

## FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As we begin the 2019-2020 school year, it is important for all members of the Greenwich community to work together to provide each young person with a safe and supportive learning environment. This means that the adults in schools, playgrounds, neighborhoods, sports facilities and homes work with our children and teens to prevent, recognize, report and respond to mean behaviors, especially those that may rise to the level of bullying (as defined by the State of Connecticut). Our goal is to foster a positive climate (physical, emotional and intellectual) and interrupt ANY kind of inappropriate peer interactions, intentional and unintentional. And, to that end, formally determining that any negative interaction is “bullying” is far less important than insuring that all our students are safe and inappropriate peer interactions are stopped.

While not all mean behaviors (inappropriate peer interactions) rise to the level of bullying, most bullying begins as mean behaviors. Mean behavior may be described in two ways:

- Unintentional mean behavior – where the perpetrator does not *intend* to hurt the victim. This presents a “teachable moment” where the perpetrator is informed that his/her behavior has caused hurt feelings. The goal is to help the perpetrator understand the impact of his/her behavior and to help the perpetrator identify alternative ways to interact that are more productive and lead to positive change.
- Intentional mean behavior – where the perpetrator intentionally behaves in a way that is meant to humiliate, isolate, or diminish the victim. If repeated, this type of mean-spirited behavior may meet the Connecticut statutory definition of bullying. Early and consistent intervention at this point on the part of all school and community members (adults, peer bystanders and peer allies) will significantly reduce incidents of any kind of hurtful mean- spirited behaviors including but not limited to bullying and harassment and improve school climate.

Our plan in Greenwich for 2019-2020 includes different components to address the ways students engage in both positive and negative behaviors:

Continuation of our emphasis on our common district norms:

- Be Here
- Be Safe
- Be Honest
- Care for Self and Others
- Let Go and Move On

- Continued implementation of the “Second Step” program at the preschool, elementary and middle school levels. This program nurtures social-emotional competence and develops foundational learning skills promoting students’ social, emotional, and academic success.
- Review of last June’s SEL survey results so each school can identify the areas that may need additional attention or development. This data will also help the District Safe School Climate committee design district-wide activities to reinforce the norms and the behaviors they represent.
- Refresher workshop for ALL certified and non-certified staff regarding their responsibilities under the Safe School Climate legislation.
- Continue to reinforce the District Norms through district-wide “Norm Days” included expanded community participation activities.
- Increase the number of schools who have participated in the year long professional learning program for Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS).

As a reminder, the Connecticut Safe School Climate legislation defines “bullying”

**A.** The repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district, or

**B.** A physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district, that:

Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student's property, places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, creates a hostile environment at school for such student, infringes on the rights of such student at school, or substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school, gives students the tools to excel in and out of the classroom and to make progress in emotion management, situational awareness, and academic achievement.

Bullying shall include, but not be limited to, a written, oral or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics;

If you witness or hear about mean behaviors (that may or may not be bullying), you may formally notify the school personnel in writing or feel free to call either your child’s teacher or administrator. It is also important for you to know that, consistent with this law, you or your child may anonymously report acts of bullying to our teachers, other educational personnel (e.g., school social worker) and/or administrator. When possible, please encourage your son/daughter to make such reports if they feel they have been targeted [bullied] or if they have

witnessed another student being targeted [bullied]. Bullying behavior is prohibited by our student discipline policy/codes of conduct and may lead to disciplinary action, including suspension from school (or in more severe cases, expulsion by your child's school district), but most importantly, ANY kind of hurtful, mean-spirited behavior is not acceptable in the Greenwich Public Schools.

In addition to the current requirements for notifying parents/guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and students against whom such acts were directed, the new legislation also requires us to notify parents/guardians of students at the beginning of any investigation that may lead to a determination of bullying.

We are aware that incidents of mean behavior and/or bullying are rarely committed in view of supervising adults. Targets are most vulnerable in situations beyond the eyes of staff, such as the playground, buses, restrooms, and bus stops. The most likely adult to be informed by a target is the parent/guardian or a peer. Parents/guardians are often reluctant to inform the school due to the student's fear of retaliation. But without parent/guardian input, the school personnel will be uninformed and unable to intervene to stop this inappropriate behavior, regardless if it rises to the level of being formal "bullying." It is vital that school staff and parents/guardians continue to work together to protect the safe physical and emotional environment of our school programs.

We hope this information is helpful as we all begin a safe and positive 2019-2020 school year.

Gene Schmidt