

HOOSAC VALLEY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
BULLY PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

updated June 2024

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICIES

Hoosac Valley Regional School District's Bullying Prevention Plan was developed in alignment with applicable state and federal laws and regulations as well as the following School Committee Policies:

- Bullying Prevention Policy (JICFB)
- AC, Nondiscrimination
- ACAB, Sexual Harassment
- JBA, Student-to-Student Harassment
- JICFA, Prohibition of Hazing
- JK, Student Discipline Regulations

COMMITMENT

The Hoosac Valley Regional School District is committed to creating and sustaining a safe, caring, respectful learning environment for all students. We will treat all members of our community with civility and respect in an inclusive environment. Keywords that represent our actions and our words are kindness, dignity, responsibility, courage and honesty. Our schools strictly enforce a prohibition against bullying of any student. The School Committee expects that in collaboration with staff, families and community members, each school will develop and implement a plan for education and discipline, including curriculum, to prevent bullying and to help adults and students to respond effectively to reports and observations of bullying. We believe that education and prevention are key elements within our bullying prevention and intervention plan. Hoosac Valley Regional School District recognizes that 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 district affords all students the same protection regardless of their status under the law. If a bullying complaint also alleges discrimination or harassment based on real or perceived protected class status, the district shall investigate the complaint under both its bullying policies and procedures and applicable civil rights complaint policies and procedures.

KEY DEFINITIONS

- ***Bullying*** - 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:
 - a. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
 - b. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself or of damage to his/her property;
 - c. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
 - d. infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
 - e. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Deliberate acts of exclusion which have the same effect are also considered forms of bullying.

- ***Cyber-bullying*** - bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall

include, but shall not be limited to, 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. Cyber-bullying shall also include the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or 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 clauses (a) to (e), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of 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 enumerated in clauses (a) to (e), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

- 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.
- School Grounds - property on which a school building or facility is located or property that is owned, leased, or used by a school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private day or residential school, or collaborative school for a school-sponsored activity, function, program, instruction, or training.
- Target - a student against whom bullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.
- Perpetrator or Aggressor - 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 a paraprofessional who engages in bullying or retaliation.
- School Staff - all Hoosac Valley Regional School district staff members including, but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activities and paraprofessionals.
- 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.

BULLYING PROHIBITED

Bullying and retaliation regarding bullying issues are prohibited on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at school-sponsored or school-related activities, functions or programs whether on or off school grounds, at school bus stops, on school buses or other vehicles owned, leased or used by the district, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the school district.

Bullying and retaliation are also prohibited 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 the district, if the act or acts in question create a hostile environment at school for the student target, infringe on the rights of the student target at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of

a school.

The School Committee expects administrators to make clear to students and School Staff that bullying and retaliation will not be tolerated and will be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including suspension and expulsion for students, and termination for employees. The district's disciplinary action shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior.

School Staff are required to report any bullying or retaliation they see or learn about. The district will promptly and reasonably investigate all allegations of bullying or retaliation. The principal/designee of each building will be responsible for handling all complaints alleging bullying or retaliation.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, who provides information during an investigation of bullying, or who is a witness to or has reliable information about bullying, is prohibited and will be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including suspension and expulsion for students, and termination for employees.

Any student who knowingly makes false charges or brings a malicious complaint regarding bullying or retaliation may be subjected to any of the disciplinary and/or corrective action(s) detailed above.

Each student is responsible for:

- Complying with the District's bullying policies and procedures;
- Ensuring that he/she does not bully or retaliate another person on school grounds or in a school-related function, event, or activity;
- Ensuring that he/she does not retaliate against any other person for reporting or filing a bullying complaint, for aiding or encouraging the filing of a bullying complaint, or for cooperating in an investigation of bullying; and
- Cooperating in the investigation of reports or complaints of bullying or retaliation.

SECTION 2: PROCEDURES

ELECTRONIC REPORTING SYSTEMS

It is widely understood that the failure to report remains a significant hurdle in attempting to respond effectively to incidents of bullying or retaliation. To address this concern, the Massachusetts anti-bullying law requires that schools make provisions for anonymous reporting, and the procedures we have adopted adequately address that concern. There remains, however, the question of providing the community with the ability to anonymously report incidents of bullying electronically.

