

# Bullying: Prevention and Intervention



**Gardner Public Schools**

Updated: August 2025

# Bullying Prevention and Intervention

M.G.L. c. 71, § 370 and the District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (BPIP) prohibit bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation:

- on school grounds, 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
- at a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related, or 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, infringe on the rights of the target at school, or materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

# Definitions

Bullying is defined as:

- The **repeated** use by one or more students or by a member of a school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity, or paraprofessional, of a written, verbal, or electronic expression of a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof that:
  - *causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property;*
  - *places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property;*
  - *creates a hostile environment at school for the victim;*
  - *infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or*
  - *materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.*
  - *Bullying shall include cyber-bullying.*

# Definitions

Cyber-bullying is defined as:

- Bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication including 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. Also includes:
  - *the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;*
  - *the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying; or*
  - *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 in the definition of bullying.*

# Definitions

Aggressor: perpetrator of bullying or retaliation as defined in M.G.L. c 71 370.

Hostile Environment: 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 the student's education.

Perpetrator: a student or a member of a school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional who engages in bullying or retaliation.

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

Target: a student victim of bullying or retaliation as defined in M.G.L c. 71 370)  
A student target of bullying or retaliation.

Victim: a student against whom bullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.

# Bullying: Vulnerable Populations

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.

The reasons for being bullied reported most often by students include physical appearance, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation ([National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016](#)).

# Bullying Prevention and Intervention

## Children with Disabilities

- M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3: Whenever the evaluation of the IEP team indicates that the child has a disability that affects social skills development or that the child is vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing because of the child's disability, the IEP shall address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment or teasing.
- For students identified with a disability of Autism, the IEP Team must consider and specifically address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.
- Students with emotional impairments, developmental delays, health impairments, communication disorders, and neurological impairments are likely to have a disability that affects their social skills development.

All students should receive clear, explicit instruction on how to respond to and report bullying. For students with disabilities, this should be provided in a manner consistent with IEPs and any accommodations needed for learning.

- Applies equally to students who are aggressors of bullying

# Difference between Bullying and Harassment

Bullying and harassment are often used interchangeably when talking about hurtful or harmful behavior. They are very similar, but in terms of definition, there is an important difference.

Bullying and harassment are similar as they are both about:

- power and control
- actions that hurt or harm another person physically or emotionally
- an imbalance of power between the target and the individual demonstrating the negative behavior
- the target having difficulty stopping the action directed at them

The distinction between bullying and harassment is that when the bullying behavior directed at the target **is also based on a protected class**, that behavior is then defined as harassment. Protected classes include race, color, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability and age.

Bullying Research and Statistics ([Bullying Statistics - National Bullying Prevention Center](#))

# Power differential and complex interactions:

More than half of bullying situations (57%) stop when a peer intervenes on behalf of the student being bullied.

[Bullying – PACER Center](#)

[Bullying Statistics – PACER Center](#)

[Prevention at School | StopBullying.gov](#)

What are the roles that kids play in bullying?

[The Roles Kids Play in Bullying | StopBullying.gov](#)

# Nature of Cyber-bullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through text and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else, causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.

Source: [StopBullying.gov](http://StopBullying.gov)

[Rates of Incidence](#)

# Nature of Cyber-bullying

While all bullying is characterized by intentional, often repetitive, hurtful behavior toward another person or group, there are distinguishing elements when it happens online or via smartphone, which include:

- **Persistent:** Most students have access to some form of technology at all times, which means cyberbullying can happen any time—in the morning, afternoon, and evening—not just while children are at school. It happens while at home or in the community.
- **Hard to detect:** While some bullying is very overt, such as pushing or damaging belongings, cyberbullying happens through phones and on computers or tablets, making it much more difficult for adults to detect.
- **Anonymous:** Cyberbullying can be done anonymously. Those being bullied might not even know who is perpetuating the behavior, which makes it easy for one child to hurt another and not be held accountable.
- **Shared to a potentially larger audience.** Information online can be easily and quickly shared, which makes it difficult to contain or stop negative messages once they are posted online.
- **Easier to be hurtful:** It is often easier to bully using technology because of greater physical distance. The person bullying doesn't see the immediate response from the person being targeted. They might not recognize the serious harm caused by their actions because technology distances them from the real-life pain they could be causing.
- **Permanent:** Once something is shared on the internet, it is often available to everyone, everywhere. It can be challenging to completely delete information once it is on the internet.

Source: [Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center](#)

# Incidence of Cyber-bullying

- One in five (20.9%) tweens (9 to 12 years old) has been cyberbullied, cyberbullied others, or seen cyberbullying ([Patchin & Hinduja, 2020](#)).
- 49.8% of tweens (9 to 12 years old) said they experienced bullying at school and 14.5% of tweens shared they experienced bullying online ([Patchin & Hinduja, 2020](#)).
- 13% of tweens (9 to 12 years old) reported experiencing bullying at school and online, while only 1% reported being bullied solely online ([Patchin & Hinduja, 2020](#)).
- Among students ages 12 – 18 who reported being bullied at school, 15% were bullied online or by text ([National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019](#))
- Reports of cyberbullying are highest among middle school students, followed by high school students, and then primary school students ([Centers for Disease Control, 2019](#))
- The percentages of individuals who have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their lifetimes have more than doubled (18% to 37%) from 2007-2019 ([Patchin & Hinduja, 2019](#))
- When students were asked about the specific types of cyberbullying they had experienced, mean and hurtful comments (25%) and rumors spread online (22%) were the most commonly-cited ([Patchin et al., 2019](#))
- The type of cyberbullying tends to differ by gender. Girls were more likely to say someone spread rumors about them online while boys were more likely to say that someone threatened to hurt them online ([Patchin et al., 2019](#))
- Those who are cyberbullied are also likely to be bullied offline ([Hamm, Newton, & Chisholm, 2015](#))

