SOUTH HADLEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

I. PRIORITY STATEMENT AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

South Hadley Public Schools is committed to maintaining a safe, supportive, respectful, and inclusive learning environment in which all students have equal access to educational opportunities and school-sponsored activities.

Bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation are strictly prohibited. The District maintains a philosophy of Zero Indifference, meaning that all reported or observed incidents of bullying, harassment, and retaliation will be taken seriously, reviewed promptly, and addressed appropriately.

This Plan is established in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Section 37O; 603 CMR 49.00; and applicable state and federal civil rights laws.

The Superintendent or designee shall oversee districtwide implementation. Each school principal shall be responsible for implementation, staff training, reporting, investigation, and oversight within their respective buildings.

The District shall review and update this Plan at least once every two years, in consultation with educators, school personnel, volunteers, administrators, students, families, community representatives, and local law enforcement. The review process shall include public notice and an opportunity for public comment.

II. DEFINITIONS

Bullying: The repeated use by one or more students or school staff members of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at a student that:

1. Causes physical or emotional harm to the student or damage to the student's property;
2. Places the student in reasonable fear of harm or damage to property;
3. Creates a hostile environment at school;
4. Infringes upon the student's rights at school; or
5. Materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or orderly operation of a school.

Cyberbullying: Bullying through technology or electronic communication, including text messages, social media, email, websites, electronic images, impersonation, and other digital communications, as defined by Massachusetts law.

Hostile Environment: A school environment permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

Retaliation: Adverse conduct directed toward a person because the person reported bullying, provided information during an investigation, witnessed an incident, or possessed reliable information about bullying.

Target: A student against whom bullying or retaliation is alleged or has been substantiated.

Aggressor: A student or school staff member alleged or determined to have engaged in bullying or retaliation.

Peer Conflict: Disagreement or conflict between students that does not meet the statutory definition of bullying. Peer conflict may nevertheless violate school rules and require intervention.

A power imbalance may be an important indicator of bullying and shall be considered during an investigation when relevant. However, the statutory definition, rather than a separate mandatory power-imbalance test, shall govern bullying determinations.

III. SCOPE AND JURISDICTION

Bullying and retaliation are prohibited:

- On school grounds and property immediately adjacent to school grounds;
- At school-sponsored or school-related activities, functions, and programs, whether on or off school property;
- At school bus stops and on school buses or other vehicles used by the District;
- Through school-owned or school-used technology and electronic devices; and
- At non-school locations or through privately owned electronic devices when the conduct creates a hostile environment at school, infringes on a student's rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or orderly operation of the school.

The District shall address reports involving students and school staff members in accordance with applicable laws, collective bargaining agreements, personnel policies, and student discipline procedures.

IV. REPORTING BULLYING AND RETALIATION

A. Mandatory Staff Reporting

All school personnel, including educators, administrators, nurses, cafeteria staff, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors, paraprofessionals, and other employees, must immediately report bullying or retaliation that they witness or become aware of.

Reports shall be made to the building principal or designated school official.

A staff member's obligation to report does not replace the responsibility to intervene immediately when safe and appropriate.

B. Reporting by Students, Families, and Community Members

Students, parents or guardians, volunteers, and community members are strongly encouraged to report suspected bullying or retaliation.

Reports may be made verbally, in writing, or through the District's designated reporting methods.

A student may report concerns to a trusted teacher, counselor, school administrator, or other staff member, who shall promptly forward the information to the appropriate administrator.

C. Anonymous Reporting

Anonymous reports shall be accepted through District-approved reporting methods.

No disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Anonymous reports shall be assessed and investigated to the extent possible.

D. Reports Involving School Administrators or Staff

When the alleged aggressor is a staff member, the report shall be referred to the building principal and appropriate District administrator.

When the alleged aggressor is the building principal, the report shall be referred directly to the Superintendent or designated central-office administrator.

When the alleged aggressor is the Superintendent, the report shall be referred to the School Committee Chair or other appropriate authority under District policy.

Investigations involving employees shall be conducted in coordination with appropriate District personnel and in accordance with applicable employment laws and agreements.

E. Documentation

All reports shall be documented using the District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Reporting Form or approved electronic reporting system.

Reports shall be maintained securely and confidentially in accordance with applicable student record, personnel record, and records retention requirements.

V. INVESTIGATION AND RESPONSE PROCEDURES

Step 1: Immediate Safety Assessment

Upon receipt of a report, the principal or designee shall promptly assess the immediate safety of the student involved.

Protective measures may include:

- Increased adult supervision;
- Adjustments to seating, transitions, or schedules;
- Designation of a trusted adult;
- Counseling and emotional support;
- Measures preventing direct or indirect retaliation;
- Individualized safety planning when warranted.

Protective measures shall not unnecessarily restrict the target's educational opportunities or place the burden of avoiding bullying on the target.

Step 2: Prompt and Impartial Investigation

The principal or designee shall initiate a prompt, fair, and thorough investigation.

