

FALL RIVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"The Scholarship City"

417 Rock Street, Fall River, MA 02720

Matthew H. Malone, Ph.D., Superintendent

MEMORANDUM

To: Fall River Community
From: Matthew H. Malone, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools
Date: January 17, 2019
Re: Fall River Bullying Framework



This has been a tough week for all of us in the Fall River Public Schools and for the entirety of the greater Fall River Community. The death of a child is THE most heartbreaking tragedy, and we all grieve the loss of our dearly departed Fonseca 5th grade student. Our thoughts and prayers, as well as our extended support network, are with the child's family and friends. We have been grateful for the outpouring of support we have received for the family and the school, as school professionals and partners from other city agencies have been fantastic in their response to this crisis.

Currently, the death investigation is being led by the District Attorney's office, and I ask kindly that we wait for their final determination before jumping to conclusions regarding the facts of this case. I have been proud of how caring and compassionate our leadership, faculty, and staff have been at Fonseca in dealing with this unfathomable situation. However, in response to the calls, emails, social media posts, and questions I have received, specifically those that have been quick to blame "bullying" as the core issue in our schools, I am providing parents and the public with this communicate to clearly explain what the Fall River Public Schools has in place to prevent and otherwise deal with bullying. I want to be very clear that the Fall River Public Schools does not condone bullying in any form, nor have we ever shied away from confronting the serious and harmful allegations of bullying in our schools.

The issue of bullying is something that our entire industry is focused on addressing, not only here in Massachusetts, but across the nation. With the advent of technology and social media, and given 24 hour per day connectivity resulting in relentless and varied mediums by which bullying may be conducted, bullying has become much more complex. In my generation, bullying was something done face-to-face during times when two or more parties were present in the same location. In this context, the victim was able to get away from a bullying situation through physically changing their proximity. In 2019, bullying has become something that may seem impossible to get away from given the reach of technology. As such, our jobs as educators leading school systems with strong core values of kindness, empathy, and teamwork has become much more complex than it was just twenty years ago. In many ways, our jobs and our efforts to combat bullying are now essentially 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

We address the issue of bullying in our schools by first following the legal statues and state regulations that outline our legal and moral responsibility to provide safe and healthy school climates across our entire school system. Massachusetts has one of the strongest anti-bullying laws in the country. MGL, Chapter 71, Section 37O, codifies bullying in the process and procedure by which it is dealt with in our schools (<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section37O>). In terms of the discipline associated following a bullying finding, please refer Chapter 222 of the Acts of 2012 *An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School* G.L. c. 71, 37H ³/₄ and G.L. c.

76, §21 <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/discipline/StudentDiscipline.html>). Aligned with MGL and required by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Fall River Public Schools has developed official policy, adopted by the School Committee https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1529337479/fallriverschoolsorg/ou5n0sa8twepkvncoi73/Bully_Prevention_2017.pdf). All schools in the Fall River Public Schools follow the district policy and procedures with accusations of bullying. All forms are contained on our district webpage. This includes investigative report led by our District Bullying Coordinator and our school Leadership Teams, which includes detailed findings, communication with students and parents, and student discipline as appropriate. If the school determines – by following the district procedure – that a bullying allegation is found to be false, parents of alleged victims have the right to appeal to the district bullying committee. Each school keeps a list of students that are investigated as aggressors or victims and the results of the investigation. When bullying is verified to have occurred, we have a host of responses to include, but not limited to, all punitive actions contained in the Code of Conduct, up to and including expulsion. Quite often, a safety plan is developed, students are separated, and the schools’ administrative teams monitor closely for accountability following the implementation of discipline.

In addition to our policy and procedure for bullying investigation and response, we also have a very robust and pro-active educational component designed around the implementation of best practice for anti-bullying. We are a PreK-12 school system that delivers an integrated social-emotional learning curriculum across all grade levels in our schools. What follows is an articulation of the pro-active educational program that we use in our schools.

Anti-Bullying Curriculum

There are various anti-bullying curricula being deployed across the district. While there is no uniform curriculum K-12, below are examples of what is being used at various Elementary / Middle School:

1. **Responsive Classroom** - <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>

- Grade Level: PreK-8
- We have trained our classroom teachers in the implementation of the Responsive Classroom model and curriculum to support social-emotional learning in our schools.
- Through direct instruction and pro-active modeling, Responsive Classroom provides a consistent classroom structure and learning environment for students and teachers that positively encourages all students to be contributing members of a classroom community. Responsive Classroom provides structures and opportunities for students to build positive relationships with each other, and their teachers. Responsive Classroom also provides students with tools to self-monitor and self-regulate their emotions in a manner that is strengths based and encourages both self-reflection and personal responsibility to the learning community.
- Key points of the program
 - setting classroom rituals and routines
 - emphasizes proactive measures over reactive
 - includes student voice in all phases of the program through hopes and dreams
 - teaches students the inherent value of making good choices, positive character trait development
 - guides our approach to discipline- logical consequences
 - sets the tone for teacher language- reinforcing, reminding, redirecting

2. **Second Step** - <http://www.secondstep.org/>

- Grade Level: K-5
- Second Step is a research-based program rooted in social-emotional learning (SEL) that helps transform schools into supportive, successful learning environments uniquely equipped to

encourage children to thrive. More than just a classroom curriculum, Second Step's holistic approach helps create a more empathetic society by providing education professionals, families, and the larger community with tools to enable them to take an active role in the social-emotional growth and safety of today's children.

