

Webster Public Schools
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Overview Statement

In the Webster Public Schools we aim to ensure a safe and happy learning environment for all members of the of the school community. We recognize that bullying does occur and we work to promote a culture which rejects bullying and provides support to any members of the school community who are bullied. Bullying behavior is recognized as being anti-social and unacceptable. Procedures are outlined in this plan for reporting bullying and responding to incidents.

The Webster Public Schools will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and 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 District also aims to work with students, teachers and community to raise awareness, encourage reporting, and prevent bullying and to promote the values of tolerance and respect as well as the valuing of difference and diversity. This will be accomplished through public comment periods of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

The policy applies to all members of the school community which includes students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents / caregivers and visitors to the school.

All members of the school community have responsibility to support and promote these objectives. They also have the right to be involved in ongoing collaboration to develop strategies to support the anti-bullying plan.

Public Involvement in the Development and Implementation of the Plan

The District also aims to work with students, teachers and community to raise awareness, encourage reporting, and prevent bullying and to promote the values of tolerance and respect as well as the valuing of difference and diversity. This will be accomplished through public comment periods of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

This plan has been developed by a cross section of educators from the Webster Public Schools. The planning team included district-level administrators, principals, guidance counselors and school adjustment counselors and classroom teachers.

The Plan uses as a primary source the Model Bullying and Prevention Plan developed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The planning team also consulted other districts and consulting firms specializing in bullying prevention.

The Plan will be open for public comment from November 10, 2010 through December 3, 2010. During the public comment period, copies of the Plan will be available in the main office of each school, the superintendent's office, and on the district's website. We will notify the public about the availability of the Plan for review and comment through letters sent home with students. Automated telephone messages, a notice in the local newspaper and a post on the district website.

In addition, the draft Plan will be available at Parents' Nights and PTO meetings during November and December. Staff members will be available to describe elements of the plan and to receive comment.

The options for public comment will include:

- Individual or small group meetings with principals, the superintendent or any planning team member
- Email message sent to the designated planning team member
- Notes dropped off in the school offices or the superintendent's office
- Phone calls to the school principals, the superintendent or the anonymous Bullying Prevention Hotline.

All comments received during the public comment period will be considered by the planning team and may result in possible revision to the draft plan.

It is the intention of the school district to hold at least one open meeting each year, and to open one formal public comment period each year, following adoption of the Plan, to allow public comment on the implementation and to invite suggestions for revisions.

During January and February of each year, the district will conduct a paper and online survey the experience, opinions and attitudes of students, faculty and parents to determine if changes and adjustments to the Plan should be considered.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying, 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 target that:

- i. Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damages to the target's property;
- ii. Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property;

- iii. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- iv. infringes on the rights of the target at school; OR
- v. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Definition of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying, bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but 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 message, cell phone voice or text messages or facsimile communications, Cyberbullying 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 the author of posted content or messages, of the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.
- 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 person, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v) inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Definition of Hostile Environment

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.

Other Definitions

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

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

Perpetrator is a student or 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 who engages in bullying or retaliation.

Statement prohibiting bullying for all handbooks and policies

Prohibition of Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Retaliation

Acts of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation are prohibited;

- On school ground, 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 an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school district or school
- 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 by a school district or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the target, infringes on their rights at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Nothing contained herein shall require school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

Procedures for reporting bullying

Employees are required to report incidents. Employees, students, parents, and visitors, however, are strongly encouraged to report suspected incidents to their principal and/or appropriate district administrator either verbally or in writing. Each school has available at its office a form to be utilized upon request of a complaining party to initiate an investigation of the incident (Appendix A,B). a report may be made using the anonymous reporting box located inside each school's main entry, district site anonymous reporting box at Filmer Administration Building, 41 East Main Street, by going to www.webster-schools.org, or by sending an email to bullying@webster-schools.org. Anonymous reports may also be made by calling the Bullying Prevention Hotline at 508-943-0104 x27.

No disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

The District will take appropriate steps to protect from retaliation persons who take action consistent with the Bullying Policy, or who report, file a complaint of, or cooperate in an investigation of a violation of the Bullying Policy. Threats or acts of retaliation, whether person-to-person, by electronic means, or through third parties, are serious offenses that will subject the violator to significant disciplinary and or other corrective action.

Any person found to have made a false accusation; report or complaint of bullying upon proper investigation will be subject to disciplinary action and / or other appropriate consequences. This may include counseling, education, mediations or other opportunities for problem solving between all parties.

