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Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

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All of the district's bullying intervention and prevention resources and forms can be found on the NPS website, Bullying Prevention & Intervention / Overview

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Introduction

Newton Public Schools is committed to excellence and equity and ensuring high levels of academic and socio-emotional learning for all students. In order to do this, we have a proactive approach to the prevention of bullying and all forms of harassment and strong interventions when violations of our norms and rules occur. Bullying or retaliation may occur in many forms, including through physical means, degrading words or actions, or social isolation. Its impact may be physically or emotionally hurtful. It instills fear of further injury, creates a hostile environment at school and, as a result, substantially disrupts a target's educational or employment experience. Anyone can be a target, but certain groups are particularly vulnerable to bullying. This includes students 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, are from certain immigrant or religious groups, and/or who appear different in any way. Students or staff members may be targets and students or staff members may also be aggressors.

The Newton Public Schools is committed to providing all students with a safe and welcoming learning environment that is free from bullying and cyberbullying, and harassment, This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process. Students, staff, parents and community partners all have a responsibility to recognize and report bullying when they see it. We must also build a school environment that promotes positive, respectful, and prosocial interactions that prevents bullying behavior. This requires anti-bullying education and learning, clear expectations for students, sound policies and procedures, professional development for staff, and community education and outreach.

Newton's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan consists of four components: Educational Resources and School Climate, Staff Development, Parent and Community Engagement and Education, and Policy and Procedures. Policy, procedures, and learning resources are outlined and accessible on our website, Bullying Prevention & Intervention / Overview.

Assessing Needs and Resources

NPS will continue to review and assess the adequacy of the current policies and procedures, current programs, and assess various resources as necessary and appropriate and update the Bullying Intervention and Prevention Plan, procedures, training, and curricula accordingly.

At least once every four (4) years, NPS will administer a student survey such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in our schools. Additionally, the district will annually report bullying incident data to DESE.

Educational and Learning Resources

Elementary School

Elementary schools incorporate the social-emotional dimensions of teaching and learning into the day -- everyday, all year long. Educators prioritize practices that help create a safe, supportive learning community where each child can achieve and thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition, elementary students receive two bully prevention lessons each year. Lastly, each elementary school has a social justice library containing resources that can be used to combat bias, racism, and ableism through developmentally-appropriate picture books.

Middle School

At the middle level, we utilize a range of resources adapted from nationally recognized resources such as the Second Step and the Responsive Classroom curricula, as well as school-developed supplemental materials and activities. Our lessons are embedded into our advisory program, special programming, early release day activities and health class. They target substance abuse, sexual harassment, other forms of bias, violence prevention, in addition to bullying prevention and restorative practices. They promote the development of empathy, positive communication, and Self-regulation and coping, problem solving, decision making, and goal-setting skills. There are lessons for each grade that then spiral throughout the middle school curriculum. These lessons use interactive teaching methods and media to engage students to make positive choices and support social emotional learning. It includes targeted lessons on cyberbullying. These goals are designed to increase protective factors, such as school "connectedness" (i.e., students sense that they have at least one adult in the school that they feel connected to) and social skills development (such as assertive communication skills and positive peer relationships).

High School

Our high schools utilize a range of anti-bullying resources adapted from nationally recognized resources, as well as developed in-house by our NPS educators and counselors. Our goal is to mobilize all students to act as upstanders (students who are neither bullies nor victims) by developing and reinforcing their strong identities, as well as create a kind and responsive student body overall that is dedicated to fostering an inclusive and respectful school community. Through their actions and influence, our students dictate the operating environment, giving strength and support to victims and decreasing the likelihood of destructive bullying behavior.

Training/Professional Development

The Newton Public Schools will annually provide professional development to all staff members that will review the district's policies and procedures, including the reporting, intervention, investigation, notification procedures and duties under the Plan, refer staff to information and resources on the district's Bullying Prevention and Intervention website, and provide training that includes, but is not limited to, some of the following components:

- Developmentally appropriate strategies for prevention and intervention to stop bullying.
- Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place among an aggressor, a target, and witnesses to bullying.
- Information on supporting students who are vulnerable to bullying.
- Information on how to provide all students with skills, knowledge and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying and harassment
- Information on cyberbullying and internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying;

In addition, the district supports teachers who teach the anti-bullying curriculum within their schools, as well as administrators who respond to complaints of bullying.

