

# Public Schools of Brookline



## Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

*Original Plan: December 30, 2011*

*Updates: July 2013, July 2014, February 2020, June 2022, February 2025*

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Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan  
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### Introduction

It is the mission of the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) to educate and inspire every student to lead a fulfilling life and make positive contributions to our world. To accomplish this mission, our schools must be safe, welcoming, respectful, and nurturing. The District 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 academic achievement and belonging for all students.

**Bullying is defined** as a student(s)' (or a PSB employee's) *repeated* written, verbal, or electronic communication and/or physical act or gesture that targets a student, causes them physical or emotional harm, damages to their property, places them in reasonable fear of harm to themselves and/or their property; and/or disrupts their learning environment and access to education. Please note that the term "repeated" is meant to describe two or more connected incidents.

The school district and our schools expect that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences. We recognize that some students may be more vulnerable to becoming 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, sexual orientation, mental, intellectual, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The District will identify specific steps to create a safe, welcoming, and 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.

PSB 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, or any inappropriate and harmful communications or interactions outside of school that are serious enough to impact a student's access to education. Bullying behavior can occur (and is prohibited) in the following scenarios: student to student and staff to student. Protections are afforded to all students regardless of their legal status.

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PSB will promptly investigate 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 caregiver 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 and respond to issues of bullying, cyberbullying, and/or retaliation. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. Each school principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan except when a reported bullying incident involves the principal or the assistant principal as the alleged aggressor. In such cases and in cases dealing with members of the central office administration staff, the Superintendent or designee shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the Plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged target. If the Superintendent is the alleged aggressor, the School Committee, or its designee, shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the Plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged victim.

In 2010, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts approved new legislation, An Act Relative to Bullying (c. 92, Acts of 2010). Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 37O, require schools to take active steps to prevent and respond to bullying. The PSB's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (hereinafter, the "Plan") has been updated to reflect M.G.L. c. 71, §37O, as amended by Sections 72 - 74 of Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013 and Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014.

The first Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (January 2011) was developed in consultation with district stakeholders, including parents/caregivers, teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, and students. The Superintendent or his/her designee is charged with reviewing and updating the Plan biennially.

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Consultation will include, at a minimum, posting a proposed updated Plan on the PSB website, and a public comment period prior to the adoption of an updated Plan.

At the beginning of each school year, the Superintendent or designee, provides the school community, including staff, students, and parents/caregivers with written notice of District policies for reporting bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the name and contact information of the Deputy Superintendent for Student Services and building-level administrators (principals and vice principals), is incorporated in student and staff handbooks, and information about the Plan is made available to parents/caregivers. The Plan can be found on the district website.

### **ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES**

Every two years, PSB will review and assess the adequacy of the current policies and procedures, current programs, and assess various resources. This information will be used to update the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, procedures, training, and curricula accordingly.

At least every four years, PSB will administer a student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in schools. The survey results will be used to assess the effectiveness of curricula and instruction that support bullying prevention (which is required under the bullying prevention and intervention statute). PSB currently uses a self-report survey in grades 3 to 12 that measures students' school belonging, supportive peer and adult relationships, social awareness, positive emotional experiences, challenging emotional experiences, and emotional regulation three times a year. These data will be presented to the PSB school committee and Community Stakeholders at least annually. Once every two years, PSB administers the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to Middle School and High School students, which includes questions about the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying. These data will be presented to the PSB school committee and Community Stakeholders bi-annually.

### **Identifying resources**

The Plan includes a process to identify the resources and supports that are available in every school for students who are targets of bullying, student aggressors, and their families. These resources and supports are separate from the people who could

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deliver them. Principals, in collaboration with appropriate district staff and support personnel (e.g., counselors, psychologists) may help identify these resources. The Plan also allows for a process to identify a team of people who could be available as an intervention team for students who are targets of bullying, student aggressors, and their families. Schools will conduct an annual review of existing and needed resources and current staffing and programs that support the creation of positive school environments by focusing on early interventions and intensive services.

