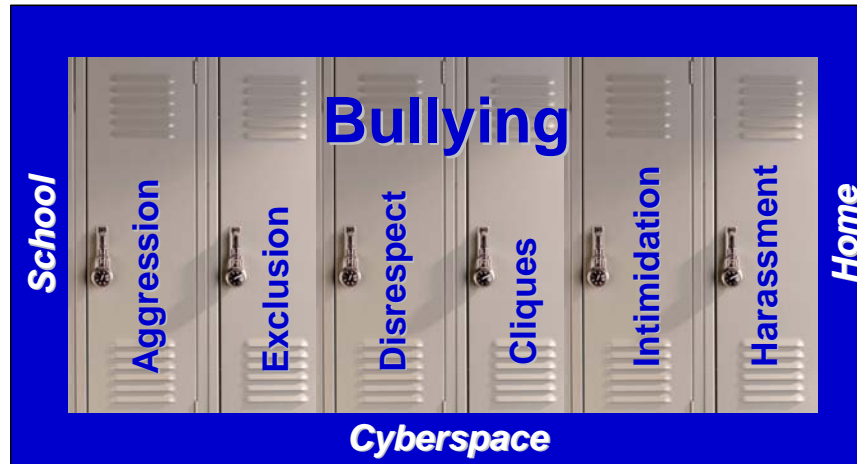


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Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Acton Public/Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools
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In June 2008, the Acton Public/Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools established a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Task Force, including parents, guardians, teachers, administrators, counselors, and law enforcement. As a committee, our goal was to ensure ownership for our Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, reflecting a safe environment built on respect for differences and comprehensive in scope. This document will be posted on the Acton Public/Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools website and be distributed to community partners for public access. The Acton Public/Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be reviewed and updated at least biennially, as mandated by M.G.L. c. 71, § 15

Acton Public Schools and Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

Statement of Purpose:

The Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying and cyber-bullying. This commitment is an integral part of the District's comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

In order to reach this systemic goal, leadership at all levels will play a critical role in the development and implementation of Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan ("Plan") in the context of the District's and school and community efforts to promote a positive environment (wellness, safety initiatives, demographic study, etc.), through public involvement in developing the Plan, assessing needs and resources, and planning and oversight.

The Plan was developed in consultation and collaboration with teachers, school staff, professional support staff, administrators, community representatives, including parents and/or guardians, and local law enforcement agencies. A task force was developed which represented a wide variety of positions to make our plan representative of all constituencies. Notice and public comment period was afforded before adoption of the policy voted on by the respective School Committees.

This Plan was part of the District's blueprint for enhancing capacity to prevent and respond to issues of bullying within the context of our other initiatives listed above. School leaders, with input from home and school, assessed the adequacy of current programs, reviewed current policies and procedures, reviewed available data on bullying and other behavioral incidents, and assessed available resources (and funding) for curricula options, training programs, and behavioral health services. As part of this review, we have set priorities for the review of School Committee policies and subsequent procedures that affect these initiatives that promote a safe environment. Extensive collaboration is done with our community law enforcement agency.

Consequently, this Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber bullying, and the District is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. Major components include:

- Development of a community culture that publicly communicates that bullying is unacceptable in any form.
- Commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community.
- Commitment to a pro-social, research-based curriculum and/or program that promotes positive peer relations.
- Commitment to addressing the needs of the victim concurrently with the on-going investigation and response to the bully.
- Annual discussion of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan with students (no later than October 1st of each year).
- Adequate supervision of students to address bullying prevention and intervention.
- Ongoing training and support of teachers and school staff in the use of proactive and effective strategies for responding to bullying and supporting bystanders and victims.

- Systematic review of the overall bullying prevention and intervention approaches used by the school.

As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, this Plan was developed with various constituencies; Acton and Acton-Boxborough administrators, faculty and staff, interested community representatives, students, parents, guardians, and the Acton and Acton-Boxborough School Committees. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The Principals are responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan at their respective buildings.

