



WEST BOYLSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

November 2024 *(revised)*

Statement of Non-Discrimination

The West Boylston Public Schools do not discriminate against students, parents, employees, and the general public.

All programs, activities, and employment opportunities are offered without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, limited English proficiency and disability.

Persons with discrimination concerns and/or complaints should contact the following administrators:

**Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (race, color, or national origin) Title IX of
the Education Amendments of 1972 (sex discrimination)
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Disability discrimination)**

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INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the current School Committee Policy, JICFB “Bullying Prevention and Intervention,” the West Boylston Public School District is committed to maintaining a safe school environment in which all members are treated with respect. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying, cyberbullying and other harmful and disruptive behaviors that can impede the learning process.

The definition of bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71 § 370 is, “The repeated use by one or more students or member of a school staff 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 himself or of damage to his 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. For the purposes of this definition, bullying includes cyberbullying.”

The West Boylston Public Schools’ Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (“Plan”) is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and the district is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In addition, this plan is intended to promote tolerance and respect for differences and to reaffirm the commitment of the citizens of our school community to basic human rights and dignity. This plan meets the requirements of M.G.L. c. 71, § 370 and as amended by sections 72-74 of Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013 and the updates of Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014 and is modeled after the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Model Plan for dealing with bullying behaviors in our schools. The plan includes strategies for identifying, reporting and responding to bullying behaviors.

PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

The West Boylston Public Schools will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses and at school bus stops, or in school-related activities. Schools will promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target’s sense of safety. The West Boylston Public Schools will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

- on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program (whether on or off school grounds), as students are walking to or from school, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned or leased or used by a school district or school or through use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by a school district or school; and
- at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related, or through use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited. As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

It should be clear that this plan applies to students and members of a school staff, including, but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activity and paraprofessionals.

This Plan also serves to reflect the update to Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014, <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter86>, which amended G.L. c. 71, §37O, the anti-bullying statute, and was signed into law on April 24, 2014. G.L. c. 71, §37O. This law and the staff of the West Boylston Public Schools recognize that certain enumerated categories of students¹ may be more vulnerable to being targets of bullying 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 one or more of these characteristics. The West Boylston Public School District has and will continue to promote programs that are embedded during the school day, including but not limited to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Second Step, Social Skills training, Gay Straight Alliance, Unified Classes and Sports, and Students for Diversity to educate students regarding tolerance and take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership in the West Boylston Public Schools, at all levels, will play a critical role in developing and implementing Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans in the context of other whole school and community efforts to promote positive school climate. Leaders have a primary role in teaching students to be civil to one another and promoting understanding of and respect for diversity and difference.

Leadership should be defined by the district or school, depending on existing roles and responsibilities and locally identified priorities for this initiative. Leadership is responsible for setting priorities and for staying up to date with current research on ways to prevent and effectively respond to bullying. It is also the responsibility of leaders to involve representatives from the greater school and local community in developing and implementing the Plan.

B. Assessing needs and resources. The West Boylston Public Schools' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is our system's blueprint for enhancing capacity to prevent and respond to issues of bullying within the context of other healthy school climate initiatives. The Plan includes the following actions to ensure the Plan remains current, includes a system for monitoring bullying within each of the schools, surveys families and students to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in our schools. Included in the Plan will be opportunities for training, a review of available data on bullying and behavioral incidents; and assess available resources including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services.

- a. at least once every four years the district will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary-developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our schools. Additionally, the school or district will annually report bullying incident data to the Department.
- b. a yearly survey of students, on school climate and school safety issues;
- c. collection and analysis of building-specific data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying (e.g., focusing on identifying vulnerable populations and "hot spots" in school buildings, on school grounds, or on school buses).
- d. data related to bullying in the West Boylston Public Schools will be reported to DESE on a yearly basis. Data collection will include:
 - i. the number of reported allegations of bullying or retaliation;
 - ii. the number and nature of substantiated incidents of bullying and retaliation;
 - iii. the number of students disciplined for engaging in bullying or retaliation
 - iv. other information required by the Department.

This information will help to identify patterns of behaviors and areas of concern, and will inform decision-making for prevention strategies including, but not limited to, adult supervision, professional development, age-appropriate curricula, and in-school support services.

C. Planning and oversight.

The West Boylston Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan has identified the building principal or his/her designee as the individual who is responsible for receiving all reports on bullying. The building principal or his/her designee is responsible for collecting and analyzing building data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes. He/she is also responsible for entering all bullying data into the District created spreadsheet for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors.

As noted above, the principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan except when a reported bullying incident involves the principal or the assistant principal as the alleged aggressor. In such cases, the Superintendent or designee shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the Plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged

victim. If the Superintendent is the alleged aggressor, the School Committee, or its designee shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the Plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged victim.