Procedures for responding to and investigating reports of bullying or retaliation

The principal or the appropriate district administrator will take specific steps to investigate all complainants of bullying. The principal or district administrator will initiate an investigation of all reports of bullying within two (2) days and every investigation will be completed within fourteen (14) days after its initiation.

Upon receiving a report of bullying the principal will immediately (that day) initiate the following steps:

1. Contact the Parent(s) / Guardian(s) of the Target
2. Contact the Parent(s) / Guardian(s) of the Aggressor(s)

The principal shall conduct a factual investigation by means of discussions with the individuals involved, witnesses, if any, review of any documents and other written or electronic materials. During this investigation, the Principal should:

3. Determine if any actions need to be taken to maintain the safety of the target or other witnesses/reports during the investigation
4. Interview the reporter
5. Interview the target if different than reporter
6. Determine witnesses (if any) and interview
7. Identify any adults present, interview
8. Investigate actions by aggressor's friends or others on his/her behalf
9. Ask about online involvement
10. Question about behaviors which are threatening in the context of bullying but are not explicitly forbidden in the school's discipline code.
11. Determine the merit and the plausibility of the report
12. Determine if the incident should be report to Law Enforcement

The principal will develop a Response Plan that includes:

- Safety Plan for the Target and
- Disciplinary actions taken against the aggressor for bullying or retaliation (keep in mind that the law states the “disciplinary actions shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior”.)
- Possible referral for the target and aggressor for in-school services such as counseling or the need to involve outside agencies.
- Notification of the target's parents/guardian of the findings of the investigation, the plan and steps that will be taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation.
- Notification of the parents/guardians of the aggressor(s) of the findings of the investigation, correction actions, referrals, and/or disciplinary actions what will be imposed.

Range of Disciplinary Actions

Consequences for confirmed bullying will include referrals, interventions, and / or disciplinary actions as outlined by the Student code of Conduct, School Committee policies and any collective bargaining agreements.

If a student has been found in violation of the bullying policy, the District will impose disciplinary measures and / or corrective actions to end and prevent further occurrences of the damage to school or District property. The nature of the action taken must comply with District and school disciplinary policies. Any disciplinary or corrective action shall conform to the due process requirements of federal and state law. Action concerning students may include a written warning, classroom transfer, suspension (short or long term), exclusion from school-sponsored functions, after-school programs and /or extracurricular activities, limited or denied access to parts or areas of the building, exclusion, expulsion, referral to law enforcement authorities, adult supervision on school premises; parent conferences; awareness training; empathy development awareness programs; counseling or any other action authorized by and consistent with the Student Code of conduct and/or school disciplinary code. The District complies with federal and state laws and regulations pertaining to the discipline of students with disabilities.

Professional Development and Staff Training

The Webster Public Schools expects to contract with a recognized consulting firm to plan and offer professional development and training for all staff.

Annual staff training on the Plan. Annual training for all school staff on the Plan 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.

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, § 37O, 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 cyberbullying; and
- (vi) Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying

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.

Additional areas 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;
- constructively managing classroom behaviors;
- 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; and
- maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.

C. Written notice to staff. The school or district 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 school or district employee handbook and the code of conduct.

Age-appropriate Bullying Prevention Curricula

The Webster Public Schools will develop and implement age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention for every grade level. We will use whole-school initiatives, classroom-based lessons, and individual instructional.

The curriculum will include specific instruction in elements of the Plan that related to students.

We will develop the specific curriculum after reviewing the guidelines issued by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and consulting with agencies such as Educators for Social Responsibility and the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University.

Regardless of the specific curricula adopted, the Webster Public Schools supports and encourages the use of general teaching techniques that support bullying prevention efforts. Those approaches include:

- 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; and
- supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

Access to Resources and Services

The Principal or designee will consider referring the target and the aggressor to a guidance counselor for an assessment. The Guidance Counselor will determine if a referral is necessary for further action. The Guidance Counselor may assist the family with referral to mental health services available through GB Wells Human Service Center, Valley Psychiatric Services and other private mental health providers.

As required by MGL c. 71B, §3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, when a student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student is vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing because of his/her disability, the IEP Team what amendments should be made to the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid or respond to bullying, harassment or teasing.

AMENDMENT TO POLICY JICFB
Approved by School Committee September 10, 2013

This amendment extends protection to students who are bullied by a member of the school staff, who are defined to work but are not limited to an “educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver and athletic coach or advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional.

