

Students

Safe School Climate Plan

The Board of Education is dedicated to promoting and maintaining a positive learning environment where all students are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school, socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. The purpose of this Safe School Climate Plan is to address the existence of bullying and teen dating violence in the district's schools.

A. Definitions

"Bullying" is defined by law as an act that is direct or indirect and severe, persistent or pervasive, which (1) causes physical or emotional harm to an individual, (2) places an individual in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm, or (3) infringes on the rights or opportunities of an individual at school.

"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. An act may not constitute bullying, but the act may still be subject to discipline for other reasons. In addition, the conduct at issue may constitute abuse, sexual harassment, discrimination, and/or criminal conduct.

"Cyberbullying" means any act of bullying through the use of the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, cellular mobile telephone or other mobile electronic devices or any electronic communications.

"Electronic communication" means 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;

"Hostile environment" means a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate;

"Outside of the school setting" means at a location, activity or program that is not school related, or through the use of an electronic device or a mobile electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by the School District;

"Mobile electronic device" means any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more individuals, including, but not limited to, a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, a laptop computer, equipment that is capable of playing a video game or a digital video disk, or equipment on which digital images are taken or transmitted.

“Teen dating violence” means any act of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including stalking, harassing and threatening that occurs between two students who are currently in or have recently been in a dating relationship.

“School climate” means the quality and character of school life based on patterns of students', parents' and guardians' and school employees' experiences of school life, including, but not limited to, norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures.

“Positive school climate” means a school climate in which (1) the norms, values, expectations and beliefs that support feelings of social, emotional and physical safety are promoted, (2) students, parents and guardians of students and school employees feel engaged and respected and work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision, (3) educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning, and (4) each person feels comfortable contributing to the operation of the school and care of the physical environment of the school.

“Emotional intelligence” means the ability to (1) perceive, recognize and understand emotions in oneself or others, (2) use emotions to facilitate cognitive activities, including, but not limited to, reasoning, problem solving and interpersonal communication, (3) understand and identify emotions, and (4) manage emotions in oneself and others.

“Social and emotional learning” means the process through which children and adults achieve emotional intelligence through the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

B. Bullying Prohibited

Bullying and teen dating violence is prohibited on 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 local or regional board of education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the local or regional board of education.

Bullying and teen dating violence are also prohibited outside of the school setting if such bullying results in any of the following:

- 1) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed
- 2) infringes in the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school
- 3) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Any form of discrimination and retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying is also strictly prohibited.

Any student who engages in bullying and teen dating violence as defined in this policy may be subject to discipline up to and including expulsion.

Any school employee who fails to respond to bullying and teen dating violence as required by this policy and the district's Safe School Climate Plan may be subject to discipline up to and including termination.

C. Roles and Responsibilities

“Safe School Climate Coordinator” is appointed by the Superintendent of Schools and is responsible for:

- 1) Implementing the District's Safe School Climate Plan;
- 2) Collaborating with safe school climate specialists, the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying in the schools of the district;
- 3) Provide data and information, in collaboration with the Superintendent of Schools of the district, to the State Department of Education regarding bullying, in accordance with state law;
- 4) Meeting with the safe school climate specialists at least twice during the school year to discuss issues relating to bullying in the school district and to make recommendations concerning amendments to the district's Safe School Climate Plan.

“Safe School Climate Specialist” is the principal of each school or designee responsible for:

- 1) Investigating or supervising the investigation of reported acts of bullying in the school in accordance with the district's Safe School Climate Plan;
- 2) Collecting and maintaining records of reports and investigations of bullying in the school; and
- 3) Acting as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying and responding to reports of bullying in the school.

“School employees” are responsible for reporting acts of bullying to safe school climate specialist when they either witness the bullying or receive a report from a student or parent. School staff who witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying must inform the school climate specialist and/or administrators, who are then charged with investigating bullying and taking appropriate action. This term includes:

- 1) A teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by a local or regional board of education or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; or
- 2) Any other individual who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides services to or on behalf of students enrolled in a public elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with the local or regional board of education.

D. Reporting Procedures

- 1) Any student who believes he or she has been the victim of bullying may report the matter to any school employee. Students may anonymously report acts of bullying to school employees.
- 2) Parents or guardians of students may file written reports of suspected bullying.
- 3) School employees who witness acts of bullying or receive reports of bullying are required to orally notify the safe school climate specialist (or another school administrator if the safe school climate specialist is unavailable), not later than one school day after such school employee witnesses or receives a report of bullying, and to file a written report not later than two school days after making such an oral report.

E. Investigation

- 1) The safe school climate specialist shall investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of bullying and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly after receipt of any written reports and that the parents or guardians of the student alleged to have committed an act or acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of the student against whom such alleged act or acts were directed receive prompt notice that such investigation has commenced,
- 2) The safe school climate specialist shall review any anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report.
- 3) After a prompt investigation, the investigator should ascertain whether the alleged conduct occurred and whether such conduct constitutes bullying as defined by law.

