

GARDNER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

PRIORITY STATEMENT

The Gardner Public School District is committed to creating and sustaining a safe, caring, respectful learning environment. The school or district expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner with respect for differences. The school or district is committed to providing all students and staff with an environment that is free from bullying and cyber-bullying. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning, healthy social development, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful, disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying, and the school or district is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The principal at each school is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan.

We recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to become targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The school or district will identify specific steps it will take 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.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- A. **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 school or district. 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. Annual staff training will be done at the beginning of each school year for all staff. During the summer of 2011, all principals and other administrators will participate in retraining in preparation for training their staff. A sign-off sheet to indicate that training has been completed will be part of the new employee employment packet. In addition, all principals will maintain logs with sign-in sheets of annual training within their buildings.
- B. **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, section 370, the content of school wide 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 immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- (iii) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) 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;
- (v) information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying; and
- (vi) Internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying.

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 Plans (IEP's). 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; and
- * maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.
- * training for administrators in interviewing and documenting practices.

Mediation training for one counselor at Gardner High School and one counselor at Gardner Middle School will be provided. In addition, a continuation of the training for Second Step trainers will take place. Teachers will be trained in age appropriate on-line resources that address cyber bullying.

- C. **Written notice to staff** - The school or district will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by distributing the Plan using the district e-mail system or by distributing written copies.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

A key aspect of promoting positive school climates is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of targets, aggressors, families, and others are addressed. This Plan describes the strategies for providing supports and services necessary to meet these needs. In order to enhance the school's or district's capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, available services reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide positive approaches to address the needs of targets and aggressors. The Plan includes a strategy for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for aggressors, targets, and family members of those students.

Identifying Resources

The administrative council, comprised of principals and central office administrators, and the guidance department under the direction of the Director of Pupil Personnel Services, will continue to review current

staffing and programs that support the creation of positive school environments. This “mapping” of resources includes a focus on early interventions and intensive services. Resources include, but are not limited to:

All levels:

- Parent surveys - District;
- MassTels surveys - District;
- School and district self-assessments;
- Annual School District Discipline Reports;
- Rediker student database statistics;

High School:

- Voices Against Violence at the high school level;

High School/Middle School

- Youth Risk Behavior Survey results at the middle school and high school levels;

Middle School:

- All Stars Program at the middle school level;
- PBIS Program
- Advisories

Elementary levels:

- PBIS Program
- Second Step Program
- Character Education Program
- Waterford Street School High Five Program;
- Elm Street School’s E-List;
- Gold Book at Elm Street School;
- Good Citizenship Awards at elementary levels;
- Guidance Lessons at elementary levels;

- Student of the Week/Month at elementary levels; and
- Principals' Awards at elementary levels.

Counseling and Other Services

The Plan identifies the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate resources within the school and district. The Plan also identifies staff and service providers who assist the schools in developing safety plans for students who have been targets of bullying or retaliation, providing social skills programs to prevent bullying, and offering education and/or intervention services for students exhibiting bullying behaviors. Tools include:

- Counseling services (including services from adjustment counselors) provided by school counselors at all schools in the district;
- Social skills groups in the schools;
- Group and individual assistance from principals and vice principals;
- Assistance from school resource officer;
- Peer mediation (middle school and high school);
- Individually focused curricula; and
- Behavioral intervention plans.

Students with Disabilities

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

Referral to Outside Services

Referrals must comply with relevant laws and policies. A determination will be made by the appropriate parties, as determined by the school principal and/or Pupil Personnel Services Director, when referral to an outside agency or service provider is indicated. In addition, identification of outside resources will be identified for families and others by placing links on the district website including resourced identified through the District Attorney's office.

Assessing Needs and Resources

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.

ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

The law requires each school or district to provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention in each grade that is incorporated into the school or district's curricula. Curricula must be evidence-based. Effective instruction will include classroom approaches, whole school initiatives, and focused strategies for bullying prevention and social skills development.

- A. **Specific Bullying Prevention Approaches.** Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research, which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:
- using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
 - empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
 - helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
 - emphasizing cyber-safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
 - enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications;
 - engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference;
 - roles of bystanders to assist the target

Initiatives will also teach students about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. This Plan includes the provision that the principal or his/her designee at each school will review the Plan with the students at either a whole grade assembly, whole school assembly, or in individual classrooms. In any case the principal bears the responsibility for ensuring that the Plan is reviewed at least biennially.

