



Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Mohawk Trail Regional School District
Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts 01370

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Goals of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan	3
Definitions	4
Policy Scope	5
Policy Information	5
Implementation Procedures	6
Reporting	6
Anonymous Reporting	6
Investigation	6
Notification	7
Notification of Bullying Prevention Curriculum	8
Take Action	8
Outcomes and Student Support	9
Safety Plans	9
Counseling and Support Services	9
Disciplinary Actions	10
Requirements for Students with Disabilities	10
Learning the Guidelines	10
Staff Professional Development	10
Ongoing Professional Development	11
Written Notice to Staff	12
Social Skills Curriculum	12

Introduction

Mohawk Trail Regional School District expects that all members of the school community will treat one another in a civil, respectful manner. The District is committed to providing and maintaining a safe, secure, and positive school climate and culture. This positive culture will increase student engagement and promote academic achievement. The District will purposefully build a kind, inclusive community.

The District will create a safe environment for all students and will teach all students strategies to prevent and respond to teasing, bullying, and harassment. We will teach pro-social values through our social skills curriculum and teachers, staff, and administrators will be role models of ethical behavior.

The District understands certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating 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, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have 1 or more of these characteristics.

Teachers and staff will monitor vulnerable students and provide additional support, as needed. The District will not tolerate unlawful or disruptive behavior including bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, or retaliation in school buildings, on school grounds, or at school-related activities. We will promptly investigate all bullying reports, take prompt action to stop bullying behavior, and restore a sense of safety for targets.

The District is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent bullying. We have established this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan to prevent, intervene, and respond to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, and retaliation.

Goals of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

The goals of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan are to:

- Create and maintain a safe and positive, caring, and tolerant school climate
- Define what constitutes bullying and harassment
- Reinforce the District's commitment to investigate and respond to bullying and harassment
- Update procedures to respond to bullying and harassment reports

Definitions

Bullying is the repeated use by any member of the MTRSD community of a written, visual (including images), verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at a target 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/herself, 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
- materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school

Cyber-bullying means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature.

Cyber-bullying shall also include the creation of an electronic medium, 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.

Cyber-bullying shall also include 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.

Harassment is unwelcome, intentional, discriminatory behavior toward an individual or group motivated by real or perceived membership in a protected category including race, ethnicity/national origin, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or age.

Sexual Harassment is a sexual advance, request for sexual favor, or behavior of a sexual nature when:

- submission to or rejection of such advance, request, or behavior is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment, or as a basis for employment decisions, or decisions regarding student evaluation, or participation in school programs or activities
- sexual advance, request, or behavior that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or school performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, or sexually offensive environment

Sexual harassment may occur student to student, adult to student, student to adult, adult to adult, male to female, female to male, male to male, and/or female to female.

Cyber-harassment is willful and repeated harm inflicted through but not limited to, Web pages, social networking sites, email, instant messaging or text messaging using computers, cell phone, or electronic network, when the target is an individual or individuals who are members of a protected group, either real or perceived.

Hazing is any behavior or method of initiation into a student organization, whether on public or private property, which willfully endangers the physical or mental health of any individual. Such behavior includes beating, whipping, branding, forced calisthenics, exposure to weather, forced consumption of any food, liquor, beverage, drug, or other substance, or any other brutal treatment or forced physical activity which is likely to adversely affect the health and safety of an individual or which subjects an individual to extreme mental stress, including sleep deprivation, or extended isolation. Hazing is a form of bullying.

Retaliation is any action taken against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

School community is a group of individuals who are connected with District schools including students, teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, coaches, school committee and local educational council members, and interested townspeople.

Policy Scope

Bullying, cyberbullying, harassment or cyber-harassment is prohibited in classrooms, on school premises, immediately adjacent to school premises, traveling to and from school, or at school-sponsored events, whether or not the events are held on school premises.

Traveling to and from school includes on a school bus or other school vehicle, at school bus stops, and walking to and from school within a reasonable time before and after school.

Bullying or harassment, including cyberbullying and cyber-harassment, can occur in locations not mentioned above, if the incident results or could result in substantial disruption of the school learning environment or orderly day-to-day operation of the school.

Policy Information

Below is a link to where you can find all school policy information.

<https://sites.google.com/a/mohawkschools.org/mohawk-school-committee/policies>

Implementation Procedures

Reporting

Any member of the school community, students, staff, parents, or other community members may make a complaint and report bullying, harassment or retaliation behavior orally or in writing. All individuals who are reported as aggressors, targets, witnesses, or are otherwise involved in a bullying incident will be afforded the same protection regardless of their legal status. Any member of the school community who retaliates against another for reporting bullying or harassment, or who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or harassment will be subject to disciplinary action.

