

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Reauthorized by the Westwood School Committee on January 13, 2022



Revised December 8, 2022

This document will be posted on the Westwood Public Schools website and be distributed to community partners for public access. The Westwood Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be reviewed and updated at least biennially, as mandated by M.G.L. c.71,§.15.

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I. Leadership

Statement of Purpose

The Westwood Public Schools expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

The Westwood Public Schools is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying and cyberbullying. This commitment is an integral part of our 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. This plan, and our commitment to anti-bullying, is supported by the District's core values, which were re-affirmed as part of our recent strategic planning process. They are listed below.

The Westwood Public Schools will create an environment for learning by demonstrating:

- Academic excellence and a commitment to improvement
- Curiosity and tenacity
- Respectful relationships in a caring, collaborative community

The Westwood Public Schools is committed to a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community. We recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to become targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including: race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, family structure, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental disability or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics.

The Westwood 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 promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action. 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 Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan ("Plan") is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and the district is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community, to prevent issues of violence. We have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to the incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. The Principals are responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan at their respective buildings.

Public Involvement in Developing the Plan

As required by M.G.L. c.71, §.37O, the Plan will be developed with various constituencies. This involvement will include: Westwood Public Schools administrators, faculty, and staff; school volunteers; interested community representatives, students, parents, and guardians; and the Westwood School Committee. Consultation will include, at a minimum, notice and a public comment period before the Westwood School Committee adopts the Plan. In addition, each building principal will work with their respective School Site Councils and/or Parent-Teacher Organizations to review the draft plan and solicit feedback. Furthermore, students at Westwood High School also have the opportunity to provide input regarding the plan.

Assessing Needs and Resources

The Superintendent, along with the Superintendent's designees, with input from administrators, faculty, and families, will assess the adequacy of current programs, policies, and procedures. This task will include:

- Review of current policies and procedures;
- Review of available data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying and behavior incidents;
- Assessment of available resources, including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services; for designing ongoing professional development;
- Review of current and relevant articles and research on best methodology to prevent, intervene, and address bullying and cyberbullying;
- Research and review evidence-based, "field tested," and research-based anti-bullying curricula and instructional guides;
- Making resources available on the District website;
- At least once every four years, the District will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education-developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our schools. Additionally, the school or district will annually report bullying incident data to the Department.

Planning and Oversight

The building Principals or designee will be responsible for the following tasks under the Plan:

- The Administrative Council, with input from other stakeholders as appropriate, will be responsible for reviewing and updating the plan biennially, or more frequently if needed.

II. Prohibition Against Bullying and Retaliation

Bullying is prohibited:

- At school and at all school facilities;
- At school-sponsored or school-related functions, whether on or off school grounds;
- On school buses or other vehicles owned, leased, or used by the school district, and at school bus stops;
- Through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, licensed, or used by the school district; and
- At non-school related locations and through non-school technology or electronic devices, if the bullying materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

As stated in M.G.L. c.71,§.370, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

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 and shall be grounds for discipline. The protections detailed in this plan apply to all students regardless of their status under the law.

III. Definitions

In order to work as collaboratively and as effectively as possible, to prevent and intervene on all acts of bullying, it is essential for administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, and 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 or a member of 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, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71,§.370, is the repeated use by one or more students or members of a school staff of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

1. Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
2. Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;

3. Creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
4. Infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
5. Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

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 posting. 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.

IV. 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, gender identity, 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, or 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.

Finally, while M.G.L. c.71,§.37O requires the Principal to contact the parents of a student who has been the alleged target or alleged perpetrator of bullying, the actions being taken to prevent

further acts of bullying shall be discussed with all parties within the boundaries of all applicable state and federal laws related to student confidentiality.

V. Training and Professional Development

The Westwood Public Schools will meet the requirements under M.G.L. c.71,§.37O to provide ongoing professional development for all staff, including but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals.

Annual Staff Training on the Plan

Annual staff training on the Plan will take place during the month of September of each school year, in conjunction with other annual mandated training requirements, including training on School Safety, Civil Rights, Restraint, Ethics, and Confidentiality.

Staff members hired after the start of the 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 or comparable program within the last two years.

Ongoing Professional Development

The Administrative Council will be responsible for oversight and implementation of the training used throughout the system. 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:

- Developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- Developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- 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;
- Information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying;
- Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying;
- Promoting and modeling the use of respectful language;

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- 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.

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.

Written Notice to Staff

The Westwood Public Schools will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing it on the Employee section of the district website at www.westwood.k12.ma.us, and by posting relevant updates via email, and/or by hardcopy in faculty rooms or other public spaces.

VI. Access to Resources and Services

The Superintendent or designee will charge the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction or their designee(s) with responsibility for researching, reviewing, and adopting appropriate curriculum and instructional materials for use in the schools. This work will require consultation with other appropriate district and town resources. The curriculum must be:

- Developmentally appropriate
- Evidence based, based on research or field tested
- Evaluated for effectiveness

The resources will be evaluated on documented success rate, design that is engaging to students, and in keeping with our core values and philosophies of pedagogy.