Definitions:

In order to work as collaboratively and as efficaciously as possible, to prevent and intervene on all acts of bullying, it is essential for administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, guardians, law enforcement agencies, and other interested parties to use common language. The following definitions are provided to facilitate this goal.

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

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71 § 370, 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:

- i. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- ii. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her 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 the school.

Cyber-bullying, 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 § 370 for the legal definition of cyber-bullying.

Hostile environment, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71 § 370, 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, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Relationship to Other Laws:

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the 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 this Plan prevents the District from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based upon a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state, or federal law, or the District's policies.

Additionally, nothing in this Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of the school or district to take disciplinary action under M.G.L., c.71, §§ 37H or 37H1/2, other applicable laws, or District policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.

Moreover, bullying behaviors are persistent, pervasive or chronic which intimidate and/or intentionally harm or threaten to harm someone in a physical/emotional manner. Bullying is defined as the act of one or more individuals intimidating one or more persons through electronic, written, verbal, physical acts or gestures or any combination thereof, either direct or indirect, mental and/or visual, when such intentional behavior substantially interferes with a student's education, threatens the overall educational environment, and/or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school.

These behaviors include physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property, placing the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, creating a hostile environment for the target, or infringing on the rights of the target at school. Specific examples include but are not limited to maliciously teasing, taunting, name-calling, sexual remarks, stealing or damaging an individual's possessions, spreading rumors, or encouraging others to reject or exclude someone. This intentional behavior includes but is not limited to harassment, intimidation, and bullying based upon race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, marital status, physical appearance, or mental, physical or sensory disability. Retaliation is prohibited and includes 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. This prohibition shall apply to all District employees, contractors, volunteers, parents/guardians, and students, including conduct between/among all parties.

Peer conflict involves disagreement and oppositional interactions which are situational, immediate, and developmentally appropriate. These latter behaviors, with adult guidance and modeling, assist in developing new skills in social competency, learning personal boundaries and conflict resolution strategies.

As defined in the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy, bullying can be any intentional written, electronic, verbal or physical act or actions against a student, school volunteer or school employee that a reasonable person, under the circumstances should know will have the effect of:

- a. Placing a student, school volunteer or school employee in reasonable fear of harm to his or her emotional or physical well-being or damage to his or her property,
- b. Creating a hostile, threatening, humiliating or abusive educational environment due to the pervasiveness or persistence of actions or due to a power differential between the bully and the victim,
- c. Interfering with a student, school volunteer or school employee having a safe environment that is necessary to facilitate educational achievement, opportunities or benefits,

- d. Perpetuating bullying by inciting, soliciting or coercing an individual or group to demean, dehumanize, embarrass or cause emotional, psychological or physical harm to another student, school employee, or school volunteer,
- e. Infringing on the rights of the other student, school volunteer or school employee at school, or
- f. Materially and substantially disrupting the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Policies and Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Bullying and Retaliation

A. Planning and Oversight:

The building principal or designee is ultimately responsible for the following tasks under the Plan:

- a. Receiving reports on bullying or retaliation;
- b. Collecting and analyzing school-wide data on bullying to assess the present level of need and measure improved outcomes;
- c. Creating a process for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors;
- d. Implementing the ongoing professional development that is required by law;
- e. Identifying support strategies that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors;
- f. Choosing and implementing, in partnership with central office administrators, the curricula that the school or district will use;
- g. Amending the student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct; and,
- h. Leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials.

The Director of Technology will be responsible for updating the Acceptable Use Policy.

B. Reporting Potential Bullying or Retaliation:

A culture of openness is considered the most effective means for countering bullying behavior. It is the responsibility of each member of the school community: students, staff and parents to report instances of bullying or retaliation, with the understanding that such reports will be listened to and taken seriously.

- a. Any school employee that has reliable information that would lead a reasonable person to suspect that a person is a target of bullying or retaliation shall immediately report it to the principal or designee. School employees also include custodians, cafeteria workers, recess, bus monitors and drivers.
- b. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing.
- c. The District will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school and home community including, but not limited to, an incident reporting form, a voice mailbox, a dedicated mailing address and an email address. Reports of bullying and/or retaliation, reported by students, parents or guardians, or others, may be made anonymously but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of these anonymous reports.