Parent and Community Engagement

Newton has developed and updated a comprehensive webpage, Bullying Prevention & Intervention / Overview. It offers easy access to the policy, plan, and procedures, and provides a vehicle for reporting instances of bullying or retaliation. The site also provides useful resources and links to related sites for students, staff, and families.

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy

The Newton Public Schools maintains updated copies of all of our policies as approved by the Newton School Committee on our website. The full text of our Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy is linked here https://z2policy.ctspublish.com/masc/browse/newtonset/newton/JICFB.

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy includes sections on definitions, the scope of school authority, reporting obligations, notification requirements, investigations, intervention outcomes and reporting requirements, and its intent is to meet the obligations of M.G.L. c.71 sec. 370, as amended. In addition, the district's Students' Rights and Responsibilities Handbook has been modified to include disciplinary codes relating to bullying, retaliation, or aiding, abetting or encouraging bullying. There are also reporting and investigation forms associated with the Plan which all supplement the policy. These procedures seek to protect the target, inform parents of all parties, repair harm, and restore a sense of safety, while both disciplining and educating the target, aggressor, and bystanders. Furthermore, our district's policy and procedures prohibiting and for investigating Discrimination and Harassment are also relevant and supportive of our goals as a district. They can be found here: School Committee Homepage / Responding to Incidents of Bias or Discrimination.

Bullying (including cyber-bullying) (as defined in law and policy) as the repeated use by one or more students or staff member, of a written, verbal, or electronic communication or expression, or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target. Bullying results in the outcomes that:

- cause physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to his or her property;
- place the target in reasonable fear of harm to him or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- create a hostile environment at school for the target;
- infringe on the rights of the target at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Bullying can include any form of repeated behavior, either in person or via electronic means, that involves an imbalance of power or strength and a pattern of behavior which interferes with another person's sense of safety, dignity, comfort or productivity in the school environment. Possible behaviors may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Physical intimidation or assault
- Name calling (verbal/written), teasing, mimicking, slurs (which may also violate Non-Discrimination Policy), or other derogatory remarks
- Displaying materially and substantially disruptive graffiti, symbols, posters, pictures, cartoons/caricatures, notes, book covers, or designs on clothing
- Phone calls, and/or electronic communications
- Touching of a person or person's clothing
- Words, pranks or actions which provoke feelings of embarrassment, hurt, or intimidation
- Stalking
- Threats, threatening gestures or actions
- False accusations or rumors
- Social isolation

The above behaviors are not necessarily bullying in isolation, but they constitute bullying when they occur in a repeated context and they:

- have the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive school or work environment;
- have the purpose or effect of substantially or unreasonably interfering with an individual's academic or work performance; or
- otherwise adversely affect an individual's educational opportunities.

Retaliation is 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.

BULLYING REPORTING AND INVESTIGATION

A. Reporting Obligations

Reporting by Staff: All faculty, staff, independent contractors or school volunteers who become aware or have a reasonable belief that bullying or retaliation has occurred shall immediately report any instance of bullying or retaliation orally or in writing, to the principal/designee(s). 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.

Reporting by Students, Parents/Guardians, and Others: In keeping with the Newton Public School System's core value of providing a safe, healthy, respectful environment, any student, parent/guardian, and others who become aware of or has a reasonable belief that bullying or retaliation has occurred or may have occurred to other members of the school community is strongly encouraged to promptly report the incident(s) to the principal/designee. A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action. Anonymous reporting is possible and is outlined below.

Reporting to Local Law Enforcement: In the event that bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal/designee will notify the local law enforcement agency in writing, if s/he suspects that

criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor.

Anonymous Reporting: Anonymous reports may be made utilizing the Newton Public School System's bullying reporting form, which can be accessed on the webpage Bullying Prevention & Intervention / Overview. The school will investigate such reports to the extent that sufficient information is provided to do so. Anonymous reporting may inhibit or interfere with the District's ability to conduct a complete and thorough investigation, and no discipline will be issued solely on the basis of an anonymous report with conclusive investigation findings.

Annual Reporting to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE): In accordance with the M.G.L. c. 71, § 370(k), NPS will annually provide the following data to DESE: 1) the number of reported allegations of bullying or retaliation; 2) the number and nature of substantiated incidents of bullying and retaliation; 3) the number of students disciplined for engaging in bullying or retaliation; and 4) other information required by DESE.

