

Abington Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy

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

I. Definitions and Statement of Prohibition

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

Nothing in this policy is designed or intended to limit the District's authority to discipline or take remedial action under General Laws Chapter 71, §37H, or in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether this policy covers the conduct.

Definitions:

Bullying is defined as the repeated and intentional 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 victim. Bullying is characterized by an imbalance of physical, psychological or emotional power, that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the victim's property
- Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to him self/her self or of damage to his/her property
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the target
- Infringes on the rights of the target at school
- Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school

Cyberbullying is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication.

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

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

- (i) on school grounds and property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program whether on or

off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased, or used by a school district or school; or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by the Abington Public School District, and

(ii) at a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the target or witnesses, infringe on their rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

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.

II. Procedures for Reporting Bullying/Cyberbullying/Retaliation

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

If a staff member witnesses or reports an incident:

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.

If a student, parent/guardian or others report an incident to a staff member:

The Abington Public School District expects students, parents or guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the principal or designee. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Students, parents or guardians, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report.

Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member, or with the principal or designee.

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

If a report is anonymous:

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

III. Procedures for Investigating Reported Bullying/Cyberbullying/Retaliation

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal or designee will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target; and altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target. The principal or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

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

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

Interview Procedure:

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

IV. Procedure for Follow-Up of Investigating Reported Bullying/Cyberbullying/Retaliation

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

- **Prohibition of Retaliation**
It will be explained to the victim, aggressor, and where appropriate, the witnesses that any retaliation taken by any party against any other party as a result of the reporting of the incident is strictly forbidden and could be subject to school and/or legal action.
- **Insufficient Evidence**
If there is insufficient evidence that the situation meets the definition of bullying, inform the parties involved and continue to monitor the situation. Refer to the Student Handbook for further disciplinary action if applicable.
- **Target Safety**
The victim's need for protection will be assessed and addressed. A post incident conference with the target will be held during which the target will be reassured of his or her safety and steps taken to prevent further occurrences.
- **Disciplinary Action Procedure**
In cases where it is determined that disciplinary action is needed the Principal or designee shall assign such consequences as are outlined in the Student Code of Conduct within the Student Handbook.
- **Notification of Parents**
Parents of the alleged aggressor and target should be contacted as soon as possible following the conclusion of the investigation or the end of the student day, whichever comes first. The school or district will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula used by the district or school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTO, PTA, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.

- **Student Support Team Follow-Up (SST)**
 Following the conclusion of the investigation, the case will be brought to the building level Student Support Team. SST will discuss further needs of the victim, aggressor, appropriate family members of the involved students and any witnesses and determine if further services and/or referrals to outside services are necessary. When appropriate, additional staff members will be notified such as: special education, general education, and support staff.
- **Special Education Process: Students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP)**
An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools, Section 7
 “For students identified with developmental or mental disabilities, the IEP team must consider and specifically address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. (see M.G.L.C. 71B, 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010)
 Whenever the IEP Team evaluation indicates that a student’s disability affects social skills development or when the student’s disability makes him or her vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing, the IEP must address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.
- **Reporting of Criminal Acts Relative to Bullying**
 Should it be determined that a crime has been committed in the act of bullying and/or cyberbullying, the Principal or designee will contact the Superintendent of Schools then the Abington Police Department in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding.
- **False Accusations**
 If it is determined that a student has knowingly provided a false accusation of bullying or retaliation, such action will be considered in itself an act of harassment or bullying/retaliation. An appropriate consequence will be assigned as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct within the Student Handbook.

Notification of Other Districts

If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, the principal or designee will promptly notify the principal or designee of the other school or district.

V. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Abington Public Schools is dedicated to providing ongoing professional development for all staff, including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, custodians, bus drivers, and paraprofessionals. Our

plan for providing professional development reflects the requirements under M.G.L.c.71,§ 370.

A. Annual Staff Training on “the Policy”

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

B. Ongoing Professional Development

The bullying prevention and intervention policy includes ongoing, research-based professional development to build the skills of all members of school staff, including but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, custodians, and paraprofessionals, to prevent, identify and respond to bullying. The content of such professional development includes: 1) developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents; 2) developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents; 3) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among the perpetrator, the victim, and any witnesses to the bullying; 4) research findings on bullying; 5) information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and 6) internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

C. Written Notice to Staff

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

D. Parents and Guardians

Parents and Guardians will be informed about the bullying prevention and intervention curricula used by the school district or school including: (i) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the school or district plan; (ii) the dynamics of bullying; and (iii) online

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

The school or district will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula used by the district or school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTO, PTA, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.

Each year the school or district will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. The school or district will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school's or district's Internet safety policy. All notices and information made available to parents or guardians will be in hard copy and electronic formats, and will be available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The Abington Public Schools will post the Plan and related information on its website at www.abingtonps.org.

*Approved by the
Abington School Committee
on March 29, 2011*