C. Responding to Potential Bullying or Retaliation:

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 the 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 steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary for all parties involved.

The Principal or designee will implement appropriate strategies for protecting a student who has reported bullying or retaliation, a student who has witnesses 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.

D. Investigative Procedures for Potential Bullying or Retaliation:

Each school is required to investigate in a timely manner and determine whether or not bullying or retaliation has occurred. This requires a determination as to the nature of the incident (bullying v. peer conflict). Once determined, an investigation and outreach to the target and family shall occur **concurrently** with a commitment to addressing the needs of the target, identifying and educating bystanders, and providing formative/educational consequences for aggressors.

Steps to be taken should include:

- a. Determine the nature, chronicity, and severity of the presenting situation.
- b. Identify aggressor(s), target(s), and bystanders
- c. Provide a safety and comfort plan for the target(s).
- d. Identify whether or not the bullying has occurred on or off campus.
- e. Immediately inform aggressors about the consequences for bullying, retaliation, and cyber-bullying in or out of school.
- f. Have conversations with all parties.
- g. Inform parents, guardians and all relevant adults of initial investigation; notice of confidentiality.
- h. Establish a timetable for following up with parents, especially parents of target(s)
- i. Collection and documentation of data.

Non-Classroom Supervision:

Each school must supervise non-classroom areas. The review and exchange of information regarding non-classroom areas are important to:

- a. Determine “hot spots” that bullying and/or retaliation may more likely occur.
- b. Consider ways of keeping certain groups or students apart during transitions, or building positive collaborations between older and younger students.
- c. Consider adult density in “hot spots” if necessary.

E. Consequences from Findings:

Upon the principal or designee determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the District use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior M.G.L. c. 71 § 370(d)(v). Skill building approaches include offering individualized skill-building sessions based on our District's anti-bullying curricula, providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with our counselors and psychologists, implementing a range of academic and non-academic positive behavioral support to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals, meeting with parents and guardians to engage parent 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.

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

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which should be read in cooperation with the State laws regarding student discipline, govern discipline procedures for students with disabilities.

If the Principal or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, the student may be subject to disciplinary action.

Consequences for bullying or retaliation should be immediately and consistently applied and must be delivered in a non-hostile manner. Consequences may be disagreeable or uncomfortable but should not involve revenge or hostile punishment.

Consequences should consider these specific issues:

- a. Nature, severity, and chronicity of the behavioral impact on the victim
- b. Degree of physical, psychological, social harm on the victim
- c. Student's age, development and degree of maturity
- d. Surrounding circumstances and context in which the incident(s) occurred
- e. Prior disciplinary history and continuing patterns of behavior
- f. Relationship between and among the parties involved
- g. Context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred
- h. The need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior.

The appropriate range of consequences, subject to due process where appropriate, is as follows:

- a. Verbal reprimand
- b. Temporary removal from the classroom
- c. Loss of privileges, including before and after school activities
- d. Time-out
- e. Notice to parent
- f. Supervised break times
- g. Detention
- h. In-school suspension
- i. Out-of-school suspension
- j. Reassignment of seats in lunch, bus, class, etc.
- k. Reassignment of classes

- l. Referral to an outside agency
- m. Reassignment to another school or another mode of transportation
- n. Expulsion
- o. Report to law enforcement

In addition, formative activities will be given, which may include:

- a. Reparation to the target (recognizing that direct apology may be contraindicated)
- b. Completion of curricular based assignment(s)
- c. Meeting with Civil Rights Coordinator
- d. Completion of community service designed to help the aggressor understand and respect differences; written report required by the aggressor
- e. Therapeutic support for both aggressor and targets

F. Notification Obligations:

Notice to another school or district: If an incident of bullying or retaliation involves students from more than one school district, commonwealth charter school, or non-public school, a school administrator shall promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school or district so that both may take appropriate action.