### **Counseling and other services**

School adjustment counselors/social workers, school counselors, board-certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), nurses, school psychologists, and student intervention team (child study team) members can help identify a variety of therapeutic and skill-based services for students who may be vulnerable to being bullied, harassed or teased, or to being identified as an aggressor. Supports may include restorative circles, school-based counseling, risk assessment, crisis intervention, safety and support plans, and help accessing community-based mental health services.

Administrators, classroom teachers, school counselors, school adjustment counselors/social workers, board-certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), nurses, and school psychologists can also provide parents and teachers with resources and support to address students' academic, emotional, and behavioral concerns as a result of bullying, harassment, or teasing. Examples of interventions to help address students' needs include individually focused curricula, social skills groups, therapeutic groups focused on developing emotional regulation skills, restorative circles, and behavioral intervention plans.

Every school has a Student Intervention Team (formerly Child Study Team) and a Clinical Team that meets regularly to discuss students. These teams can help identify the supports and services that may help students who are targets of bullying, student aggressors, and their families. For example, Clinical Team members often work collaboratively to apprise parents of outside resources to enhance parenting skills and provide for the needs of children. This includes providing linguistically and culturally responsive resources to families.

School counselors, school adjustment counselors/social workers, and school psychologists maintain current information on community-based mental health

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agencies, services, and providers who can offer social-emotional and mental health support to students. School adjustment counselors/social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, speech pathologists, and BCBA's work collaboratively to develop behavior plans and social thinking groups for students who may be vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

### **Students with Disabilities**

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 that the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of their 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.

Within the context of their IEPs, students with disabilities who have needs in this area may receive specialized instruction from speech and language pathologists, counselors, school psychologists, social workers, special education teachers, and/or other special education staff. This specialized instruction may include but is not limited to direct and indirect ways to react to and avoid bullying behavior. Goals and objectives focused on the needs of the individual student may include areas such as self-advocacy skills, social communication skills, skills for responding to teasing, problem-solving skills, skills for managing anger, skills for recognizing the feelings of others, and conflict resolution skills.

### **Referral to outside services**

School counselors, school adjustment counselors/social workers, and school psychologists have an established practice of providing parents/caregivers and students with referral information and assistance in accessing social-emotional and mental health support and services in their community. At this time, the Public Schools of Brookline has contracts with Care Solace, Cartwheel Care, and the Brookline Center. School-based clinical staff and administrators can work closely with students and families to help them access these supports.

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## **ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES**

### **Specific bullying prevention practices**

Direct instruction to support bullying prevention happens at the class, small group, and individual levels. At the class level, lessons targeting bullying prevention are led by classroom teachers (e.g., Second Step), school counselors, and health teachers. At the individual and small group levels, instruction is provided by counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other related service providers. The following skills are emphasized within these levels of instruction:

- explicitly teaching students social-emotional skills, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making;
- having students actively practice skills with peers;
- empowering students to take action by helping them understand what to do when they witness other students or school staff engage in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- helping students understand and identify the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying;
- emphasizing cybersafety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- enhancing students' ability to take the perspective of, and experience empathy for, others;
- enhancing students' skills for initiating and maintaining healthy relationships and respectful communication; and
- engaging students in a safe and supportive school environment that is respectful and affirming of all diversity and differences.

### **General teaching strategies that support bullying prevention efforts**

The following strategies are integral to establishing safe and supportive school environments. As part of our regular practice in PSB, educators consistently focus on:

- establishing, teaching, and reinforcing clear developmentally appropriate behavioral expectations and classroom routines for students;



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- creating and maintaining safe, positive, and affirming school and classroom environments for all students, including students who may be vulnerable to experiencing bullying, harassment, or teasing;
- actively reinforcing engagement in prosocial and respectful behavior;
- using positive behavioral supports and interventions to prevent and respond to challenging behavior;
- encouraging all adults to develop and maintain strong, positive relationships with students;
- providing students with ongoing opportunities to engage in collaborative learning with peers;
- providing students with ongoing instruction and support to effectively resolve conflicts in a healthy and positive way, including restorative justice;
- using the internet, technological devices, and social media safely and appropriately; and
- supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength and interest.

