal determines that the conduct reported would not constitute bullying or retaliation, as defined by M.G.L. c.71, §37O and/or Groton-Dunstable Regional School District’ policies, the Principal shall document that determination on the Incident Reporting Form and shall take no further action with regard to the bullying complaint. If the Principal determines that such facts, if true, would constitute discrimination or harassment (discrimination or unwelcome conduct on the basis of race, age, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or religion), the Principal shall follow the District or school’s policies and procedures for applicable discrimination or harassment investigations. If the Principal determines that such facts, if true, would constitute bullying or retaliation, the principal will promptly commence a bullying investigation of the complaint.

Upon commencing a bullying investigation, the Principal will make a preliminary determination as to the need for immediate interventions to protect the safety of the alleged target, complainant, witnesses or interviewees regarding the bullying allegations. Such interventions may include, but are not limited to, creating a personal safety plan for the target or others involved; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor and/or others involved in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target; and altering the aggressor’s, target’s or others involved schedule and access to each other. The Principal or designee may take additional steps deemed necessary by the school administration to protect the

safety of the target and any witnesses or interviewees while the investigation is ongoing.

### Obligations to Notify Others

Notice to Parents or Guardians. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding to it. The notification to the parents and guardians of the target will include the actions the school is taking to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state and federal confidentiality and student records laws and regulations, including 603 CMR 49.00.

Notice to Another School or District. If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the Principal, or designee, first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the Principal, or designee, of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, including 603 CMR 49.00 and 603 CMR 23.00.

Notice to Law Enforcement. At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the principal or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of state and federal law and regulations, including 603 CMR 49.00, as well as locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. (parents/guardians may also make an independent decision to notify the local law enforcement agency.) Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the principal, or designee, shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor.

A principal may disclose a determination of bullying or retaliation to a local law enforcement agency under 603 CMR 49.06 without the consent of a student or his or her parent/guardian. The principal shall communicate with law enforcement officials in a manner that protects the privacy of targets, student witnesses, and aggressors to the extent practicable under the circumstances. In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or District policies and procedures, consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate. The principal must document the reasons for his or her decision to notify law enforcement.

Notice to Other Parties. A principal may not disclose information from a student record of a target or aggressor to a parent/guardian unless the information is about the parent's/guardian's own child.

A principal, or designee, may disclose student record information about a target or aggressor to appropriate parties in addition to law enforcement in connection with a health or safety emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals as provided in 603 CMR 23.07(4)(e) and 34 CFR 99.31(a)(10) and 99.36. 603 CMR 49.07(3) is limited to instances in which the principal has determined there is an immediate and significant threat to the health or safety of the student or other individuals. It is limited to the period of emergency and does not allow for blanket disclosure of student record information. The principal must document the disclosures and the reasons that the principal determined that a health or safety emergency exists.

Investigation. The principal, or designee, will promptly investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved.

During the investigation the principal or designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the principal, or designee, and other staff members as determined by the principal, or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, as appropriate. To the extent practicable and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the principal, or designee, will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation.

Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with school or District policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, the principal, or designee, will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

Determinations. The principal, or designee, will make a determination based upon all the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal, or designee, will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not inappropriately restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. The principal, or designee, will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the principal, or designee, may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or school counselor, and the target's or aggressor's parents or guardians, to identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying behavior and to assess the level of need for additional social skills development.

Upon investigation and determination that bullying has occurred, the principal, or designee,

will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation. The principal, or designee, will inform the target's parents/guardians what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notices to parents/guardians must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the principal or designee cannot report specific information to the target's parent or guardian about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

The principal, or designee, will inform the parent or guardian of the target about the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's ("DESE") problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system, regardless of the outcome of the bullying determination.

Program Resolution System Office  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street, Malden  
MA 02148-4906  
Telephone: 781-338-3700; TTY: N.E.T. Relay: 1-800-439-2370.

The principal will collaborate with special educators, guidance counselors, counselors and/or school adjustment counselors to provide counseling or appropriate referrals for services for targets, aggressors, and families.

If, at anytime during the bullying investigation and determination process, the principal determines that potential discrimination or harassment on the basis of a protected class may have occurred, the Principal shall follow the District or school's policies and procedures for applicable discrimination or harassment investigations.

### Responses to Bullying

#### Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-Building

Upon the principal, or designee, determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the school or District use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O(d)(v). Skill-building approaches that the principal or designee may consider include:

- Offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's/District's anti-bullying curricula;
- Providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with guidance counselors and other appropriate school personnel;
- Implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand prosocial ways to achieve their goals;
- Meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce

- the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home; and
- Adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills.

### Taking Disciplinary Action

If the principal, or designee, decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the principal or designee, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior. Discipline will be consistent with the Plan, with the school's or District's code of conduct and applicable due process rights. Disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to detention, prohibitions or limitations on student's participation in extracurricular and/or athletic activities and other school-related events, as well as suspension from school.

Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which should be read in cooperation with state laws and regulations regarding student discipline.

If the principal, or designee, determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student may be subject to disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to: detention, prohibitions or limitations on student's participation in extracurricular and/or athletic activities and other school-related events, as well as suspension from school.

### Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

The principal, or designee, will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of others as well. One strategy that the principal or designee may use is to increase adult supervision at transition times and in locations where bullying is known to have occurred or is likely to occur.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the principal or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the principal or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

## **COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

*Parent/Guardian Education and Resources.* The Groton Dunstable Regional School District will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula being used. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTA/PTO, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), or similar organizations.

*Notification Requirements.* Each year the Groton Dunstable Regional School District will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyber-bullying and online safety, as well as how parents and guardians can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the District and its bullying prevention and intervention plan. The District will send parents or guardians written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the Districts' Internet safety policy. All notices and information made available to parents or guardians will be in hard copy and electronic formats and will be available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The District will post the Plan and related information on its website.

## **PROBLEM RESOLUTION SYSTEM**

Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014 amended Section 37O of chapter 71 of the General Laws to include (g) (v): The Plan shall inform parents or guardians of the target about the Department's problem resolution system and the process for seeking assistance or filing a claim through the problem resolution system. This information will be made available in both hard copy and electronic formats:

Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the District may do so with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/>, emails can be sent to [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu) or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information are also available at the Superintendent's office.



## **RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS**

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the school or District, no person shall be discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town or in obtaining the advantages, privilege and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. M.G.L. c. 76, §5. Nothing in the Plan shall prevent the District or a district school from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state, or federal law, or school or District policies.

In addition, nothing in the Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of the school or District to take disciplinary action or other action under M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 37H or 37H½, other applicable laws, or local school or District policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.

Chapter 86 requires schools and Districts to administer a student survey developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) every four years to assess "school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in schools." The survey results will be used to assess the effectiveness of bullying prevention curricula and instruction that is required under the bullying prevention and intervention statute. Additionally, the school or District will annually report bullying incident data to DESE.