

Abington Public Schools
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy

The Abington School Committee and the Abington Public School District is committed to providing a safe and civil educational environment for all students, employees, volunteers and patrons which is free from harassment, intimidation, bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation.

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy shall apply to students and members of a school staff, including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activity, paraprofessionals and appointed volunteers.

Policy:

The Abington Public School District, in accordance with the General Laws of Massachusetts, Chapter 71, §37O, prohibits bullying in any form.

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

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

(ii) at a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the target or witnesses, infringe on their rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Nothing in this Policy 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 is also prohibited.

Nothing in this policy is designed or intended to limit the District's authority to discipline or take remedial action under General Laws Chapter 71, §§ 37H or 37H1/2, M.G.L. Chapter 76 § 5 or other applicable laws or school or district policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether this policy covers the conduct or behavior.

I. Definitions

Bullying is defined as the repeated and intentional use by one or more students or by a member of a school staff including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities or paraprofessionals of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target. Bullying is characterized by an imbalance of physical, psychological or emotional power, 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 self/her self 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.

For purposes of this section, bullying shall include cyberbullying.

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

Perpetrator is defined as a student or a member of a school staff, including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, counselor, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional who engages in bullying or retaliation. For purposes of this Policy, the term "aggressor" will have the same meaning as "perpetrator".

Cyberbullying is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 370 for a complete legal definition of cyberbullying.

Where the term "bullying" is used in this document, it is intended to encompass both "bullying" and "cyberbullying" as defined above.

Retaliation is defined as 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.

II. Leadership

The Abington Public School Department's administration, faculty and staff will, in conjunction and cooperation with each school building's Student Support Team (SST) review, develop and oversee bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

- As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, planning is reviewed and developed in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents, and guardians.
- At least once every four years beginning with 2015/16 school year, the district will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary-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.
- It is recognized 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, or sensory, disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. Specific steps will be taken to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

III. Procedures for Reporting Bullying and Retaliation

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing. A school staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school staff members, may be made anonymously. The school district will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, a voicemail box, a dedicated mailing address, and an email address.

A. Reporting by Staff

A staff member will report immediately to the principal or designee when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report to the principal or designee does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school or district policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

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

The Abington Public School District expects students, parents or guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the principal or designee. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Students, parents or guardians, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member, or with the principal or designee. The principal or designee will consider the following when addressing a student involved in an act of bullying or retaliation:

- Acknowledge student's feelings
- Determine if there are safety issues that must be addressed immediately
- Staff member completes incident report and gives to designated administrative staff member

If a report is anonymous:

- Determine if there are safety issues that must be addressed immediately
- Staff member completes incident report and gives to designated administrative staff member

IV. Procedures for Investigating Reported 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 additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The principal or designee will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying or retaliation a student who has reported bullying or retaliation, a student who has witnessed bullying or retaliation, a student who provides information during an investigation, or a student who has reliable information about a reported act of bullying or retaliation.

The safety of all students involved in the alleged incident will be monitored at all times.

Interview Procedure:

- Interview the target and the alleged aggressor separately
- Identify the problem
- Determine if incident is repetitive in nature
- Protect the target's confidentiality when possible
- In case of denial or if further information is needed, interview witnesses.
- Make the alleged aggressor aware of consequences of retaliation against target and reporter
- Encourage reporting of future incidents
- Document all interviews

V. Procedures for Follow-Up of Investigating Reported Bullying or Retaliation

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.

- Prohibition of Retaliation
It will be explained to the target, aggressor, and where appropriate, the witnesses that any retaliation taken by any party against any other party as a result of the reporting of the incident is strictly forbidden and could be subject to school and/or legal action.
- Insufficient Evidence
If there is insufficient evidence that the situation meets the definition of bullying, inform the parties involved and continue to monitor the situation. Refer to the Student Handbook for further disciplinary action if applicable.

- **Target Safety**
The target's need for protection will be assessed and addressed. A post incident conference with the target will be held during which the target will be reassured of his or her safety and steps taken to prevent further occurrences.
- **Disciplinary Action Procedure**
In cases where it is determined that disciplinary action is needed the Principal or designee shall assign such consequences as are outlined in the Student Code of Conduct within the Student Handbook.
- **Notification of Parents**
Parents of the alleged aggressor and target should be contacted as soon as possible following the conclusion of the investigation or the end of the student day, whichever comes first.

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.

- **Student Support Team (SST) Follow-Up**
Following the conclusion of the investigation, the case will be brought to the building level Student Support Team. SST will discuss further needs of the target, aggressor, appropriate family members of the involved students and any witnesses and determine if further services and/or referrals to outside services are necessary. When appropriate, additional staff members will be notified such as: special education, general education, and support staff.
- **Special Education Process: Students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP)**
An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools, Section 7
"For students identified with developmental or mental disabilities, the IEP team must consider and specifically address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. (see M.G.L.C. 71B, 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010)

Whenever the IEP Team evaluation indicates that a student's disability affects social skills development or when the student's disability makes him or her vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing, the IEP must address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

- **Reporting of Criminal Acts Relative to Bullying**
Should it be determined that a crime has been committed in the act of bullying and/or cyberbullying, the Principal or designee will contact the Superintendent

of Schools then the Abington Police Department in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding.

- **False Accusations**
If it is determined that a student has knowingly provided a false accusation of bullying or retaliation, such action will be considered in itself an act of harassment or bullying/retaliation. An appropriate consequence will be assigned as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct within the Student Handbook.
- **Notification of Other Districts**
If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, the principal or designee will promptly notify the principal or designee of the other school or district. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, and 603 CMR 49.00.

VI. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Abington Public Schools is dedicated to providing 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 an extracurricular activity and paraprofessionals. Our plan for providing professional development reflects the requirements under M.G.L.c.71, § 370.

A. Annual Staff Training

Abington Public Schools has committed to train faculty representatives through the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) at Bridgewater State University. This training is approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and is grounded in the research and best practices of Bullying Prevention and Intervention. Through this “Train-the-Trainer” Model, faculty representatives will serve as liaisons to all staff.

B. Ongoing Professional Development

The bullying prevention and intervention policy includes ongoing, research-based professional development to build the skills of all members of school staff, including but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activity and paraprofessionals, to prevent, identify and respond to bullying. The content of such professional development includes:

1. Developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents;
2. Developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
3. Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among the aggressor, the target, and any witnesses to the bullying;
4. Research findings on bullying;
5. Information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
6. Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

C. Written Notice to Staff

All Abington Public Schools' employees will be provided a copy of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy. It will also be available as an electronic document on the Abington Public Schools' Website at www.abingtonps.org.

D. Parents and Guardians

Parents and Guardians will be informed about the bullying prevention and intervention curricula used by the school district or school including:

1. How parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the school or district policy;
2. Dynamics of bullying; and
3. Online safety and cyberbullying.

Parents and guardians will also be notified in writing each year about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy, in the language(s) most prevalent among the parents or guardians. School- or district-specific approaches to collaboration should take into account age, climate, socio-economic factors, linguistic, and cultural make-up of students and the parents.

The school or district 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 school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTO, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.

Each year the school or district will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. The school or

district will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Policy 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 Abington Public Schools will post the Policy and related information on its website at www.abingtonps.org.

VII. Problem Resolution System:

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: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa>, emails can be sent to compliance@doe.mass.edu or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information is also available at the Superintendent's office.

Approved by the
Abington School Committee
on March 29, 2011

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