Reports of bullying or retaliation can be made by staff, students, caregivers, or others, and may be oral or written. All oral reports must be recorded in writing using the District's Bullying and Harassment Incident Complaint Reporting Form. School and district staff members are required to report 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 suspected aggressor) any instance of bullying or retaliation that the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses before the end of the day. Reports made by students, caregivers, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously. An Incident Report Form is not required as a condition of making a report. However, each school principal or administrative designee must complete an Incident Report Form and Administrative Bullying Prevention on every report of bullying made by students, staff, Caregivers, or other sources. The Bullying and Harassment Incident [Complaint Reporting Form](#) (link). The form can also be found on the website, www.mtrsd.org, and paper copies are housed in the main office of each school. Forms in other languages will be available as needed.

Anonymous Reporting

Any school community member may make an anonymous report of bullying, harassment, or retaliation. Please complete the [Bullying and Harassment Incident Complaint Reporting Form](#). Please select anonymous on the form. Anonymous information cannot be used by itself for disciplinary proceedings, but it may lead to an investigation into the allegation. By selecting anonymous be sure you understand that follow up to you cannot happen.

Investigation

Investigations are coordinated by the building Equity Officer (EO). The Equity Officer at the middle and high school is the assistant principal, principal or designee. The elementary level Equity Officer is the principal or their designee. The following are the steps and resources used in an investigation into bullying, harassment or retaliation to determine if bullying, harassment or retaliation has occurred.

- Review the bully report form that was submitted

- Send letter home acknowledging a report has been filed within one school day (target and aggressor)
- Interview students and staff
- Review evidence
- Determine if this was an act of bullying, harassment, or retaliation.
- Document using the investigation document with the Protocol Checklist .
- Send copies of the report home to target and alleged aggressor. These reports will have action plans for the individual students to protect other students involved. They should only have what happened for the individual if it was a group of aggressors.

Copy of report gets filed in the following places:

- If it was found to be bullying
 - Aggressor student file
 - Equity Officer Confidential file
 - District Equity Officer Confidential File
 - Target only in Equity Officer and District Equity Officer confidential file
- If not found bullying then aggressor is kept in Equity Officer and District Equity Officer confidential file

Investigation of the complaint will be concluded within 14 school days of the filing of the initial report. Most investigations will be concluded within 10 school days.

There are circumstances in which an incident is referred to the District Equity Officer or Superintendent of Schools.

- When a parent, guardian, or student feels an incident was not resolved at the building level
- When an incident involves the Equity Officer or principal or other building staff responsible for an investigation
- When a situation remains unresolved after an investigation and corrective action
- Usually this would be two or more substantiated incidents involving a single individual or group
- Adult to adult bullying behavior

Notification

Following preliminary screening, parents/guardians of all students involved in a bullying, harassment, or retaliation incident will be notified by a building Equity Officer or his designee within one school day of the filing of a bullying, harassment, or retaliation report or complaint.

When criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the local law enforcement agency must be notified by the building Equity Officer. When the incident involves students from more than one school or school district, the building Equity Officer immediately notifies the principal of the other school so both schools can address the incident promptly.

The building Equity Officer will notify the aggressor's parents/guardians, in accordance with state and federal privacy laws, of disciplinary action taken. Parents will be informed about the seriousness of retaliation. Counseling or a referral to an outside agency will be offered to the aggressor's family.

The building Equity Officer will notify the target's parents/guardians, in accordance with state and federal privacy laws, that action has been taken to stop the bullying behavior, and prevent both recurrence and retaliation. Parents will be informed about the seriousness of retaliation and advised to report any retaliation incidents. Counseling or a referral to an outside agency will be offered to the target's family.

The building Equity Officer will notify the individual who filed the complaint, in accordance with state and federal privacy laws, if he/she was not the target or parent/guardian, that his/her complaint has been investigated and action has been taken. The individual will be informed about the seriousness of retaliation and advised to report any retaliation that occurs.

The forms will document the corrective or disciplinary action taken and the notification of all relevant individuals. The Investigation Protocol Checklist will serve as a reference throughout the process to ensure appropriate steps are taken and follow-through is completed.

Notification of Bullying Prevention Curriculum

Parents and guardians are informed about the curriculum through the student handbook, principal and teacher newsletters

These documents provide opportunities for parents to learn about how to reinforce the curriculum at home

Working with local and state police, the district provides student assemblies to inform and address issues relative to bullying, cyberbullying, and online safety.

Take Action

If the complaint against the aggressor is substantiated the investigator's report will:

- Provide for reasonable, timely, and age-appropriate corrective action intended to stop the bullying or retaliation behavior and prevent its recurrence
- Document steps to address the effect of the bullying or retaliation behavior on the target
- Document steps to protect the target and/or one who filed the complaint from retaliation
- Provide corrective action for anyone who knowingly makes a false report of bullying, harassment, or retaliation
- The building Equity Officer will have an educational discussion with the aggressor and bystanders about the consequences of bullying behavior and the fact that everyone is now aware of the situation. The building Equity Officer will discuss the consequences if bullying behavior continues or if retaliation occurs

- In the event that disciplinary action is taken there needs to be a balance of teaching appropriate behavior in the action plan
- See the safety plan section below for the steps to assuring the targets safety

In exceptional cases in which a formal investigation is not needed and immediate action is required, the building Equity Officer may immediately inform targets, aggressors, and bystanders about the consequences of bullying or retaliation in school and immediately follow-through with consequences.