What the district has learned from the past is that many students knew of bullying incidents but lacked the confidence to alert the administration. An electronic anonymous system will open the door to reporting and take away the fear associated with reporting an incident.

The presence of an electronic anonymous reporting system will serve as an immediate deterrent for bullying or retaliation behavior. It will empower bystanders and victims while shifting the balance of power away from those that engage in bullying or retaliation behavior.

Drafting strong penalties for the misuse of the system will help curb inappropriate use.

Offering an electronic anonymous system sends a strong message to the students and the community that the district is ready and able to tackle this problem by any means necessary.

Students, staff, parents, guardians or others are able to report incidents of bullying or retaliation through the anonymous electronic system or through report forms located at each individual school as well as the Superintendent's office.

One significant concern that has been raised is the question of false reporting and/or abuse of an anonymous reporting system. District research has shown that schools that have adopted anonymous electronic systems report minimal issues with false reporting. The district also recognizes that the provision of anonymous reporting, regardless of the format, will always carry an associated risk of false reports. A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action. No disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Hoosac Valley Regional School District Procedures Related to Acts of Bullying

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING ACTS OF BULLYING OR RETALIATION

1. If any employee of the Hoosac Valley Regional School District observes, has been reported to, or otherwise becomes aware of a possible act of bullying or retaliation that person must report the event to a school administrator (Principal/Designee) within one (1) full school day, using the Bullying Reporting Form, or other appropriate means of communication.
2. If a student expresses a desire to report or discuss a possible incident of bullying or retaliation with a staff member, the staff member will, in a timely manner, provide the student with a practical, safe, private and age-appropriate way of doing so.

3. Reporting forms may be obtained in the school's main office, counselor's office, on the respective school and district websites, and other locations determined by the school. All members of the community (students, staff, family members, or members of the community at large) may report an act of bullying or retaliation to a school administrator via the bullying reporting form or other appropriate means of communication. If a student requires help completing the form, a staff member will provide the necessary assistance.
4. Each school will devise ways in which the complaint forms may be submitted to school administration, including means to report anonymously.
5. Information obtained from the Bullying Report Forms shall be recorded in the district specific filing system as a "complaint" for the reported target student.

PROCEDURES FOR THE PROMPT INVESTIGATION OF ACTS OF BULLYING OR RETALIATION

1. The Principal or designee must initiate an investigation of a report of bullying or retaliation within a swift and timely manner after being notified of a possible bullying or retaliation incident, consistent with due process rights, using the Bullying Incident Investigation Form.
2. If the target is injured, medical treatment will be provided without delay, and the student's parents will be notified immediately.
3. The Principal or designee will conduct an investigation to determine both whether an act of bullying or retaliation occurred, and which person(s) were responsible for the act(s) and/or played a role in perpetuating it. The Bullying Flowchart will be followed.
4. Other related complaints regarding the involved parties, including those from previous schools, will be reviewed as part of the investigative process.
5. The Principal or designee will contact the parents/guardians of all related parties in a timely manner in which the investigation was initiated and inform them of the status of the investigation in line with student confidentiality protections.
6. Discussions with all parties should be documented by the investigating administrator as soon as possible after the event.
7. When an act of bullying or retaliation has been determined, the Principal or designee will apply consequences consistent with due process rights using the school Code of Conduct as a guide.
8. At any point after receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, the principal or designee shall notify the local law enforcement agency if the principal or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor. Notice shall be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. The principal shall document the reasons for his or her decision to notify

law enforcement. Nothing in 603 CMR 49.06 shall be interpreted to require reporting to a law enforcement agency in situations in which bullying and retaliation can be handled appropriately within the school district or school. In making the determination whether notification to law enforcement is appropriate, the principal may consult with the school resource officer and any other individuals the principal deems appropriate. Nothing in 603 CMR 49.06 shall prevent the principal from taking appropriate disciplinary or other action pursuant to school district or school policy and state law, provided that disciplinary actions balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. The principal shall respond to the incident as set forth in relevant provisions of the local plan consistent with 603 CMR 49.06. 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 or school, 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.