Identifying Resources

The Administrative Council and/or the anti-bullying curriculum subcommittee will be responsible for creating and posting a bibliography of anti-bullying resources including, but not limited to:

- The Westwood Public Schools Anti-Bullying Policy

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- The Westwood Public Schools Anti-Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
- Research articles and materials on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying
- Relevant and useful website
- Community resources and related services

The bibliography and resources will reside on the District website.

Counseling and Other Services

The Westwood Public Schools has a variety of appropriate resources within the district and community. The Westwood Public Schools utilizes guidance counselors and 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 Westwood Public Schools utilizes a variety of tools including, but not limited to, behavioral intervention plans, social skills groups, and individually focused curricula.

Counseling and Other Services

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

Referral to Outside Services

The Westwood Public Schools has a referral protocol for referring students and families to access appropriate services. In particular, the schools have a strong partnership with Westwood Youth and Family Services (WYFS). According to their website, WYFS is a municipally-funded agency providing clinical and support services designed to foster the healthy growth of children ages 4-18. Parents and children often contact WYFS because of school-related behavior or academic issues, peer and social problems, child and parent conflict, or other behavior problems associated with normal child and family development. WYFS offers a wide range of services that are free to Westwood residents and confidential. WYFS has an office staffed with a full-time counselor at Westwood High School.

VII. Academic and Non-Academic Activities

Specific Bullying Prevention Approaches

Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, may include the following:

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

General Teaching Approaches that Support Bullying Prevention Efforts

The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of the Westwood Public Schools 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;
- 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.

VIII. Policies and Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Bullying and Retaliation

Reporting Potential Bullying or Retaliation

Reports of potential 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 documented in an age appropriate manner by the Principal or designee. A school or district staff member is required to report promptly 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. **Note: It is imperative that anonymous reports contain detailed information about the alleged incident to allow the school to respond appropriately.** The Westwood Public Schools will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community, including an anonymous electronic option.

Use of a written form is not required as a condition of making a report. The Westwood Public Schools will:

1. Take all reported incidents either verbal or written and will record necessary information to document the information as reported,
2. Provide information on how to report incidents on both the website for each school, as well as in school handbooks.

At the beginning of each school year, the Superintendent 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 or district website, and in information about the Plan that is made available to parents or guardians.

Reporting by Faculty and Staff

A faculty or staff member will report promptly 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.

Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others

The school or district strongly encourages 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.** The Principal or designee will document all reported incidents.

Responding to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation

Safety

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Principal or designee will take steps to assess the safety needs of the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. 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 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.

Obligations to Notify Others

Notice to Parents or Guardians: Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding to it. 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. As stated previously in Section IV of the Plan, while M.G.L. c.71B,§.370 requires the Principal to contact the parents or guardians of a student who has been the alleged target or alleged perpetrator of bullying, the actions being taken to prevent further acts of bullying shall be discussed with all parties within the boundaries of all applicable state and federal laws related to student confidentiality.

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.

Notice to Law Enforcement: If the school principal or a designee determines that bullying has occurred, he/she shall take appropriate disciplinary action. On behalf of the student, the principal may consult with the local law enforcement agency to determine if criminal charges are warranted. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00.

At any time before, during, or after the investigation, the Principal may, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the School Resource Officer or other representative of the local law enforcement agency and the Superintendent or designee.

Investigation

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

During the investigation, the Principal or designee may, 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.

The Principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the Principal or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, may conduct interviews. 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. To the extent possible, the Principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation, including preserving electronic communication such as email and text communications.

Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with Westwood Public Schools policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, the Principal or designee will, with the consent of the Superintendent, 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

reasonable steps to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefitting 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 counselors, 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.**

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

Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the district may do so with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at www.doe.mass.edu/pqa; emails can be sent to compliance@doe.mass.edu; or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hardcopies of this information are also available at the Superintendent's Office.

Responses to Bullying

Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-Building

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

- Meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home;
- Implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals;

- Providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with guidance counselors and other appropriate school personnel;
- Making a referral for evaluation; and
- Adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills.

Taking Disciplinary Action

If the Principal or designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the Principal or designee. 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.

Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

The Principal or designee will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to ensure the safety of all students. 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 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.

IX. Collaboration with Families

The Westwood Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan includes strategies to engage and collaborate with students' families in order to increase the capacity of each of our schools as well as the district to prevent and respond to bullying. Provisions for informing parents or guardians about the bullying prevention and intervention curricula used by the schools include:

1. How parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the district or plan
2. The dynamics of bullying
3. Online safety and cyberbullying

Parents and guardians will also be notified in writing each year about the student-related sections of the Westwood Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

Schools will collaborate with School Site Councils and parent organizations (PTOs, SEPAC, Site Councils) to create parent resource and information networks. Schools will work with these parent groups to offer education programs for parents and guardians that focus on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula used by the school(s). These programs will include overview of reporting procedures and responses, review of cyber-safety procedures, and bullying prevention.

Schools will annually inform parents or guardians about the anti-bullying curricula. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. The schools will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Westwood Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and the Westwood Public Schools Network and Internet Acceptable Use Policy. All notices and information made available to parents or guardians will be in hardcopy and electronic formats, and will be made available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The district will post the Plan and related information on its website.