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 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 of 603 CMR 49.00.

The Principal or designees will notify the parents/guardians of the acts the District has taken to prevent further acts of bullying and retaliation through consequences and formative activities, as discussed above. Moreover, the school will notify the parents/guardians about the range of services, including, but not limited to, counseling (guidance, adjustment counseling, school psychology intervention) both individually and in group, social groups (social skills building, social pragmatic groups), friendship groups, discussion groups, role-playing groups, etc. that are specifically designed to address issues of bullying and retaliation. These individual and group interventions are designed to teach generalization skills. Staff will be given time to regularly communicate and collaborate with each other to ensure consistent reinforcement of a student’s specific skills, adjust the school environment to meet that student’s needs, and be notified to prevent any further acts of bullying and retaliation. Specialists will consult with staff to help students becoming targets and/or aggressors. These acts will be discussed openly with the parents/guardians to establish a trusting relationship between home and school.

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 requirement of 603 CMR 49.00.

In making these determinations, the Principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the school resource officer and the Superintendent or designee. At all times, schools will remain sensitive to the confidentiality of all parties, but may not be able to preserve fully the confidential nature of the allegation.

Collaboration with Families:

The Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools in collaboration with parent associations 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 used by the district or individual school.

Each year the Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that is being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyber-bullying and online safety. The schools or district will send parents written notice every 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 District will further post the Plan and related information on its website.

Access to Resources and Services:

A key aspect of promoting positive school climates is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of targets, aggressors, families, and others are addressed. In this regard, the Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools will refer families/guardians of targets and aggressors to a variety of appropriate resources within the District. The Acton-Boxborough Schools utilize school counselors, school psychologists who assist in developing safety plans for students who have been targets of bullying or retaliation, providing social skills programs to prevent bullying, and offering education and/or intervention services for students exhibiting bullying behaviors. The Acton-Boxborough Schools utilize a variety of tools including, but not limited to, behavioral intervention plans, social skills groups, and individually focused curricula. Translators are provided as needed. In some cases, families/guardians of targets and aggressors will be referred to appropriate counseling services outside the school. The District will have the upmost respect and sensitivity for families of targets and aggressors and offer help for families to determine the appropriate service for them.

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 that should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. All special education staff is annually trained on this requirement.

All resources are evaluated on design engaging to students, in keeping with the District's core values, and culturally and linguistically appropriate and linked to community service agencies.

Ongoing Academic and Non-Academic Activities for Students:

Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research (evidence-based), which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:

- a. Using scripts, role plays, and social stories to develop skills;
- b. 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;
- c. Helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;

- d. Emphasizing cyber-safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- e. Enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful verbal and written communications; and,
- f. Engaging students in a safe supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference.

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

- a. Setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
- b. Creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students;
- c. Using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- d. Using positive behavioral supports;
- e. Encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- f. Modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- g. 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;
- h. Using the Internet safely; and
- i. Supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

Ongoing Professional Development:

In general, professional development opportunities will establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, constructive management for classroom behaviors, civil communication, empathy and respect for differences. Specifically, the District will provide an annual school based bullying prevention and intervention training each year for all employees to include staff duties under the Plan (found also in the District employee handbook and code of conduct), an overview of the steps that the Principal and/or designee will follow upon receipt of a report, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades. All staff members hired after the start of the school year is required to participate in school-based training during the school year in which they are hired.

The content of such on-going professional development will include:

- a. Developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to prevent and/or stop bullying incidents,
- b. Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witness to the bullying,
- c. Research findings including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment, including, a particular focus of the student on the autism spectrum or students whose disability affects social skill development, information on the incident and nature of cyber-bullying, and internet safety as they relate to cyber-bullying.
- d. Ways to prevent and respond to bullying or retaliation for students with disabilities, which must be considered in the development of the student's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

For parents and guardians, the District will offer education programs that are focused on the parental components of the bullying prevention curricula and any social competency curricula used by the District or school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTO, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.