9. The Principal or designee will notify, in the primary language of the home, parents/guardians of all parties involved as to the specific actions taken relative to each person. A principal or designee's notification to a parent about an incident or a report of bullying or retaliation must comply with confidentiality requirements of the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, 603 CMR 23.00, and the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Regulations, 34 CFR Part 99, as set forth in 603 CMR 49.07.
10. A principal or designee may not disclose information from a student record of a target or aggressor to a parent unless the information is about the parent's own child.
11. A principal or designee may disclose a determination of bullying or retaliation to a local law enforcement agency under 603 CMR 49.06 without the consent of a student or his or her parent. The principal shall communicate with law enforcement officials in a manner that protects the privacy of targets, student witnesses, and aggressors to the extent practicable under the circumstances.
12. A principal or designee may disclose student record information about a target or aggressor to appropriate parties in addition to law enforcement in connection with a health or safety emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals as provided in 603 CMR 23.07(4)(e) and 34 CFR 99.31(a)(10) and 99.36. 603 CMR 49.07(3) is limited to instances in which the principal has determined there is an immediate and significant threat to the health or safety of the student or other individuals. It is limited to the period of emergency and does not allow for blanket disclosure of student record information. The principal or designee must document the disclosures and the reasons that the principal determined that a health or safety emergency exists.
13. The Principal or designee will create a written record of the bullying investigation and any disciplinary actions taken, as well as the statements of the victim, witnesses, and offender and notice to the parents/guardians. No material records or evidence will be discarded until all students involved have left the school district.
14. The Superintendent shall be notified and will summarily document the investigation.

PROCEDURES FOR FOLLOWING UP ACTS OF BULLYING OR RETALIATION

1. Upon investigation and determination that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee shall promptly notify, in the primary language of the home, the parents of the target and the aggressor of the determination and relevant steps to prevent future bullying or retaliation. The Principal or designee shall inform the parent or guardian of the target about the Massachusetts's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Problem Resolution System and the process for accessing that system. Any disciplinary action shall follow due process and the Code of Conduct. Notices shall comply with student confidentiality.
2. After the determination that an act of bullying or retaliation has occurred and after appropriate discipline has been enforced, the Principal or designee will inform the target's parent of actions that school officials will take to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation, including assessing the target student's needs for protection and in order to restore a sense of safety will develop with the target student and his/her parents or guardians as safety plan; and with the aggressor student and his/her parents or guardians a conduct plan; and with the person(s) who reports bullying, the person(s) who provides information during an investigation and witnesses to the bullying or retaliation incident a safety plan.
3. The safety plan for the target will include, but not be limited by, the following. A staff member (as designated by the administrator, student, and the parents/guardians) will be assigned as a check-in person to regularly meet with the student to ensure the following:
 - An immediate safety plan will be put in place to keep the target student in school without fear. The school will provide any support needed to allow the student to stay in school and feel safe at all times.
 - Ensure no acts of retaliation have occurred.
 - Strategies are provided for dealing with future incidents, emphasizing immediate reporting of any further acts.
 - Access to the school counselor will be made available.
 - Information regarding outside support services, including counseling, are provided to student and family.
 - The frequency and duration of check-ins will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
4. If the target student is a student with a disability, the Principal or designee shall contact the Director of Special Services and special education liaison or 504 liaison and inform liaison of the outcome of the bullying investigation and the student's Team shall consider whether a Team meeting is required and shall consider whether the student requires disability-related educational supports and services related to bullying prevention and intervention.
5. The conduct plan for the aggressor will include, but not be limited by, the following: The Principal of designee will conduct compulsory conduct meetings to ensure the following:
 - A strong statement with very specific consequences will be communicated to the student and parent in terms of retaliation or contact with the target student. Contact with the target will be prohibited and serious consequences will be given if this occurs. No further acts of bullying have been committed.
 - The student has been educated regarding acceptable alternative behaviors and if appropriate,

- access to the school counselor shall be provided.
- The student has received further education of the school's anti-bullying policy, including the potential for more serious school consequences and/or criminal charges being filed.
 - The frequency and duration of these meetings will be decided on a case-by-case basis.
 - Information regarding outside support resources, including counseling, will be made available to the student and their parents/guardians.
 - If the aggressor is a student with a disability, the Principal or designee shall contact the special education or 504 liaison and inform liaison of the outcome of the bullying investigation and the student's Team shall consider whether a Team meeting is required and shall consider whether the student requires disability-related educational supports and services related to bullying prevention and intervention.
6. In order to protect a person who reports bullying or retaliation, provides information during a bullying or retaliation investigation, witnesses bullying or retaliation or has reliability information about an act of bullying or retaliation, the district shall offer safety planning strategies. The safety planning strategies will include, but not limited to the following. A staff member (as designated by the administrator, student, and the parents/guardians) will be assigned as a check-in person to regularly meet with the person(s) to ensure the following:
- An immediate safety plan will be put in place to keep the person(s) who reported a bullying or retaliation incident; a witness or a person(s) who provided information to an investigation in a school without fear. The school will provide any support needed to allow the person to stay in school and feel safe at all times.
 - Ensure no acts of retaliation have occurred.
 - Information regarding outside support services are provided to student and family.
 - The frequency and duration of check-ins will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
 - Information regarding outside support resources will be made available to the student and their parents/guardians.

