

BULLYING PREVENTION

The Weston Public Schools, in accordance with Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, Massachusetts General Laws, chapter 71, S370, endeavour to maintain a safe learning environment where students can achieve the highest academic standard. The Weston Public Schools are committed to creating an environment in which every student develops emotionally, academically, and physically in a caring and supportive atmosphere free of intimidation and abuse. Bullying of any type has no place in a school setting. The Weston Public Schools will endeavour to maintain a school culture free of bullying. The Weston Public Schools shall not tolerate bullying.

Definitions

“Bullying” is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target’s property;
- places the target in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself, or of damage to his/her property;
- creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

“Cyber-bullying” means 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 the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or the knowing impersonation of another person as author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying above

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 the definition of bullying above.

Bullying and/or cyber-bullying may occur in and out of school, during and after school hours, at home and in locations outside of the home. When a student alleges that bullying and/or cyber-bullying has occurred, the Weston Public Schools expects the full cooperation and assistance of parents and families in the investigation process and in preventing bullying and/or cyber-bullying in the future.

For the purpose of this policy, whenever the term bullying is used it is to denote either bullying, or cyber-bullying.

“Retaliation” is any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment by a current student or former student under the age of 21 directed against a student who reports bullying and/or cyber-bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying and/or cyber-bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying and/or cyber-bullying.

Prohibitions

Bullying and/or cyber-bullying are prohibited:

- On school grounds;
- On property immediately adjacent to school grounds;
- At school-sponsored or school-related activities;
- At functions or programs whether on or off school grounds
- At school bus stops;
- On school buses or other vehicles owned, leased or used by the school district; or,
- Through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the Weston Public Schools;

Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by the Weston school district if the act or acts in question:

- create a hostile environment at school for the target;
- infringe on the rights of the target at school; and/or
- materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Prevention and Intervention Plan

The Superintendent and/or his/her designee shall oversee the development of a prevention and intervention plan, in consultation with all district stakeholders, which may include teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents and guardians, consistent with the requirements of this policy, as well as state and federal laws. The Superintendent and/or his/her designee will review and update the bullying prevention and intervention plan at least biennially.

The Principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the bullying prevention and implementation plan within his or her school. See also “Weston Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan” oo,3-4 (“Leadership.”)

Reporting

Students, who believe that they are a target of bullying, observe an act of bullying, or who have reasonable grounds to believe that these behaviors are taking place, must report such incidents to the school principal or designee, or a member of the school staff. The target shall, however, not be subject to discipline for failing to report bullying.

Each school shall have a means for anonymous reporting by students of incidents of bullying. No formal disciplinary action shall be taken against the aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying shall be subject to disciplinary action.

Parents or guardians, or members of the community, are encouraged to report an incident of bullying as soon as possible.

Any member of a school staff shall immediately report any instance of bullying the staff member witnessed or become aware of to the school principal or their designee.

Consistent with G.L. c71, S370, the procedure for making such reports may be found on pp.8-10 of the law (“Policies and Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Bullying and Retaliation”).

Investigation Procedures

The following are general guidelines for responding to a report of bullying or retaliation. For more information, see pp. 8-10 of the Plan (“Policies and Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Bullying and Retaliation”).

The school principal or a designee shall promptly investigate a report of bullying or retaliation using a Bullying/Cyber-bullying Report Form. The principal or designee will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved. The principal or designee, or other staff members, as determined by the principal or designee, may conduct interviews of the alleged target, alleged aggressor, staff members, students, and/or witnesses. The principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation.

The school principal or a designee, upon receipt of a viable report, shall promptly contact the parents or guardians of a student who has been the alleged target or alleged aggressor of bullying. The school principal or designee will also notify the parents or guardians of the alleged target of the actions taken to prevent further acts of bullying to the extent consistent with state and federal law.

The school principal or designee or other staff members as determined by the principal or designee shall assess an alleged target’s need for protection and will respond as needed to restore a sense of safety for that student. .

Confidentiality of the alleged target, a person who reports bullying, a person who provides information during an investigation of bullying, or is witness to or has reliable information about an act of bullying, will be protected to the extent practicable, given the school’s obligation to investigate and attend to the matter. The school principal or designee will take appropriate steps to protect from bullying or retaliation the alleged target, a person who reports bullying, a person who provides information during an investigation of bullying, or is witness to or has reliable information about an act of bullying.

The principal or designee will complete the investigation in a timely manner. The principal or designee will keep the parents or guardians informed as to the status of the investigation. Upon completion of the investigation, the principal or designee shall notify the parents or guardians of the results of the investigation. The report provided to parents or guardians shall include whether the allegations were found to be factual, whether a violation of this policy was found, and whether disciplinary action has or shall be taken. All notice to parents must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations.

If the school principal or a designee determines that bullying has occurred he/she shall take appropriate disciplinary action and if it is believed that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal or designee shall consult with the school's resource officer and the Superintendent to determine if criminal charges are warranted. If it is determined that criminal charges are warranted, the principal or designee will notify the local law enforcement agency.

Disciplinary actions for students who have committed an act of bullying or retaliation shall be in accordance with district disciplinary policies.

Each school shall document any incident of bullying that is reported per this policy and a file shall be maintained by the Principal or designee..

Confidentiality shall be maintained to the extent consistent with the school's obligations under state and federal law.

Retaliation

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

Target Assistance

The Weston Public Schools shall provide counselling or referral to appropriate services, including guidance, academic intervention, and protection to students, both targets and aggressors, affected by bullying or retaliation, as necessary.

See also Plan, p. 7 ("Access to Resources and Services").

Training and Assessment

Training shall be provided for school employees and volunteers who have significant contact with students in preventing, identifying, responding to, and reporting incidents of bullying.

Age-appropriate, evidence-based instruction on bullying prevention shall be incorporated into the curriculum for K-12 students.

See also, Plan, pp. 5-6 ("Training and Professional Development") and p. 8 ("Academic and Non-Academic Activities").

Communication with Other School Districts

If an incident of bullying or retaliation involves students from more than one school district, the school district or school first informed of the bullying or retaliation shall, consistent with state and federal law, promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school district or school so that both may take appropriate action. If an incident of bullying or retaliation occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in a local school district, the school district or school informed of the bullying or retaliation shall contact law enforcement,

Special Education

Whenever the evaluation of the Individualized Education Program team indicates that the child has a disability that affects social skills development or that the child is vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing because of the child's disability, the Individualized Education Program shall address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment or teasing.

See also Plan, p. 7 ("Access to Resources and Services").

Publication and Notice

Annual written notice of the relevant sections of the bullying prevention and intervention plan shall be provided to students and their parents or guardians, in age-appropriate terms and in the appropriate language.

Annual written notice of the bullying prevention and intervention plan shall be provided to all school staff. The faculty and staff at each school shall be trained annually on the bullying prevention and intervention plan applicable to the school.

Relevant sections of the bullying prevention and intervention plan relating to the duties of faculty and staff shall be included in the school employee handbook. The bullying prevention and intervention plan shall be posted on the Weston Public Schools website.

Adopted: November 21, 2011

REFERENCES: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

LEGAL REFS.: Title VII, Section 703, Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended
Federal Regulation 74676 issued by EEO Commission
Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
603 CMR 26.00
MGL 71:37O
MGL 265:43, 43A
MGL 268:13B
MGL 269:14A

CROSS REFS.: AC, Non-discrimination
ACAB, Sexual Harassment
JBA, Student-to-Student Harassment
JICFA, Prohibition of Hazing
JK, Student Discipline Regulations