

Medfield Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

December, 2010

LEADERSHIP

Public Involvement. The Medfield Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is developed through a consultation process which involves all members of the school community. Built upon the District's Bullying and Harassment Policy and school-level Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans, the MPS district plan, which will be updated every two years, draws upon the expertise of teachers, administrators, and support personnel and members of the larger school community. The Plan is developed and evaluated by a Steering Committee comprised of district-level and school level personnel, reviewed by the district's Leadership Team, Superintendent's Advisory Council, and School Committee. A public comment period is provided to solicit additional input through the district's website and school councils.

Needs Assessment. The district uses several sources of data to develop and evaluate the plan. Student surveys are conducted for students in grades 2 through 12. In addition, staff observations of needs are conducted on an ongoing basis through class meetings, advisories, and observations both inside and outside the classroom. At all levels, building data from incident reports during the course of the year are documented. At the end of each school year, the principal or designee collects all relevant data and makes it available to those who are responsible for reviewing and evaluating the plan.

Planning and Oversight. The principal or principal's designee at each school is responsible for receiving reports on bullying, collecting and analyzing data on bullying, and recording and tracking incident reports. The principal, in conjunction with other school staff members, also plans for ongoing professional development, plans supports for targets and aggressors, approves the implementation of school curricula, and organizes key people for implementing the internet safety policy, amending student and staff handbooks, leading parent involvement activities, and reviewing and updating school bullying prevention and intervention plans as required by law.

Priority Statements. The Medfield Public Schools expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences. At each school administrators, teachers, and support personnel will articulate this vision clearly so that all members of the school community are aware of the district's commitment to bullying prevention and intervention.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Annual Staff Training on the Plan. Annual training for all school staff 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 to be offered at all grades throughout the school or district. 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.

The following persons will conduct the annual training:

- The principal or designee will oversee the professional development of staff members who may have direct supervisory responsibilities for children, including instructional aides, LMC aides, student teachers and substitute teachers.
- The district's athletic director is responsible for annual training of coaches.
- The principal or designee will be responsible for annual training of building secretaries, custodians, maintenance staff members, and food service employees.
- The Pupil Services Director or designee will be responsible for annual training of bus drivers.

Ongoing Professional Development. The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create 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, sec 370, the content of schoolwide and districtwide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- (i) developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- (ii) developmentally 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 cyberbullying, and
- (vi) internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

Currently, school-based teams have attended or are scheduled to attend Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) training and will be equipped to extend this training to staff members at each school on an ongoing basis.

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 or students whose disability affects social skills development. The district's Pupil Personnel director will oversee the professional development in relation to these plans.

In addition, professional development will also include

- maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students
- promoting and modeling the use of respectful language

- teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others
- through the following research-based curricula:
- Open Circle for grades K-3
 - Responsive Classroom and Character Education grades 4-5
 - Research-based curricula to be determined for grades 6-12 (see below) to supplement existing bullying prevention lessons in the Wellness and Advisory curriculum.

The principal or designee will continually update staff on these ongoing initiatives. In addition, each school will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including staff responsibilities in the staff handbook.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Identifying resources. The Steering Committee has delineated the following existing resources for bullying prevention and services to targets, aggressors, and their families.

Bullying prevention curriculum:

- Open Circle: Grades K-3
- Responsive Classroom and Character Education: Grades 4-5
- Bullying prevention lessons encompassed in the district Wellness Curriculum grades 6-10 and the current Advisory Program in grades 6-8.

The Steering Committee recommends the following:

Year 1 of the Plan:

- Investigation of research-based curricula for Grades 6-8 to supplement the current Advisory and Wellness bullying prevention curricula
- Mapping of the bullying prevention lessons currently addressed through the social competency and advisory programs.

Year 2 of the Plan:

- Investigation of appropriate curricula and venues for continuing through grades 11 and 12 the bullying prevention lessons now encompassed in Wellness classes at grades 9 and 10.

Counseling and other services. Guidance counselors, school psychologists, and school nurses at each school have lists of available resources for students and families. The Pupil Services director will maintain a district copy of available resources.

In addition to school counseling, a variety of within-school supports exist, such as social skills groups, lunch-time groups, and group and individual counseling for targets and aggressors.