Outcomes and Student Support

Safety Plans

Each school's building Equity Officer in consultation with his staff will develop a safety plan for the following individuals:

- Targets of bullying, harassment, or retaliation
- An individual who reports, witnesses, or cooperates in an investigation and feels threatened or intimidated
- Students who provide information as part of an investigation, or students who are reliable witnesses, or who might be aware of bullying and provide relevant information
- All students who are in any way part of a bullying incident as target, aggressor, witness, bystander, or informant

The Safety Plan will include:

- A Safe Zone or area where the target or others can go to get help from a trusted adult
- A protocol for informing all relevant adults (bus driver, counselor, playground monitor, etc.) of the situation that exists between the target/others and the aggressor
- A plan to monitor less structured areas of the school like hallways, cafeteria, bus, and playground
- Weekly assessment of the effectiveness of the Safety Plan
- A plan of action to be taken in the event of retaliation against the target or any other individual.

Counseling and Support Services

Students who need additional social-emotional support are currently receiving counseling and guidance from school psychologists, guidance counselors, and special educators. IEP and 504 Teams may explore implementing an evidence-based social skills curriculum and additional time in social skills groups for students who are especially vulnerable to bullying and harassment due to race, disability, or gender orientation. Any programs for vulnerable students will be evaluated annually for effectiveness by students, teachers, and administrators.

In addition, some students and families may need to be referred to outside services. School psychologists, guidance counselors, and/or special educators will help students and families find the outside services they need in a timely way.

Disciplinary Actions

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 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.

Requirements for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may need additional support at school as they develop social skills. For students identified as being on the Autism spectrum or having a disability that affects social skills development, the IEP or 504 Team needs to evaluate that student's vulnerability as a bully or a target. The IEP Team will need to specifically address the social skills needed to avoid becoming a bully or a target as well as how to respond if bullying occurs.

The IEP or 504 team can recommend pragmatic language and /or counseling services to supplement a school's social skills curriculum. The social skills curriculum may require reinforcement, repetition, or modification to reach a student with identified social skills deficits. This is often provided by small group instruction but may be provided through individualized instruction.

A guidance counselor, school adjustment counselor, or psychologist monitors a student's social skills development and responds to socially challenging circumstances in the school environment. Concerns are reported to a student's family promptly and diplomatically. If a student with an identified disability is involved in a bullying, harassment, or retaliation incident, either as a target or aggressor, there should be careful consideration of the student's disability.

Learning the Guidelines

Staff Professional Development

The 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
- Information about the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades throughout the school or district

Ongoing Professional Development

The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the content of schoolwide and district wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- Developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying
- Developmentally (or age-) 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 an 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

Professional development will also address ways to prevent and respond to bullying or retaliation for students with disabilities that must be considered when developing students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This will include a particular focus on the needs of students with autism or students whose disability affects social skills development.

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

- Promoting and modeling the use of respectful language
- Fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference
- Building relationships and communicating with families;
- Constructively managing classroom behaviors
- Using positive behavioral intervention strategies
- Applying constructive disciplinary practices
- Teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others

- Engaging students in school or classroom planning and
- decision-making
- Maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students

Engaging staff and those responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan to distinguish between acceptable managerial behaviors designed to correct misconduct, instill accountability in the school setting, etc and bullying behaviors .

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.

Social Skills Curriculum

The District had previously adopted and implemented Second Step, published by the Committee for Children, as our social skills curriculum in grades K - 6. In 2010 the district purchased Steps to Respect, an evidence-based social skills curriculum with an anti-bullying focus, also published by the Committee for Children. The district purchased the updated Second Step Curriculum in 2018.

In Kindergarten through Grade 6, students have Second Step lessons. In Second Step students will learn pro-social values like learning skills, empathy, emotional management, and problem solving. Students will also have lessons that include ethical values lessons. As part of social skills training, students will learn about alternatives to discipline like restorative justice, making amends, and community service.

In grades 7 through 12, middle and high school faculty and staff embed lessons on anti-bullying in the advisory program and in the health and wellness classes. Advisories are using Responsive Classroom tools to support the teaching. The guidance department also does teaching around hurting and flirting, and the department does 7th, 9th and 11th grade conferences so students know who they can talk to. They meet with students on an as needed basis and can be referred by anyone for additional social emotional support. There also are presenters that have come in to talk about cyber bullying.

All students will be trained about the important role bystanders play in stopping bullying and retaliation and will be equipped to promptly step in when they see bullying or retaliation occur.

Bully Prevention Survey

As part of the bully prevention plan a student survey must be administered every four years to assess “school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in schools. The survey is called the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey. It is given yearly to 8th, 10th and 12th grade students.