### **Social Emotional Learning/Anti-Bullying Programs**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) helps students acquire the skills necessary to be respectful and responsible members of their school community and the ever-evolving global society. Effectively supporting students' social-emotional development requires actively incorporating SEL into classroom routines, embedding SEL into academic instruction, and providing students with explicit SEL instruction. Effective SEL programs emphasize the development of five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. PSB aims to provide explicit, age-appropriate, and evidence-based instruction on bullying prevention and intervention to students. The following are offered across the district:

### **Restorative Justice Practices**

- Restorative justice refers to a set of formal and informal practices that are designed to strengthen communities and respond to harm after it occurs. In keeping with restorative practices' respect for human dignity, participation in any restorative practice must be entirely voluntary. The fundamental premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative, more productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority

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make decisions with them rather than to them or for them. When used to repair harm, restorative practices center on three questions:

- What was the harm caused to both the individual and the community?
  - Who is responsible for causing the harm and for making things right?
  - How can the harm be repaired and relationships restored to the greatest extent possible?
- Restorative practices focus on how to build connections between individuals and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making. The use of restorative practices in schools helps to improve human behavior, develop and maintain relationships, explore learning opportunities, and teach leadership and personal accountability.
  - In practice, classrooms can hold classwide restorative circles to build community. Additionally, when harm is experienced, restorative circles that include two students or a small group of students can be facilitated by a supportive adult. The goals for this type of circle are to offer space for students to describe the impact of the behavior, acknowledge the harm that was done, and develop plans for repairing the harm.

### **Explicit Social-Emotional Instruction**

In classrooms across the district, students are explicitly taught how to treat each other respectfully (i.e. what respect looks like in their school) and how students, including bystanders and the student who is bullied, should respond when peers are not being respectful.

**Elementary Curriculum.** School counselors and classroom teachers provide students in BEEP through 5th-grade weekly whole-class SEL lessons that address specific SEL competencies (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making) and ways to effectively prevent and respond to bullying, harassment, and teasing. This instruction includes the use of Second Step, which is an evidence-based SEL curriculum. This curriculum actively teaches skills related to empathy and kindness, emotional regulation, and problem-solving, each of which is critical in forming and maintaining strong, positive relationships. School counselors and classroom teachers also work together to develop lessons to meet the unique needs of individual classrooms, including teaching students how to identify and respond to bullying.

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**Middle School Curriculum.** Students in 7th and 8th grade participate in Health education. Health classes across the district use a skills-based approach to gain functional knowledge that supports the application of essential health skills and the promotion of overall wellness.

Health Skills Practiced

- Analyzing Influences
- Accessing Valid and Reliable Information
- Interpersonal Communication (including assertive and refusal skills)
- Decision-Making
- Goal Setting
- Self-Management
- Advocacy

7th Grade Content Topics :

- Supporting healthy self-esteem and self-concept
- Identify safety guidelines, and demonstrate strategies to avoid dangerous situations, including refusal skills
- Practicing managing emotions and feelings
- Demonstrating conflict resolution skills and active listening skills
- Examining situations where adult help is needed, determining support services, people, and resources
- Identifying different forms of bullying, including cyberbullying
- Discussing bystanding, upstanding, and how to be an allyship
- Developing media literacy skills and analyzing influences that promote aggression and violence
- Initiating and maintaining healthy and unhealthy relationships, which includes skills practice for confronting hurtful behavior and examining communication
- Discussing dating relationships, personal values/decision-making, non-sexual activities, qualities in a partner, abstinence, postponement, and consent

8th Grade Content Topics

- Practicing empathy skills and using “I-statements”.
- Practicing conflict resolution skills and managing emotions.
- Mental Health Literacy
- Initiating and maintaining friendships and healthy relationships

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- Reviewing bullying (including cyberbullying), laws, and prevention.
- Reviewing bystanders, upstanders, and allies
- Accessing support services at home, school, and in the community
- Discussing the importance of respect and boundaries.
- Identifying and practicing consent
- Defining and identifying different forms of sexual harassment
- Examining the importance of reporting sexual harassment
- Modeling, rehearsing, and demonstrating refusal skills in sexual contexts
- Describing how sexual decision-making can create an unplanned situation that affects future goals

**Wellness Education (9th Grade).** Using a skills-based health approach, students in the 9th-grade Lifetime Wellness classes gain functional knowledge that supports the application of essential health skills and the promotion of overall wellness.