Each school, under the direction of the building principal, is responsible for ensuring all staff complete the yearly online professional development related to the Plan and to also provide for the ongoing professional development that is required by law and may be conducted through faculty meetings or the most effective means as determined by him or her. The building principal or his/her designee is responsible for planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors as well as for choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or district will use to instruct students about issues of bullying and cyberbullying. Each building principal or his/her designee is responsible for implementing the West Boylston Public Schools Bullying Prevention-Intervention Plan, for amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct; leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials; and reviewing and updating these materials each year, or more frequently, if necessary. To ensure consistency across the West Boylston Public School District, however, all events, programs, data, and professional development offered shall be coordinated through the District's Administrative TEAM.

The Superintendent or her/his designee is responsible for developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the West Boylston Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, including an Acceptable Use Internet Safety policy, and for designating key staff to be in charge of reviewing and updating them on an annual basis. The School Committee is responsible for the approval of any new or updated policies, with the Superintendent having district oversight.

The building principal will ensure that this oversight provides special attention to certain enumerated categories of students who may be more vulnerable to being targets of bullying 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 one or more of these characteristics.

WBPS school or district leaders are responsible for the following tasks:

- 1) receiving reports on bullying;
- 2) collecting and analyzing building- and/or school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes;
- 3) utilize the district developed tool/process for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors;
- 4) planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law;
- 5) planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors;
- 6) choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or district will use;
- 7) developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Plan, including an Internet safety policy, and designating key staff to be in charge of implementation of them;
- 8) amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct to, among other things, make clear that bullying of students by school staff or other students will not be tolerated;
- 9) leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials;
- 10) reviewing and updating the Plan each year, or more frequently.

D. Developing priority statements

The West Boylston Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and each school in the district is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence and to promote an environment of tolerance and respect. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. The building principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan.

Each school in the district expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences. As a school district, we recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to become targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on 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, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics.

The school or district will identify specific steps it will take to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

We will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target's sense of safety. We will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The West Boylston Public School District's ongoing professional development plan will reflect the requirements under M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O to provide ongoing professional development for all staff, including but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals.

A. Annual staff training on the Plan. Annual training for all staff of the West Boylston Public Schools on the Bullying Intervention and Prevention Plan will include staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the principal or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula and/or expectations to be offered at all grades throughout the school or district. Staff members hired after the start of the school year are required to participate in school-based training during the school year in which they are hired, unless they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last two years.

B. Ongoing professional development. The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the content of school-wide and district-wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- a. developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- b. developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- c. information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- d. research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment;
- e. information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- f. Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

Professional development will also address ways to prevent and respond to bullying or retaliation for students with disabilities that must be considered when developing students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This will include a particular focus on the needs of students with autism or students whose disability affects social skills development.

Additional areas identified by the school or district for professional development include:

- maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.
- promoting and modeling the use of respectful language;
- using positive behavioral intervention strategies (PBIS);
- teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others;
- engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making;
- fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference;
- building relationships and communicating with families;
- constructively managing classroom behaviors; and
- engaging staff and those responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan to distinguish between acceptable managerial behaviors designed to correct misconduct, instill accountability in the school setting, etc. and bullying behaviors.
- applying constructive disciplinary practices;

C. Written notice to staff. The school or district will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties and bullying of students by school staff, in the school or district employee handbook and the code of conduct. The Bullying Prevention-Intervention Plan will be posted to the District's website.

D. Communication Among and Between Schools: As students transfer from one school to the next, communication between staff members, to include the guidance counselors, school nurse and/or principal, will take place to ensure that the receiving school is aware of any "history" between students to further ensure that safe environments are provided for all.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

A key aspect of promoting positive school climates is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of targets, student aggressors, families, and others are addressed. These students include targets, aggressors or bystanders of bullying or cyberbullying. Schools will also address the emotional needs of these students' families. The West Boylston Public Schools' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan includes strategies for providing support and services necessary to meet these needs. In order to enhance the

schools' capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, available services reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets, student aggressors and bystanders. The schools provide counseling or referral to appropriate services for students who are student aggressors, targets, and family members of those students.

- A. Identifying resources. School counselors, together with building administrators, will work to identify the school's capacity to provide counseling, case management and other services for these students (targets, student aggressors, bystanders) and their families. Schools will conduct an annual review of staffing and programs that support the creation of positive school environments, focusing on early interventions and intensive services, and develop recommendations and action steps to fill resource and service gaps. Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) is embedded in the elementary school of the and Restorative Justice Practices at the Middle/High School.
- B. Counseling and other services. School counselors, nurses, school psychologists, BCBA, and special educators provide a variety of skill-based services to students within the education setting that include on-going emotional support, risk assessment, crisis intervention, and help with community based counseling referrals when appropriate. School counselors meet with parents and teachers as needed to help address students' academic, emotional and behavioral concerns as collaboratively as possible. School counselors and school social workers maintain up-to-date information on community based mental health referrals as well as Community Service Agencies (CSAs) within the local vicinity, providing services to Medicaid eligible students. School counselors, school psychologists, BCBA and special needs educators work collaboratively to develop behavior plans and social thinking groups for students with social skills weaknesses. In addition, school counselors, school psychologists, BCBA, and special education professionals work together to educate and support parents, conduct parent workshops and apprise parents of outside resources to enhance parenting skills and provide for the needs of children.