The investigation shall include, as appropriate:

1. Review of the original report and relevant records;
2. Separate interviews with the target and alleged aggressor;
3. Interviews with relevant witnesses;
4. Review of electronic communications, images, recordings, and other available evidence;
5. Consideration of prior relevant incidents or patterns of conduct;
6. Evaluation of whether the statutory elements of bullying or retaliation are met;
7. Documentation of findings and supporting evidence.
8. Investigators shall avoid conflicts of interest and shall protect the privacy of students and witnesses to the extent permitted by law.

The District shall provide appropriate communication and language assistance to students and families as necessary.

Step 3: Determination

At the conclusion of the investigation, the principal or designee shall make a determination based on the available evidence and applicable legal standards.

Findings shall distinguish among:

- Substantiated bullying;
- Substantiated retaliation;
- Conduct that violates other school rules or policies but does not meet the legal definition of bullying;
- Allegations that are not substantiated by the available evidence.
- A determination that bullying was not substantiated shall not prevent the District from providing student supports, addressing inappropriate conduct, or investigating possible discrimination or harassment.

Step 4: Parent or Guardian Notification

Upon a determination that bullying or retaliation occurred, the principal shall promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and aggressor.

The target's family shall be informed of the determination, the school's procedures for responding, and the actions being taken to prevent further bullying or retaliation.

The aggressor's family shall be informed of the determination and applicable response procedures.

Notifications shall comply with federal and state student confidentiality requirements. Families shall not receive confidential disciplinary or educational records concerning another student except as legally permitted.

Required notification shall be provided in the primary language of the home.

The target's parents or guardians shall also be informed of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Problem Resolution System and the process for requesting assistance or filing a complaint.

The District may contact families earlier in the process when appropriate for student safety, communication, or investigation purposes.

Step 5: Corrective and Disciplinary Action

When bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the District shall take appropriate action consistent with applicable law, District policies, and student handbooks.

Possible responses include:

- Explicit instruction and behavioral interventions;
- Parent or guardian conferences;
- Counseling or social skills interventions;
- Behavioral support plans;
- Restorative interventions when appropriate, voluntary, and safe;
- Loss of privileges or extracurricular participation;
- Detention or other school-based consequences;
- Suspension or other disciplinary action when legally appropriate;
- Employee corrective or disciplinary action when applicable.

Disciplinary responses shall balance accountability, prevention of recurrence, student safety, and instruction in appropriate behavior.

All student disciplinary action shall comply with Massachusetts student discipline laws and regulations, including applicable due process protections and special education requirements.

Restorative practices shall not be used to pressure a target to reconcile with an aggressor or replace necessary protective measures.

Step 6: Law Enforcement Notification

At any point after receiving a report, including following an investigation, the principal shall notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency when there is a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against an aggressor.

The District shall follow the notification and coordination requirements of 603 CMR 49.05, including applicable procedures for incidents involving another municipality or students from different school districts.

Notification to law enforcement does not eliminate the District's independent responsibility to address student safety, conduct its administrative review, and implement appropriate interventions.

Step 7: Follow-Up and Monitoring

Following a substantiated incident, the principal or designee shall implement a documented follow-up process.

The process shall include:

- Checking on the target's physical and emotional safety;
- Monitoring for recurrence and retaliation;
- Reviewing the effectiveness of protective measures;
- Providing additional supports when needed;
- Communicating with families as appropriate;

- Documenting follow-up findings and adjustments.

As a District administrative practice, an initial follow-up should ordinarily occur within five school days of the determination, with additional follow-up based on the circumstances and student's needs.

VI. PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATION AND FALSE REPORTING

Retaliation against any person who reports bullying, participates in an investigation, serves as a witness, or possesses reliable information about an incident is strictly prohibited.

The District shall take reasonable measures to protect targets, reporting individuals, and witnesses from retaliation.

A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action consistent with applicable law and District policies.

A report made in good faith shall not be considered knowingly false solely because an investigation does not substantiate the allegation.

VII. SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

The District shall provide or facilitate access to appropriate supports for targets, aggressors, and their families.

Supports may include school counseling, school psychological services, behavioral interventions, social skills instruction, family consultation, referrals to community providers, and other individualized supports.

Interventions shall be developmentally appropriate and responsive to the student's educational, social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

The District shall make reasonable efforts to restore the target's sense of safety and full participation in school programs and activities.

VIII. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

South Hadley Public Schools recognizes that certain students may be particularly vulnerable to bullying or harassment because of actual or perceived 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, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or association with individuals possessing these characteristics. There will be protection for all students regardless of their legal status under the law.

The District shall provide all students with the skills and knowledge needed to recognize, prevent, report, and respond to bullying.

Specific supports may include:

- Individualized adult check-ins and safety plans;
- Explicit instruction in social communication, self-advocacy, and reporting;

- Accessible and developmentally appropriate reporting methods;
- Targeted supervision in areas where students may be vulnerable;
- Staff training regarding disability-related needs and discriminatory harassment;
- Coordination with school counseling, special education, and student support teams.