B. Safety

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Principal or designee will take steps to assess the safety needs of the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. The Principal or designee will take steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary for all parties involved. In taking any such action, however, the rights and safety of the alleged target, alleged aggressor, and bystanders must be considered.

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 and remind the alleged aggressor and witness(es) that threats or acts of retaliation, including electronic communications, against reporters, targets and/or witnesses is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Confidentiality: During an investigation, the confidentiality of the target and the other witnesses will be maintained only to the extent practicable given the school's obligation to investigate and address the matter.

C. Notification

Upon receiving a complaint, the parents/guardians of all minor parties (both the target and the aggressor) involved will be notified of an incident in a timely fashion, preferably on the same day of the report, by the principal/designee.

D. Investigation

The Principal or designee will promptly investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in

doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved.

During the investigation, the Principal or designee may, among other things, review video if available, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The Principal or designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

The Principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the Principal or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, may conduct interviews. To the extent practicable, and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the Principal or designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. To the extent possible, the Principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation, including preserving electronic communication such as email and text communications.

The principal will use a "reasonable person" standard in making this determination. (When applied to children, the "reasonable person" standard is generally, "that a reasonable person of like age, intelligence and experience under like circumstances.")

Allegation involving Staff Member: If the complaint involves an allegation against a staff member, the Principal or designee will inform the staff member of the allegation and investigation, and consult with the Director of Human Resources prior to interviewing the staff member.

E. Determination and Intervention Outcomes

The Principal or designee must weigh all of the information objectively to determine whether the alleged event occurred and, if it did, whether the events constitute bullying or retaliation.

Students who engage in bullying or retaliation will be subject to consequences, which may include disciplinary action; however, the action taken must balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. The range of disciplinary actions includes, but is not limited to, verbal or written warning, reprimands, detentions, short- or long-term suspensions, from school, as determined by the school administration and/or school committee.

Reporting Obligations: Upon a determination that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the student aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding to it. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00

If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the principal or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the principal or designee of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, and 603 CMR 49.00.

If bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the school will work to assure the safety of all parties. The school will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. As with the investigation, the response will be individually tailored to all of the circumstances, including the nature of the conduct and the age of the students involved. In addition to taking disciplinary action, the following are examples of steps that may be taken to prevent the recurrence of bullying or retaliation:

- Monitor and assure the continued safety of all parties through implementation and monitoring of a safety plan for the target and witnesses as needed.
- Provide necessary support for the target.
- Require relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students.
- Refer to psycho/social educational groups or workshops.
- Develop an action plan directed toward helping the aggressor recognize and correct behaviors.
- Conduct parent conferences.
- A plan for a restorative process may be developed with consideration of developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning, growth, and repair. Repair work occurs when appropriate and with consideration of the specific individuals involved.
- Refer to intervention groups and/or individual counseling for all parties as appropriate.
- Monitor behaviors and, as needed, develop a behavioral plan.
- Work with bystanders to empower them to become part of the solution.
- Creation of safety plans.
- Exclude from participation in school-sponsored or school-related functions, afterschool programs, and/or extracurricular activities.
- Determine with the families whether a family member of the involved students (target, aggressor, bystanders) if a referral to school-based counseling services, and/or referral to outside counseling, services or agencies is appropriate. would be well served by counseling or referral to services. If appropriate, referrals may be made to in-house counseling or psychological services, local agencies, and/or William James College INTERFACE Referral Service .

A disability that affects social skills development may in turn affect a student's participation in (as an aggressor) or vulnerability to (as a target) bullying. In addition to the possibility of the above actions, the Team may consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to refrain from or respond to bullying behavior. This may include creation of or adjustment to behavior plans and/or instruction in social pragmatics.

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. Parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor, to the extent consistent with state and federal law, will be notified of actions taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation.

Restorative or corrective action may be implemented regardless of whether the bullying policy has been violated in order to support any students, families or other community members involved.

F. Investigation Review

Regardless of the outcome of the bullying or retaliation determination, the principal or designee will inform the parent or guardian of the target about the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system. Any parent or guardian wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the district may do so with the DESE Program Resolution System. That information can be found at http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa, emails can be sent desecompliance@mass.gov; individuals can call 784-338-3700.

G. FIle/Record Keeping

All files, forms, written findings, evidence, determinations, or any other material gathered related to a complaint, report, or investigation must be kept in a file in the individual school's administrative offices. In addition, copies of all investigative reports will be maintained in the Office of Assistant Superintendent of Elementary or Secondary Education, as applicable.