# Strategies to Prevent Bullying

Early childhood/young children:

- promote social emotional learning;
- help students develop empathy and value others feeling;
- model empathy and kindness; and,
- discourage exclusionary play and encourage relationships between peers.

School age (in addition to the above):

- follow school policy/rules address bullying behavior;
- bullying prevention in curriculum;
- culture of acceptance tolerance, respect; and,
- teach appropriate behaviors and how to respond

Immediate Intervention/Response:

- Pay attention, don't ignore it, when you see something do something, remain calm, deal with students individually

# Strategies and Interventions to Prevent Bullying

Evidence based practice:

- Multi-tiered behavioral framework: PBIS
- Adult Supervision in all areas of the school especially common areas to supervise behaviors and intervene early.
  - Bullied students reported that bullying occurred in the following places: the hallway or stairwell at school (37.5%), inside the classroom (39%), in the cafeteria (25.1%), outside on school grounds (24.4%), on the school bus (9.8%), and in the bathroom or locker room (11.9%).

[Student Reports of Bullying: Results From the 2022 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey](#)

- SEL curriculum: PATHS, Second Step, Zones of Regulation, Social Thinking, Responsive Classroom, etc.

[Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2022](#)

- Internet Safety and Cyber-bullying

[How to Prevent Cyberbullying : A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Youth](#)

# District-Wide Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

The Gardner Public School District (“District”) is committed to creating and sustaining a safe, caring, respectful learning environment. The District expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner with respect for differences. The District is committed to providing all students and staff with an environment that is free from bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. this commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and healthy social development, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation , which can impede the learning process

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (“Plan”) is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and retaliation. The Plan applies to all students and all school staff members, including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extra curricular activity, and paraprofessionals. the Principal in each building, or their designee, is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan.

# Reporting of Bullying or Harassment

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents/guardians or others, and may be oral or written.

If you:

- Receive a complaint or report of bullying or harassment;
- Observe/witness bullying or harassment; or
- Become aware of bullying or harassment;

***Report it to the Principal or Assistant Principal immediately!***

# Responding to a Report of Bullying

After receiving a report of bullying, the District considering all of the allegations as true may dismiss the allegation of bullying if the allegations do not constitute bullying under Massachusetts law. If after making a preliminary determination that the facts as alleged, if true would meet the statutory definition the principal/designee will promptly investigate, which may include interviewing the alleged target, alleged aggressor, staff members, students, parents or guardians, witnesses and/or others.

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal/designee will take steps to restore a sense of safety for the alleged target. Responses may include but not limited to:

- creating a personal safety plan;
- pre-determining seating arrangements for the alleged target and/or the alleged aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus;
- identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the alleged target
- altering the alleged aggressor’s schedule and access to the alleged target

Other steps to promote safety may be taken, as appropriate, if the alleged aggressor is a staff member. The principal or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary

During interviews principal/designee will inform anyone involved in the investigation that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Principal/designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigation to the extent practicable, and in accordance with state and federal law regarding privacy of student records and mandated reporting.

# Bullying Investigations: Notice of Findings

If the school principal or a designee determines that bullying has occurred shall promptly notify the parents/guardians of the victim and the perpetrator. In the event the allegation by a staff member is substantiated, the principal/designee will promptly notify the staff member.

- Notice shall be in the primary language of the home and include determination and actions taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation.
- The principal/designee may, but not required to, contact parents/guardians prior to a determination.
- Notice for victims shall include DESE Problem Resolution System and the process for seeking assistance or filing a PRS claim.
- Notice to parents/guardians will comply with federal and state law regarding confidentiality of student records, and other privacy laws. The principal/designee cannot inform the target's parents/guardians about any disciplinary action taken against the aggressor, unless the information is directly related to the victim (e.g stay away or no contact order)

If principal/designee determine disciplinary action is appropriate it will be based on the facts and findings and in accordance with district disciplinary policies. Discipline procedures for SWD are governed by IDEA. Discipline procedures for staff members will be referred to Human Resources Dept.

If an incident of bullying or retaliation occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in the school district, the principal of the school informed of the bullying or retaliation shall notify the local law enforcement agency if the principal has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor.

Please review the following **required** documentation before continuing to the next slide:

- [JICFB - Bullying Policy](#)
- [Gardner Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#)
- Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities in the IEP and in School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Efforts:  
[Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities in the IEP and in School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Efforts](#)
- National Bullying Prevention Center:  
[Bullying Statistics - National Bullying Prevention Center](#)

*If employees have any questions regarding this training module or required documentation, please contact your direct supervisor or your school's principal.*