For students with disabilities, the District shall comply with applicable requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504, and Massachusetts special education law.

When a student's disability affects social skills development or makes the student vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing, the IEP Team shall consider the student's needs and whether the IEP requires appropriate instruction, services, or other supports.

When bullying may interfere with a student's receipt of a free appropriate public education, the District shall consider whether an IEP or Section 504 team review is necessary.

IX. COORDINATION WITH CIVIL RIGHTS AND OTHER DISTRICT PROCEDURES

Reports involving potentially discriminatory harassment shall be referred promptly to the appropriate District Civil Rights Coordinator or other designated official.

When reported conduct may involve discrimination or harassment based on a legally protected characteristic, the District shall assess its obligations under applicable state and federal civil rights laws independently of the bullying determination.

The District shall coordinate applicable procedures for:

- Civil rights and discriminatory harassment complaints;
- Sex-based discrimination and Title IX complaints;
- Disability-related harassment and denial of educational access;
- Student discipline;
- Special education and Section 504 protections;
- Mandatory reporting and student safety.

An incident may require review under more than one District policy or legal framework.

The District shall not require that conduct satisfy the statutory definition of bullying before addressing possible unlawful discrimination or harassment.

X. PREVENTION CURRICULUM AND STUDENT EDUCATION

South Hadley Public Schools shall provide age-appropriate, evidence-based bullying prevention instruction in every grade.

Instruction shall be integrated into the District's curriculum and schoolwide prevention practices.

Topics shall include:

- Respectful relationships and positive school culture;
- Recognition of bullying, harassment, and retaliation;

- Safe and effective reporting procedures;
- Bystander responsibilities and strategies for seeking adult assistance;
- Empathy, conflict resolution, and social-emotional skills;
- Digital citizenship, cyberbullying, and internet safety;
- Respect for individual differences;
- Appropriate strategies for responding to harmful conduct.

The District shall monitor implementation of prevention instruction and identify opportunities for improvement.

XI. ANNUAL STAFF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All school faculty and staff shall receive annual training on the District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

Training shall include:

1. Staff responsibilities for recognizing, reporting, and responding to bullying;
2. Developmentally appropriate prevention and intervention strategies;
3. Power dynamics among aggressors, targets, and witnesses;
4. Research regarding students at increased risk of bullying;
5. Cyberbullying, electronic communications, and internet safety;
6. Prevention of retaliation;
7. Documentation, confidentiality, and investigation procedures;
8. Coordination with civil rights, special education, and student support requirements.

Additional professional development shall be provided as needed for administrators and staff responsible for investigating incidents or implementing interventions.

Relevant reporting and response obligations shall be included in employee handbooks.

XII. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The District shall inform parents and guardians about its bullying prevention curriculum, reporting procedures, and available resources.

Family communications shall address the dynamics of bullying, strategies for reinforcing prevention at home, online safety, cyberbullying, and how families may seek assistance.

Annual written notice of relevant student-related provisions of the Plan shall be provided to students and families in age-appropriate language and in the languages most prevalent among District families.

The District shall provide annual written notice of the Plan to all staff.

The Plan shall be publicly accessible on the District website.

XIII. DATA COLLECTION, MONITORING, AND REPORTING

Each school shall maintain accurate records of bullying and retaliation allegations, investigations, findings, disciplinary responses, and relevant follow-up actions.

The District shall annually report required bullying incident data to DESE in the prescribed format, including reported allegations, substantiated incidents, and students disciplined for bullying or retaliation.

The District shall administer the state-required school climate and bullying survey at least once every four years, in accordance with DESE requirements.

District and school administrators shall review available incident and climate data to identify patterns, evaluate prevention efforts, and recommend improvements.

Records shall be maintained and disclosed only in accordance with applicable confidentiality and records retention requirements.

XIV. PLAN REVIEW AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Superintendent or designee shall coordinate review of the District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan at least biennially.

The review shall include consultation with appropriate school and community stakeholders, public notice, and an opportunity for public comment.

Each principal shall be responsible for ensuring that school personnel understand and implement the Plan.

The District shall review implementation practices, available incident data, prevention programming, training needs, and family feedback.

Revisions shall be communicated to students, families, and staff, and the current Plan shall be posted on the District website.

- **XV. APPLICABLE LEGAL AUTHORITIES**
- Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Section 37O
- 603 CMR 49.00 — Notification of Bullying or Retaliation
- Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Sections 37H, 37H½, and 37H¾, as applicable
- 603 CMR 53.00 — Student Discipline
- 603 CMR 23.00 — Student Records
- Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71B and applicable special education regulations
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Applicable federal and Massachusetts civil rights and nondiscrimination laws
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Adoption Date: Pending School Committee action

Most Recent Review: October 2026

Next Required Review: In accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, §37O, no later than two years after adoption or most recent update

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