Safety plans for students who are the targets of bullying or retaliation are developed by the principal or designee in conjunction with appropriate school personnel.

Students with disabilities. As required by M.G.L. c 710, Sec 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.

ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Specific bullying prevention approaches. Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:

- Using scripts and role plays to develop skills
- Empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance
- Helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance
- Emphasizing cybersafety, 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.

Initiatives will also teach students about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. The principal or designee will provide explicit age-appropriate information to students on the Plan during assemblies or small-group presentations at each school throughout the school year.

General teaching approaches. The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of our bullying intervention and prevention initiatives:

- Setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines
- Creating safe school and classroom 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
- Supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

During the summer 2011, a district Bullying Prevention and Intervention Curriculum Committee will meet to review the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education guidelines (to be published by June 30, 2011) in order to align our district Bullying Prevention curriculum with these guidelines or recommend adoption of appropriate curricula if needed.

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 or district staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee 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. (Oral and anonymous complaints may be reviewed but are inherently difficult to investigate and may not be procedurally fair; as a result no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on oral or anonymous complaints unless verified by clear and convincing evidence.) The school or district will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form¹ with directions for submission to the appropriate school office.

Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. The school or district will: 1) 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 2) 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, each school 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 name and contact information of the principal or designee, will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks, on the school website, and in information about the Plan that is made available to parents or guardians.

1. Reporting by Staff

A staff member will report immediately to the principal or designee 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.

2. Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others

¹ See Appendix A for MPS Incident Reporting Form.

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.

Responding to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation.

1. 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 in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person;” and altering the schedules and access to involved students, including witnesses and reporters. 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. Student safety plans will be developed by the principal or designee in conjunction with appropriate school personnel.

2. Obligations to Notify Others

- a. 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. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.
- b. 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, and 603 CMR 49.00.
- c. 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 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with 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.

In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the Medfield Police Department and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate.

Investigation.

The principal or designee will investigate promptly 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, 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 of 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 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.

The principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notice to parents 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.

Responses to Bullying

1. 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 pro-social 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;
- adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills; and
- making a referral for evaluation

2. 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 and with the school's or district's code of conduct.

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

3. 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 education and resources.

Each year each school will host a parent program which includes description of the social competency curriculum of the school and information on (i) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school or district plan, (ii) the dynamics of bullying; and (iii) online safety and cyberbullying. These programs will be offered in collaboration with each school's CSA, Boosters, School Councils, Special Education Advisory Council, or Medfield Coalition for Public Education and other community organizations. In addition, schools will make available to parents on their websites information on resources available for parents.

Notification requirements.

Each year each school 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 cyberbullying and online safety. The school or district will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school's or district's 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 school will post the Plan and related information, such as the School Committee Policy, parent resources, and appropriate links on its website.

PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

- (i) on school grounds and property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased, or used by a school district or school; or through the use of technology or

- (ii) an electronic device owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, and 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, infringe on their rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupt 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.

As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

DEFINITIONS

Aggressor is a student who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

Bullying and cyberbullying means unwelcome written or electronic communication, verbal or physical acts or gestures where a student or employee feels coerced, intimidated, harassed or threatened and under the circumstances (1) may cause a reasonable person to suffer physical or emotional harm (2) may cause damage to another student's or employee's property, or (3) may cause a disruptive or hostile school environment. The behavior must interfere with an employee's ability to perform his or her duties or with a student's academic performance or ability to learn, or interfere with a student's ability to participate in or benefit from services, activities, or privileges:

- a. That are being offered through the school district; or
- b. During any education program or activity; or
- c. While in school, on school equipment or property, in school vehicles, on school buses, at designated school bus stops, at school-sponsored activities, at school-sanctioned events; or
- d. Through the use of data, telephone or computer software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, or computer network or any public education institute.
- e. As used in the School Committee Policy, "electronic communication" means any communication through an electronic device including, but not limited to, a telephone, cellular phone, computer or pager.

Cyberbullying, is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O for the legal definition of cyberbullying.

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 a student's education.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

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, or paraprofessionals.

Target is a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

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, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in the Plan prevents the school or district 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.