F. Response to Verified Acts of Bullying

- 1) Each school shall provide prompt notice to both the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed that an investigation has begun and notice not later than forty-eight hours after the completion of the investigation. This notification shall include a description of the response of school employees to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying. In addition to the results of such investigation, the school shall also notify verbally and by electronic mail (if such parents' or guardians' electronic mail addresses are known) that such parents or guardians may refer to the plain language explanation of the rights and remedies available under Connecticut General Statutes Sections 10-4a and 10-4b that is to be developed by the Connecticut Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative (and which will then be published on the District's website).
- 2) Each school is required to hold a separate and distinct meeting with the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying and the parents or guardians of the student against whom such act was directed to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed and the policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying. This invitation

shall also include the description of the response of school employees to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying. Except in rare circumstances, such meetings with parents and guardians should be held separately.

- 3) A student safety support plan shall be developed for any student against whom an act of bullying was directed. The plan shall address safety measures the school will take to protect such students against further acts of bullying.
- 4) Case-by-case interventions shall be developed to address repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline.
- 5) The principal of a school, or designee, shall notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency when such principal, or designee, believes that any acts of bullying constitute criminal conduct.

G. Prevention and Intervention Strategy

Students shall be provided with a variety of prevention and intervention strategies for bullying and teen dating violence which may include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for safe school climate or for the Prevention of bullying and teen dating violence identified by the State Department of Education;
- 2) School rules prohibiting bullying, teen dating violence, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts;
- 3) Adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying and teen dating violence is likely to occur;
- 4) Inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying and teen dating violence education and prevention using a culturally competent school-based curriculum focused on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation in kindergarten through high school;
- 5) Individual interventions with the bully, parents and school employees, and interventions with the bullied child, parents and school employees. Interventions will include referrals to a school counselor, psychologist or other appropriate social or mental health service, and periodic follow-up by the safe school climate specialist with the bullied child;
- 6) School-wide training related to safe school climate;
- 7) Student peer training, education and support;
- 8) Promotion of parent involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions.

H. Documentation and Recording Keeping

- 1) Safe school specialists shall establish a procedure for each school to:
 - a. Document and maintain records relating to reports and investigations of bullying in such school.
 - b. Maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection. This public list must not contain any personally identifiable information about any student or information that might reasonably lead to the identification of any student.
- 2) The district's safe school climate coordinator shall annually report the number of verified acts of bullying in the district's schools to the Department of Education in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education.

I. Training

All school employees must annually complete training on the prevention, identification and response to bullying and the prevention of and response to youth suicide as follows:

- 1) Teachers, administrators and pupil personnel who hold the initial educator, provisional educator or professional educator certificate shall receive in-service training. (Such in-service training may not be required if the district implements any evidence-based model approach that is approved by the State Department of Education and is consistent with state law.)
- 2) All other school employees shall receive such training as provided or made available by the State Department of Education.

J. Safe School Climate Committee

For the school year commencing July 1, 2012, and each school year thereafter, the principal of each school shall establish a committee (or designate at least one existing committee in the school) to be responsible for developing and fostering a safe school climate and addressing issues relating to bullying in the school. Such committee shall include at least one parent or guardian of a student enrolled in the school appointed by the school principal. Parents or guardians who serve on such committee shall not participate in the activities described in subparagraphs (I) and (2) below or any other activity that may compromise the confidentiality of a student. The safe school climate committee of each school shall:

- 1) Receive copies of completed reports following investigations of bullying;
- 2) Identify and address patterns of bullying among students in the school;
- 3) Review and make recommendations to amend school policies relating to bullying;

K. Documentation and Record Keeping

- 1) Review and make recommendations to the district safe school climate coordinator regarding the district's safe school climate plan based on issues and experiences specific to the school;
- 2) Educate students, school employees and parents and guardians of students on issues relating to bullying;
- 3) Collaborate with the district safe school climate coordinator in the collection of data regarding bullying, in accordance with the law;
- 4) Perform any other duties as determined by the school principal that are related to the prevention, identification and response to school bullying.

L. Periodic Assessment of School Climate

- 1) On and after July 1, 2012, and biennially thereafter, each school in the district shall complete an assessment using the school climate assessment instruments, including surveys, approved and disseminated by the State Department of Education. The assessments for each school in the district shall be submitted to the State Department of Education so that the state can monitor bullying prevention efforts over time and compare each district's progress to state trends. Assessment tools must include student assessment instruments, including surveys that contain uniform grade-level appropriate questions that collect information about students' perspectives and opinions about the school climate at the school and allow students to complete and submit such assessment and survey anonymously.
- 2) Assessment tools may also be used by Safe School Climate Committees to review and make recommendations for revisions to the district's Safe School Climate Plan.

M. Notice Requirements

- 1) At the beginning of each school year, each school will provide school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district's Safe School Climate Plan.
- 2) Students and the parents or guardians of students shall be notified at the beginning of each school year of the process by which students may make reports of bullying.
- 3) Language concerning bullying shall be included in student codes of conduct.
- 4) The district's Safe School Climate Plan shall be made available on the websites of the Board of Education and each individual school.

The Superintendent of Schools is authorized to develop regulations to implement the district's Safe School Climate Plan.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-15c Discrimination in public schools prohibited

46a-58 Deprivation of rights

10-148a Certificates of qualification

10-145o Teacher education and mentoring program

10-222d Policy on bullying behavior

10-222g Prevention and intervention strategy re: bullying

10-222h Analysis of bullying policies

P.A. 11-232 An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws.

P.A. 19-166 An Act Concerning School Climates

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REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 14
Bethlehem and Woodbury, Connecticut