AVAILABILITY OF THE BULLYING REPORT FORM

1. Schools will inform staff about the availability of the Bullying Report Form for their use during opening-of-school meetings and then periodically throughout the school year.
2. Schools will inform students about the availability of the form and its use during orientation sessions and periodically throughout the school year.
3. Samples of the form, as well as a description of the form's availability (as described below) will be included in the faculty and student/parent handbooks.
4. Forms will be available in the school's main office, counselor's office, library, and other locations as determined by the individual schools. Electronic versions of the form will be available on the district and individual school websites.
5. Each school will devise ways in which the reporting form may be submitted to the school administration, including means to submit anonymously.

SECTION 3: BULLYING PREVENTION CURRICULUM

The school district will implement an anti-bullying program as a required part of the curriculum at each grade level. It will be based in age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention using evidence-based curricula. In recent years, the district has strengthened the social skills development curriculum of grades Pre-K-3 through the implementation of *Responsive Classroom*. Moreover, after a great deal of research, the middle school (grades 4-7) implemented a research based program, Positive Action. Furthermore, grades 8-12 have implemented the use of CREW advisory blocks and utilize a combination of resources including *Olweus* and concepts from *We Are Crew*.

The district will provide instruction on civil and ethical behavior at each grade level and hold students and adults responsible for behaving with respect toward one another at all times, through the reinforcement of our district wide acronym of PRIDE (Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, Diversity, and Empathy). Instruction will include appreciation of human differences and avoidance of behaviors that discriminate against others based on their gender, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, race, national origin, religion or disability.

SECTION 4: PARENT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The Principal or designee shall inform parents and guardians about the bullying prevention curriculum and provide families with information on the dynamics of bullying, online safety and cyberbullying and how parents and guardians can reinforce the school's bullying prevention curriculum at home and support the school district's bullying prevention efforts. The district will offer several forums for parents/guardians, students and community members on bullying prevention and intervention.

The district shall provide to students and their parents or guardians in age-appropriate terms and in the most prevalent languages of families, annual written notice of relevant student-related sections of the bullying prevention plan in the Student Handbook.

This Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan shall be posted on the district's website. Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the district may do so with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/>, emails can be sent to compliance@doe.mass.edu or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information are also available at the Superintendent's Office.

SECTION 5: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A yearly plan is in place to provide training to all teachers in the bullying prevention curriculum at all grade levels. The faculty and staff at each school shall be trained annually on this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. Additionally, ongoing professional development for all School Staff members, as required by the state's anti-bullying statute (G.L. c. 71, §37), shall be provided to build the skills to prevent, identify and respond to bullying and to implement the bullying prevention and intervention plan. The content of such professional development shall include, but not be limited to:

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 cyber-bullying;
6. internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying; and
7. legal issues and responsibilities related to bullying. The School Staff shall receive annual written notice of the bullying prevention and intervention plan.

SECTION 6: EVALUATION

As required by state law, once every four years, Hoosac Valley Regional School District shall administer a student survey developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to assess “school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in schools. The survey results will be used to assess the effectiveness of district’s evidence-based bullying prevention curriculum and programs. Additionally, the district has developed appropriate instruments to gauge the climate of schools at all levels, particularly the amount of bullying that occurs and how it is handled by students and staff. These instruments will be used annually to assess effectiveness of the district’s bullying prevention programs and curriculum. The district shall report bullying incident data to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in a form and manner established by the state agency.