- Created for K-5, field tested lessons make the best use of class time while videos, stories and games model how to recognize, report, and refuse bullying.

3. **Steps to Respect** - <https://www.blueprintsprograms.org/factsheet/steps-to-respect>

- Grade Level: K-6
- An anti-bullying curriculum designed to reduce bullying and destructive bystander behaviors, increase prosocial beliefs related to bullying, and increase social-emotional skills through a grade appropriate literature unit and other educational materials and lessons.

4. **Teaching Tolerance** Activities embedded into Advisory, Morning Meeting, and Classroom Lessons - <https://www.tolerance.org/>

- Grade Level: K-12
- Film kits and lesson plans provide the building blocks of a customized Learning Plan, and include texts, student tasks and teaching strategies around the themes of Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action. These Standards provide a common language and a road map for anti-bias education at every grade level.

5. **Katie Brown Educational Program** - <https://kbep.org/program/>

- Grade Level: 4-12
- [Katie Brown Education Report of the FRPS](#)
- The Katie Brown Educational Program (KBEP) offers a range of educational programs throughout the year. KBEP takes the approach that all young people need age-appropriate relationship violence prevention education to be able to build and maintain successful relationships from childhood into adulthood educational programs including lecture, discussion, group and individual activities, handouts, moments of self-reflection, and additional resources.
- [4th Grade Scope and Sequence](#)
- [5th to 12th Grade Scope and Sequence](#)

6. **Botvin LifeSkills Health Program**

- Grade Level: 3-8
- Taught for a semester at each school
- Topics of self-esteem, self-awareness, communication, social skills and advocating for self are covered
- [3rd to 5th Grade Scope and Sequence](#)
- [6th to 8th Grade Scope and Sequence](#)

7. **Health I and Health II**

- Grades 9 and 11
- One-term classes include units on bullying
- Graduation Requirement to take both classes

8. **Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders (AVB)**

<https://www.childtrends.org/programs/aggressors-victims-and-bystanders-avb>

- Grade Level: 6-8

- The AVB program combines classroom instruction with behavioral strategies for controlling aggression and managing conflict. The school-based curriculum consists of 20 sessions that look at the nature of aggression and violence and the techniques available to control them. Session topics include looking at conflict in our lives, circumstances when conflicts become violence, beliefs about conflict and violence, inner conflict, and visions of a non-violent world.

9. Conditions for Learning Survey

- An annual survey is conducted of students, parents and teachers to assess their perceptions around school climate and culture
- Data is collected and used to inform district-wide SEL programming

In response to some very negative comments about Fonseca Elementary School, specifically, let me be clear that our faculty, staff, and leadership are the very best in the business of education and they have worked hard to create a school climate and culture that is safe, healthy, and focused on always meeting the needs of students and families first. In the fall of 2016, DESE determined Fonseca Elementary School to be an underperforming elementary school, designating the school a level 4 school in need of turnaround. During that first year, a local stakeholder group and a Turnaround Redesign Team worked all year to develop a rigorous Turnaround Plan. Said plan was implemented in the fall of 2017 under the leadership of Principal Lisi and her faculty and staff. The Fonseca Elementary School is currently in year 2 of the implementation of their Turnaround Plan, closely monitored by DESE and other outside reviewers for accountability. In addition, I and my central office team regularly visit, observe, and roll up our sleeves to support our practitioners in their school improvement efforts.

Our team of professionals at Fonseca have done an amazing job of improving the climate and culture of the school community. Improvements are being made and the changes over the past three years are palpable, as our student conduct data indicates a decrease in physical incidents and bullying over the past three years. There is still work to be done, of course, especially in our efforts to increase student achievement results, but each week the school is demonstrating improvement. I invite any parent or community member to visit Fonseca to see the first-hand progress that has been made.

Finally, I ask the public to please know and understand that we will always be transparent in our efforts to take on issues of bullying and bring all of the resources we have available to ensure our students are kept safe, healthy, and free from behaviors that create a hostile environment. If any parent or community member suspects that bullying is occurring, please address it immediately using the chain of command – starting with the classroom teacher, counselor, vice principal, and principal. If still not satisfied, the central office is capable and ready to assist in problem solving as needed. We are in the business of supporting our learners and working with parents as a team to foster academic and social/emotional development of our students so that our graduates are competent, caring, productive members of our democracy.

I am accountable for the safety and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff, and I take this responsibility seriously. If anyone has any questions they would like to ask, please contact me directly. I am looking forward to our continued, collective work as a City and as a community of care to combat and eradicate bullying from our schools. The Fall River Public Schools will be working with our partners at Diman, as well as our local parochial and charter schools, to collectively organize our best practices and further a community conversation on bullying in our schools and in our community. We are all in this work together.

MHM/rlc