Health Skills Practiced:

- Analyzing Influences
- Accessing Valid and Reliable Information
- Interpersonal Communication (including assertive and refusal skills)
- Decision-Making
- Goal Setting
- Self-Management
- Advocacy

Content Topics Covered:

- Identifying supports and resources (school, home, community)
- Review of bullying, bystanders, allies, and upstanders
- Violence prevention skill development
- Coping skills, stress management
- Identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Consent and boundaries
- Impact of media, culture, technology, and peers on health-promoting behaviors
- Examining the influence of substance use on behavior
- Practicing goal setting and advocating for self and others as it relates to health and safety
- Mental Health Literacy

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**Advisory/Hub (Grades 9 to 12).** Advisory/Hub is a program supported by the Innovation Fund since 2009. All BHS students participate in a weekly Advisory/Hub, which implements the Restorative Justice Practices of holding meetings in a circle, centering student voice, and prioritizing social-emotional growth, connection, and community. Advisory/Hub also provides students an opportunity to meet with their advisors and student support staff.

**Social Thinking (Grades K-12, as appropriate).** The social thinking program teaches students how to think in a variety of social situations. Students are taught to observe and think about their own and others' thoughts and feelings. Students also learn about the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The Social Thinking curriculum is often used with individual students, small groups of students, or classrooms where additional support and teaching of social skills is needed.

### **REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION**

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or caregivers, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing by the staff member. School staff who witness or become aware of bullying or retaliation shall report immediately in writing such bullying or retaliation to the principal or designee or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor.

Please note that school staff are legally required to report bullying. Although there may be times when a family or student does not want an educator to report bullying behavior (or pursue an investigation), educators are required to do so. School staff will take supportive measures to prevent retaliation and ensure student safety.

Each school shall have a means for anyone to anonymously report bullying or retaliation. No formal disciplinary action shall be taken against a student or staff member solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Anonymous reporting is available on the Public Schools of Brookline website.

Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation/report of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action equivalent to that for bullying or retaliation.

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At the beginning of each school year, the school or district will provide the school community, including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals, students, and parents or caregivers, 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, and the superintendent or designee when the principal or the assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, 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 caregivers.

### **Reporting by Staff**

A staff member will immediately report to the principal or designee, or the superintendent or designee when the principal, vice principal, or district staff is the alleged aggressor, or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor when they witness or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report as provided 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 Caregivers, and Others**

The school or district expects students, parents or caregivers, 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, or superintendent or designee when the principal or vice principal is the alleged aggressor. Students, parents or caregivers, 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, or superintendent or designee when the principal or vice principal is the alleged aggressor. Students, parents, and caregivers can report bullying or retaliation on [the PSB website](#).

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**Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation – Allegations of Bullying by a Student**

Upon receipt of a report of behavior that could constitute bullying or retaliation, the principal/designee shall promptly,

- 1) With the assistance of support staff, assess the alleged target's need for protection and (if needed) create and implement a safety plan that shall restore both a sense of and actual safety for the target. The safety plan is an immediate action plan identifying the target's primary and secondary safe person who they can go to if they feel unsafe at any time after the initial report of bullying. The safety plan should be agreed upon by students, parents/families, and school administration, and filed with completed bullying investigation documents;
- 2) With the assistance of support staff, determine appropriate supportive measures. Supportive measures are temporary actions that are reasonably available and are designed to ensure educational access, protect safety, or deter harassment or other prohibited conduct;
- 3) Notify the safe person listed on the student's safety plan;
- 4) If a bullying investigation is necessary, notify the parents/caregivers of the alleged target(s) and the alleged aggressor(s) within the confines of student confidentiality protections as outlined within DESE regulations and/or FERPA, and consistent with the requirements of the Plan;
- 5) If a bullying investigation is necessary, conduct and conclude an investigation within 10 school days that is consistent with the requirements of the Plan. If the investigation exceeds 10 school days, the principal/designee must provide ongoing updates to involved families.

The principal/designee will implement appropriate strategies for protecting a student from bullying or retaliation 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**

- 1) Notice to Parents or Caregivers
  - a) Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or caregivers of the target and the student aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding

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to it. The district strives to notify parents within 24 hours of determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.