SECTION 7: AFFIRMATIONS

Hoosac Valley Regional School Committee

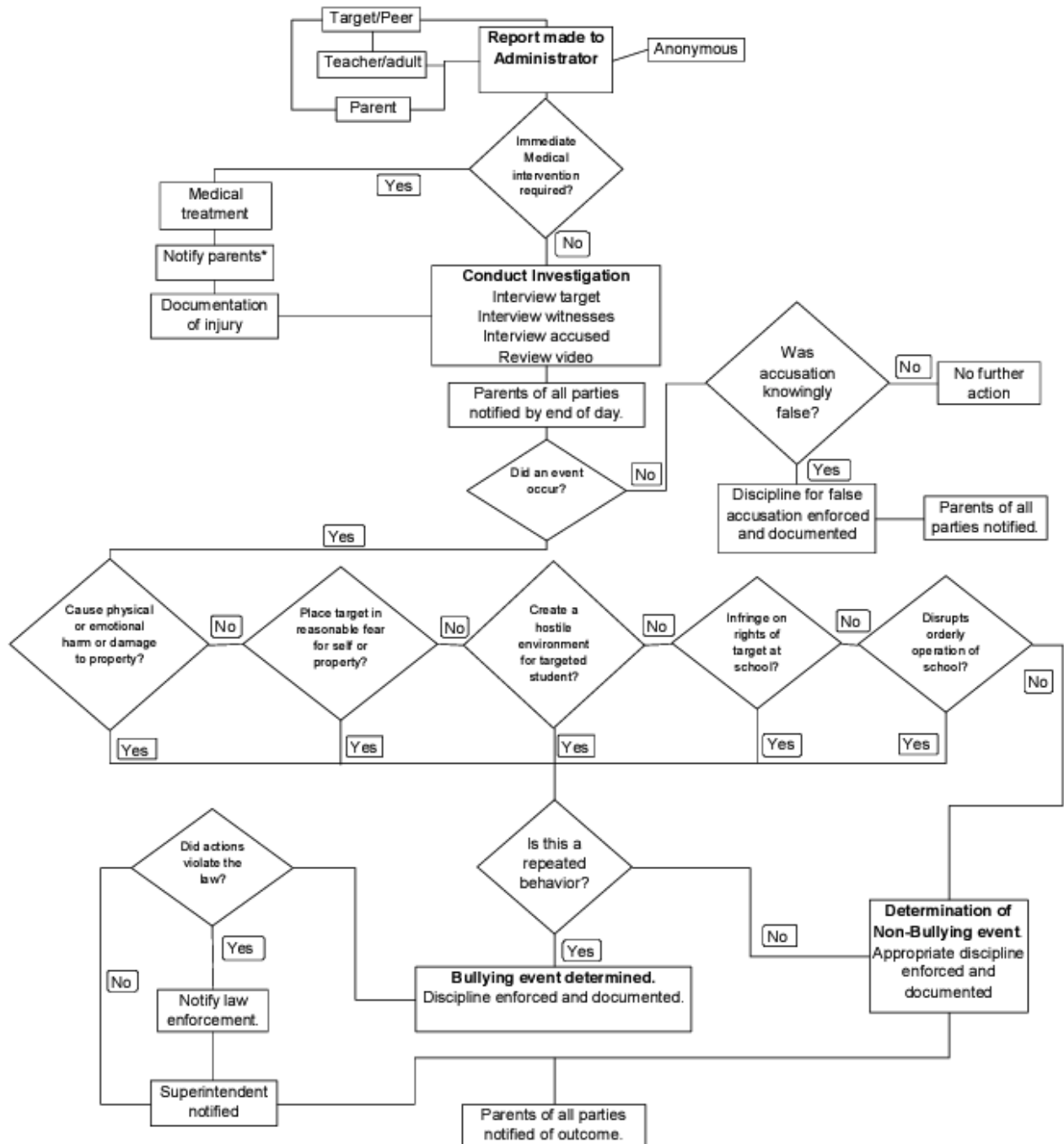
Adam Emerson, Chair
Erin Milne, Vice Chair
Andy Przystanski, Member
John Duval, Member
Micheal Henault, Member
Robert Tetlow, Member
Fred Lora, Member

Hoosac Valley Regional Administrative Leadership Team

Aaron Dean, Superintendent
Monica Zanin, Director of Student Services
Jacqueline Daniels, Associate Director of Student Services
Kristen Palatt, Director of Curriculum

SECTION 8: APPENDICES

Hoosac Valley Regional School District Bullying Flowchart



Hoosac Valley Regional School District Bullying Flowchart