Below is a list of activities offered at the schools:

- One-on-one and small group counseling
- Peer Mentors/Buddy
- Crisis intervention
- Facilitating classroom meetings to resolve problems
- Lunch/friendship groups
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Parent workshops
- Transition planning from one district school to the next
- Parent guidance
- Behavioral plan development
- Classroom observations
- Teacher consultation

The West Boylston Public School district has and will continue to promote programs that are embedded during the school day, including but not limited to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social Skills training, Gay-Straight Alliance, Unified Classes and Sports, and Peer Mentors to educate students regarding tolerance and take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

C. Students with disabilities. As required by M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, when the IEP Team determines the student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her

disability, the Team will consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

D. Referral to outside services. The West Boylston Public Schools has established a referral protocol for referring students and families to outside services, most notably YOU Inc. and Youth and Family Services. School counselors and other specialists will help students and families access appropriate and timely services. Referrals must comply with relevant laws and policies.

ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

The West Boylston Public Schools provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention in each grade that is incorporated into each school's evidence-based curricula, the goal of which is to establish and maintain a positive school culture in which all students feel safe and respected. Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) is embedded in the elementary school of the and Restorative Justice Practices at the Middle/High School.

Other resources are currently available on the Department's website at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/bullying/> including [social and emotional learning guidelines](#).

Specific Bullying Prevention Approaches: Bullying prevention curricula is informed by current research which, among other things, may emphasize the following approaches:

- using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
- empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students or school staff engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance and its effects on other students;
- emphasizing cyber-safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications;
- engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference; and
- providing parents and guardians with information regarding the schools' bullying prevention curricula.

Student-related sections of the West Boylston Public Schools' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be annually addressed through school assemblies and/or small group meetings at the beginning of each school year. Teachers will review and apply the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) each school year to ensure all students receive the accommodations needed to be successful in the classroom and may mitigate or eliminate bullying.

General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts. The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of our bullying intervention and prevention initiatives:

- setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;

- creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students;
- using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- using positive behavioral supports;
- encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- using positive approaches to behavioral health, including collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution training, teamwork, and positive behavioral supports that aid in social and emotional development;
- using the Internet safely; and
- supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION

To support efforts to respond promptly and effectively to bullying and retaliation, the West Boylston Public Schools have policies and procedures in place for receiving and responding to reports of bullying or retaliation, "Policy JICFB, Bullying Prevention Intervention." These policies and procedures will ensure that members of the school community, students, parents, and school staff know what will happen when incidents of bullying occur.

A. Reporting bullying or retaliation. Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing. A school or district staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor, any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously. The school or district will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, online form, by phone, and an email address.

Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. The school or district will: 1) include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents or guardians; 2) make it available in the school's main office, the counseling office, the school nurse's office, and other locations determined by the principal or designee; and 3) post it on the school's website. The Incident Reporting Form will be made available in the most prevalent language(s) of origin of students and parents or guardians.

At the beginning of each school year, the school or district will provide the school community, including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers,

custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals, students, and parents or guardians, with written notice of its policies for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the name and contact information of the principal or designee, and the superintendent or designee when the principal or the assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks, on the school or district website, and in information about the Plan that is made available to parents or guardians.

1. Reporting by Staff: A staff member will report immediately to the principal or designee, or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or the assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. Such a report will be documented to include all pertinent details, including targets, aggressors, and bystanders. The requirement to report as provided 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. Failure to report incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

2. Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others: The school or district expects students, parents or guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the principal or designee, or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Students, parents or guardians, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. Students will be provided practical, safe, private, and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member, or with the principal or designee, or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor.

B. Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation – Allegations of Bullying by a Student.

1. **Safety:** Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal or designee will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.

Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target; and altering the aggressor’s schedule and access to the target. The principal or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

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. The confidentiality of students and witnesses reporting alleged acts of bullying will be maintained to the extent possible given the school’s obligation to investigate the matter.

2. Obligations to Notify Others

- a. Notice to parents or guardians. Upon determining 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. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.
- b. Notice to Another School or District. If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved a 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.
- c. Notice to Law Enforcement. At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the principal or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21, who is no longer enrolled in school, the principal or designee shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the student aggressor.

In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the superintendent of schools and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate.