2) Notice to Another School or District

- a) If the reported incident involves students from another PSB or non-PSB school, the principal or designee shall promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school so that both may take appropriate action.

3) Notice to Law Enforcement

- a) 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 requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the principal or designee shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the student aggressor.

In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate.

### **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 will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or caregivers, and others as necessary. The principal or designee will remind the alleged student aggressor, target, and witnesses of the importance of the investigation, their obligation to be truthful, and that retaliation



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against someone who reports bullying or provides information during a bullying investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. If one or more students involved in the situation have a disability or special need that impacts their ability to be interviewed, ensure that any needed accommodations or extra support are provided.

Interviews may be conducted by the principal or designee and by other staff members with appropriate training, as determined by the principal or designee. 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. The principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation.

Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with school or district policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, the principal or designee will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

### **Determinations**

The principal or designee will make a determination based on all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal or designee will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted from participating in school or benefiting from school activities.

The principal or designee will:

1. determine what remedial action is required, if any;
2. determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary, including when appropriate, consultation with support staff to identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying or retaliation, and assess the level of need for additional social skills development or referral to one or more of the resources identified in this Plan;
3. Notify the parents/caregivers of the target(s) and the aggressor(s) of the determination and of the procedures for responding to the bullying or retaliation;
4. Notify the parents/caregivers of the target(s) of the action to be taken to prevent further bullying or retaliation; and

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5. In the event of a staff member, the administrator will consult with the Director of Human Resources to determine the appropriate course of action.

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 caregiver about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of to report violations.

If, after the investigation, the principal or designee determines that bullying or retaliation has not occurred, they shall notify the parents/caregivers of the alleged target(s) and aggressor(s) of the determination and shall verify that they have received notice of the student-related sections of the Plan. Notice to parents/caregivers shall be in the primary language of the home and consistent with the confidentiality requirements of the Plan. Please note that non-bullying behavior that violates the PSB Code of Conduct may still result in disciplinary action.

The principal or designee shall maintain a file of all reports of bullying or retaliation, along with investigative materials and documentation of report(s) made to law enforcement.

The principal or designee shall inform the parent or caregiver 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.

## 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:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions from related service providers (e.g., counselors, psychologists, social workers, speech and language pathologists)

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- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with school counselors and other appropriate school personnel.
- implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals.
- meeting with parents and caregivers to engage parental support and to reinforce SEL curricula and social skills-building activities at home.
- adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills;
- with consent from all students and families, participation in a restorative circle that aims to repair the harm that was caused.

#### **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, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior.

Discipline will be consistent with the Plan and with the District's Code of Conduct. As described in the District's Code of Conduct, potential consequences for engaging in bullying include:

- Changes to a student's class schedule
- Additional monitoring
- Implementation of a Behavior Support Plan
- Peer mediation
- Loss of privileges
- Referral to school-based supports
- Restitution
- Detention
- Suspension

The School Committee expects administrators and supervisors to make clear to students and staff that the act of bullying in the school building, on school grounds, on the bus or school-sanctioned transportation, or at school-sponsored functions is against the District's code of conduct and may be grounds for disciplinary action for students and termination for employees.

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Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education 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 enhance the target's sense of safety and that of others as well. One strategy that the principal or designee may use, if feasible, is to increase adult supervision at transition times and in locations where bullying is known to have occurred or is likely to occur.

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 additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the principal or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

## **TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **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 district.

Staff training for those responsible for implementation and oversight of the Plan will include training to distinguish between acceptable managerial behaviors designed to correct misconduct, instill accountability in the school setting, and bullying behaviors.

Age-appropriate, evidence-based instruction on skills to prevent bullying shall be incorporated into the curriculum for all PreK-12 students.

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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 the tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development offered by PSB will build the skills of staff to broadly promote the SEL development of all students and to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying behavior. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the content of schoolwide 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 intervening and responding to bullying incidents;
- (iii) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that may or may not take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) research findings on bullying, including information about the 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 and retaliation for students with disabilities that must be considered when developing students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This will include a focus on the needs of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), developmental disabilities, and students whose disability affects their social skills development.