- B. **General Teaching Approaches That Support Bullying Prevention Efforts.** The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of our bullying intervention and prevention initiatives:
- setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
 - creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students;
 - using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
 - using positive behavioral supports;
 - encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
 - modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
 - using positive approaches to behavioral health, including collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution training, teamwork, and positive behavioral supports that aid in social and emotional development;
 - using the Internet safely and promoting students' understanding of the Acceptable Use Policy and;
 - supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION

In order to support efforts to respond promptly and effectively to bullying and retaliation, we have put into place a policy (Gardner School Committee Policy JICBF) and procedures for receiving and responding to reports of bullying or retaliation. The policy and procedures will ensure that members of the school community – students, parents, and staff – know what will happen when incidents of bullying occur.

A. Reporting Bullying or 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 or district 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 or district staff members may be made anonymously. The school or district will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, a voice mail, a dedicated mailing address, and an email address. For each school, reports will be made to the Assistant Principal (when there is one) or to the Principal when there is no Assistant Principal using that individual's e-mail address, voice mail, or mailing address at the school. For the district, the contact person shall be the Chief Academic Officer via e-mail, voice mail, or mailing address. E-mail addresses and mailing addresses may be seen on the district website www.gardnerk12.org

The school or district will: 1) include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form (Form A – attached to this document) in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents or guardians; 2) make it available in the school's main office, the counseling office, the school nurse's office, and other locations determined by the principal or designee; and 3) post it on the school's website. The Incident Reporting Form will be made available in the most prevalent language(s) of origin of students and parents or guardians.

At the beginning of each school year, the school or district will provide the school community, including administrators, staff, students, and parents or guardians, with written notice of its policy for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the name and contact information of the principal or designee, will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks, on the school or district website, and in information about the Plan that is made available to parents or guardians.

1. 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.

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

The school or 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 with 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.

B. Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation.

1. Safety

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.

2. Obligations to Notify Others

- a. Notice to parents or guardians. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding to it. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.
- b. Notice to Another School or District. If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the principal or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the principal or designee of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, and 603 CMR 49.00.
- c. Notice to Law Enforcement. At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the principal or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the 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 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.

- C. Investigation. The principal or designee will investigate promptly 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 guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Interviews will be conducted by the principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the principal or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, as appropriate. 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 separate written, confidential 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.

- D. Determinations. The principal or designee will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances and record acquired information on Form B (Attached to this document). 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 in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. The principal or designee will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the principal or designee may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or school counselor, and the target's or aggressor's parents or guardians, to identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying behavior and to assess the level of need for additional social skills development.

The principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notice to parents must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the principal or designee cannot report specific information to the target's parent or guardian about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

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

- E. Responses to Bullying.

1. 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 based on the school's/district's anti-bullying curricula;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with guidance 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 guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home;
- adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills; and
- making a referral for evaluation.

2. 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 school or district's code of conduct.

Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which should be read in cooperation with state laws regarding student discipline.

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

3. 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 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.

COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES

Resources for families and communication with them are essential aspects of effective collaboration.

- A. Parent education and resources. 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 Police Department, District Attorney's Office, PTO, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.
- B. Notification requirements. 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 cyber-bullying and online safety. The school or district will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school 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 school or district will post the Plan and related information on its website.

PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

In addition to inclusion in the Plan, the following statement is included in the student handbooks and in any codes of conduct.

Acts of bullying, which include cyber-bullying, 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.

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.

DEFINITIONS

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

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- i. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- ii. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- iii. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;

- iv. infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- v. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyber-bullying, is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O for the legal definition of cyber-bullying.

Hostile environment, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Staff includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

Target is a student against whom bullying, cyber-bullying, 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, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in the Plan prevents the school or district from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state, or federal law, or school or district policies.

In addition, nothing in the Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of the school or district to take disciplinary action or other action under M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 37H or 37H½, other applicable laws, or local school or district policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.

Please see attached Incident Reporting Form to be used at all schools as described in the Plan.

BULLYING INCIDENT REPORTING FORM

1. Name of Reporter/Person Filing the Report: _____

(Note: Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report.)

2. Check whether you are the: Target of the behavior Reporter (not the target)

3. Check whether you are a: Student Staff member (specify role) _____

Parent Administrator Other _____

Your contact information/telephone number: _____

4. If student, state your school: _____ Grade: _____

5. If staff member, state your school or work site: _____

6. Information about the incident:

Name of Target (of behavior): _____

Name of Aggressor (Person who engaged in the behavior): _____

Date(s) of Incident(s): _____

Time when Incident(s) Occurred: _____

Location of Incident(s) (Be as specific as possible): _____

7. Witnesses (List people who saw the incident or have information about it):

Name: _____ Student Staff Other _____

Name: _____ Student Staff Other _____

Name: _____ Student Staff Other _____

8. Describe the details of the incident (including names of people involved, what occurred, and what each person did and said, including specific words used). Please use additional space on back if necessary.

FOR ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY

9. Signature of Person Filing this Report: _____ Date: _____

10: Form Given to: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date Received: _____