- C. 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 will, among other things, 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 student aggressor, target, and witnesses of the importance of the investigation, their obligation to be truthful and that retaliation against someone who reports bullying or provides information during a bullying investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the principal or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, as appropriate. 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. The principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation.

Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with school or district policies and procedures for investigations and for possible disciplinary action. If necessary, the principal or designee will consult with the Superintendent regarding consultation with legal

counsel pertaining to the investigation of the alleged report.

- D. Determinations The principal or designee will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal or designee will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. The principal or designee will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the principal or designee may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or school counselor, and the target's or student aggressor's parents or guardians, to identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying behavior and to assess the level of need for additional social skills development.

The principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notice to parents must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations. 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.

The principal or designee shall inform the parent or guardian of the target about the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system, regardless of the outcome of the bullying determination.

- E. Responses to Bullying. The West Boylston Public Schools have incorporated a range of individualized strategies and interventions that may be used in response to remediate a student's skills or to prevent further incidents of bullying and/or retaliation.

1. Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-building

Upon the principal or designee determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the school or district use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O (d) (v). Skill-building approaches that the principal or designee may consider include:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's/district's anti-bullying curriculum;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with guidance counselors and other appropriate school personnel;
- implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand prosocial ways to achieve their goals;
- meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home;
- adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills; and
- making a referral for evaluation

2. Taking Disciplinary Action

If the principal or designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the principal or designee, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior. Discipline will be consistent with the Plan and with the school's or district's code of conduct.

Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which should be read in cooperation with state laws regarding student discipline.

If the principal or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student may be subject to disciplinary action.

3. Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

The principal or designee will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of others as well. One strategy that the principal or designee may use is to increase adult supervision at transition times and in locations where bullying is known to have occurred or is likely to occur.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the principal or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the principal or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

F. Responding to a Report of Bullying by School Staff

As is the case with reports of students bullying others, if any allegations are made, by a student, against a staff member, all the above procedures/guidelines will be strictly adhered to. The appropriate parties will be notified, a thorough investigation will be conducted, parents/ guardians will be notified, a determination will be made, and an appropriate response will be developed. In keeping with the procedures outlined above when a student is alleged to have bullied another, all parties involved in the reporting and investigation of an alleged instance of bullying by a staff member must be truthful. Retaliation against someone who reports bullying or provides information during a bullying investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including suspension and termination.

1. Reports of bullying by a member of the support staff or a teacher should be made to the building principal or designee.
2. Reports of bullying by the principal or assistant principal should be made to the superintendent.
3. Reports of bullying by the superintendent should be made to the school committee.

COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES

The West Boylston Public Schools is committed to engaging and collaborating with students' families in order to increase the capacity of each of our schools as well as the district to prevent and respond to bullying. We believe that communication with them is an essential aspect of effective collaboration. We will inform parents and guardians about the bullying prevention and intervention curricula used by the schools and how they can reinforce the curricula at home and support the school or district plan; the dynamics of bullying; and online safety and cyberbullying. Parents and guardians will also be notified in writing each year about the student-related sections of the West Boylston Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan as well as the Internet Acceptable Use Policy, requiring their signature annually to indicate such receipt. Schools will work with their local school councils, PBIS Teams, Special Education Advisory Council and/or Bullying Prevention teams to ensure that communication with parents remains open and collaborative. All notices and information made available to parents or guardians will be in hard copy and electronic formats, and will be available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The West Boylston Public Schools' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and related information will also be posted on the website.

PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

The West Boylston Public Schools prohibits any acts of bullying, which includes cyberbullying:

(i) on school grounds and property immediately adjacent to 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 school district or school; or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, and (ii) at a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the target or witnesses, infringe on their rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited.

As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non school related activities, functions, or programs.

PROBLEM RESOLUTION SYSTEM

Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014 amended Section 370 of Chapter 71 of the General Laws to include (g) (v): The Plan shall inform parents or guardians of the target about the Department's problem resolution system and the process for seeking assistance of filing a claim through the problem resolution system. The information will be made available on both hard copy and electronic formats.

Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the district may do so with the 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.

DEFINITIONS

Aggressor is a student or a member of a school staff who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation towards a student.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students or a member of a school staff of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

1. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
2. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
3. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
4. infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
5. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O for the legal definition of cyberbullying.

Hostile environment, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is 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 a student's education.

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.

School Staff includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

Target is a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the school or district, no person shall be discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town or in obtaining the advantages, privilege and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. Nothing in the Plan prevents the school or district from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state, or federal law, or school or district policies.

In addition, nothing in the Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of the school or district to take disciplinary action or other action under M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 37H or 37H½, M.G.L. c. 71, §§41 and 42, M.G.L. c 76 § 5, or other applicable laws, or local school or district policies, or collective bargaining agreements, in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.