Additional areas identified by the school or district for professional development include:

- creating and maintaining strong, positive relationships with students

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- creating and maintaining safe, positive, and affirming learning spaces for all students
- modeling and promoting the use of respectful and affirming language
- building strong, positive relationships with families
- fostering an understanding and respect for diversity and difference
- helping students effectively work and play together
- using positive behavioral interventions and supports to prevent, manage, and respond to classroom behaviors
- using instructional practices that help support self-awareness, social awareness, and responsible decision-making
- teaching students how to effectively manage anger and other strong, negative emotions
- creating opportunities for students to take the perspective of others
- teaching students how to effectively advocate for their needs
- engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making
- engaging staff and those responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan to distinguish between acceptable managerial behaviors designed to correct misconduct and instill accountability in the school setting

### **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 and bullying of students by school staff, in the school or district employee handbook and the Code of Conduct.

### **COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

#### **Parent education and resources**

The District will offer education programs for parents and caregivers 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, the Brookline Parent Education Network, School Councils, the Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.

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**Notification requirements**

The school or district will inform parents and caregivers about the bullying prevention curricula of the school district and shall include, but not limited to:

- How parents and caregivers can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school district or school plan;
- The dynamics of bullying; and
- Online safety and cyber-bullying

The school or district will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the district's Internet safety policy. All notices and information made available to parents or caregivers will be available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or caregivers. The school and district will post the Plan and related information on its website.

**PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION**

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 a school district or school, 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.

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.

As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the District or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

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### PROBLEM RESOLUTION SYSTEM

Any parent or guardian wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the District may do so with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Problem Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at:

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

### APPEALS

Parents or caregivers of either the Target or Aggressor may appeal a bullying determination decision in writing to the Deputy Superintendent for Student Services or designee within five (5) school days of receipt of the determination decision.

Appeals are not a “do-over” of the original investigation. Appeals are properly confined to a review of the written record of the original investigation to determine:

1. If there was a procedural irregularity that affected the outcome of the matter;
2. If there is new evidence that was not reasonably available at the time of the determination that could affect the outcome of the matter; and
3. If the principal or designee investigating had a conflict of interest or bias for or against the Target or Aggressor that affected the outcome of the matter.

### DEFINITIONS

**Aggressor** means a student or a member of school staff who engages in bullying or retaliation as defined herein. School staff includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisers to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals.

**Bullying**, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students or a member 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;



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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.

\*Please note that the term “repeated” is meant to describe two or more connected incidents.

**Cyberbullying**, means 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 messages or facsimile communications.

Cyberbullying also includes the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or knowingly impersonates another person as author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

Cyberbullying also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

**Home Base** is a location in the school selected by school administration and staff where a student may go when feeling unsafe. This location should be a place where students can be supervised and monitored by school staff and where they are able to request support (principal’s office, vice principal/assistant headmaster’s office, dean’s office, school counselor’s office, the main office, etc.)

**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. The conduct of the aggressor sufficiently interferes with or limits a student’s ability to

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participate in or benefit from school-sponsored or school-related activities, functions or programs.

**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.

**Safe Person** is a designated person in the school who the student can talk to and process social situations that are troubling, confusing, or agitating including bullying, that may not be readily understood by the student. This person should be familiar to the student and have a trusting relationship already established. This person should be a person chosen by or acceptable to the student and family.

**Safety Plan** is an immediate action plan identifying the target student's primary and secondary safe person who they can go to if they feel unsafe at any time after the initial report of bullying. In addition, the safety plan lists the behavioral expectations moving forward for all students involved including the aggressor. It lists school team actions and supportive measures intended to provide support to students in resolving the bullying conflict, which may include, but not be limited to, additional supervision during recess, lunch, and transition time, scheduling changes, scheduled check-ins with involved students, etc. This plan should be agreed upon by students, parents/families and school administration and filed with completed bullying investigation documents.

**School 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.

## 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, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, sexual

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orientation, or mental, intellectual, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. 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, M.G.L. c. 71, §§41 and 42, M.G.L c 76 § 5, or other applicable laws, or local school or district policies, or collective bargaining agreements, in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.

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Appendix - Reporting and Investigation Flow Chart