- The investigator will file a copy of the report with the school and send a copy to the Office of Assistant Superintendent of Elementary or Secondary Education, which will be maintained in accordance with student record laws by NPS. Only central office administrators and school leaders from schools that are involved in a report will have access to reports and files.
- A copy of relevant support/safety plans, restorative responses and similar documents will be kept on file by the relevant school administrator to ensure implementation of such plans and responses.
- If discipline is involved, the student discipline notices may remain in student's temporary school files, and instances involving suspensions (in-school and out of school) are reported in the student information system (ASPEN) and to DESE per student discipline reporting requirements. Consistent with laws, collective bargaining agreements and past practice, discipline and similar documents may be placed in an employee's personnel file.
- The central administration may use data from investigations and reports, excluding student and staff identifying information, for analysis, and reporting to the School Committee, state and federal agencies. Additionally, reports may be subject to public record requests; however, consistent with governing law, all reports that are responsive to public record requests will be redacted to remove all personally identifying information.

Relationship to Other Laws and Policies

A. Rights and Responsibilities Handbook

There are several applicable sections and references within the Students' Rights & Responsibilities Handbook - Newton Public Schools addressing Bullying Intervention and Prevention, including:

- Associated Rights of Students, Section C - Right to An Equal Education; and

- Rules of Behavior and Discipline, Section B - Discipline Guidelines and Codes

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B. Non-Discrimination Policy, including Harassment and Retaliation and Protocol

Newton Public Schools does not exclude from participation, deny the benefits of NPS from or otherwise discriminate against, individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, active military/veteran status, marital status, familial status, homelessness, ancestry, ethnic background, national origin, or any other category protected by state or federal law in the administration of its educational and employment policies, or in its programs and activities, and provides equal access to all designated youth groups. Newton Public Schools requires all members of the school community to conduct themselves in accordance with this policy.

THe full text of the policy, which was revised and adopted in October 2022, can be found here, Non-Discrimination Policy, including Harassment and Retaliation

The Non-Discrimination Protocol

All members of the school community are responsible for reporting any incident that they believe to be discrimination. Using the Non-Discrimination Protocol which was revised in September 2024, NPS will respond promptly to any reports or complaints of discrimination, including harassment and retaliation, or other violations of civil rights. Where it is determined that discrimination has occurred, NPS will act promptly to address the conduct and will take developmentally-appropriate restorative, corrective, and/or disciplinary action.

Corrective, restorative and/or disciplinary measures will be implemented to address the behavior and support the individuals or groups impacted with the intention to:

- Provide protection and support for those harmed by understanding their needs,
- Promote accountability and learning for the aggressor(s) through intentional and restorative action, and
- Facilitate/foster healing for all involved, as possible and appropriate

Restorative or corrective action may be implemented regardless of whether the non-discrimination policy has been violated in order to support any students, families or other community members involved.

C. Other Laws, Policies and Practices

In addition, nothing in the Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of the Newton Public Schools to take disciplinary action or other·action under M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 37H or 37H1/2, M.G.L. c. 71, §§41 and 42, M.G.L. c 76 § 5, or other applicable laws, Newton Public Schools' policies, or collective bargaining agreements, in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.

FORMS

All formal reports and investigations of bullying are to be completed and submitted through the forms below. Newton Public Schools will collect and archive all information submitted via

reporters, investigators, witnesses and/or additional documentation throughout the investigation and in conclusion.

1 Bullying Incident Reporting Form

Bullying is serious and will not be tolerated in the Newton Public Schools. If you wish to report an incident of alleged bullying, either contact the principal, assistant principal, or dean or complete and submit this Bullying Incident Reporting Form r l so that staff can investigate the matter. In addition, we encourage you to work directly with school staff as they take steps to resolve problems and assure the safety of all parties. You can find more information about the Newton Public Schools' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy and Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan on our website, Bullying Prevention & Intervention / Overview.

This form can be completed anonymously.

2. Bullying Investigation Forms

Administrators that conduct an investigation may utilize these google forms or use them as a templates or guides in their investigation process and documentation. All reports must be maintained by the Administrator and a copy submitted to the appropriate district supervisor's office.

Administrator Bullying Investigation Initial Form

Administrator Bullying Investigation Report Form