

Worcester Public Schools

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

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Worcester Public Schools

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Statement of Purpose

The Worcester Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying. The Worcester Public School community will treat each other in a civil manner with respect for all differences. Worcester Public Schools are committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The district takes seriously its responsibility for the implementation of the Plan to ensure students are safeguarded from bullying.

The Worcester Public School is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from in-person bullying and cyber-bullying. 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 and outstanding results for all students. 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 or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics.

The Worcester Public Schools will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, in Worcester Public Schools buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation, and take immediate action to end bullying behavior and restore the target's sense of safety. We will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, the curriculum, instructional programs, staff development, and extracurricular activities, and engage parents/guardians to support bullying prevention.

I. LEADERSHIP

Leadership at all levels plays a critical role in the development and implementation of the Worcester Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. Leaders have a primary role in teaching students to be civil to one another and promoting understanding of and respect for diversity and differences. District leaders, including the Chief Academic Officer, designated staff members and school-based leaders are responsible for this initiative. They will set priorities and use current research to adjust the plan to effectively respond to bullying.

- A. Public involvement is important in developing the Plan. The Worcester Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan was developed in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents, and guardians as required M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O. Worcester Public Schools has actively engaged these stakeholders in this process. We hosted Bullying Prevention Roundtable discussions, presented and gathered feedback at the Citywide Parent Planning Parent Advisory Council and the Special Education Advisory Council, and the School Committee Teaching, Learning and Student Supports Sub-Committee, surveyed students at the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, and conducted informational sessions on the local cable television channel.
- B. Internal and external stakeholders were useful in assessing needs and resources. This Plan serves as the district's blueprint for enhancing capacity to prevent and respond to issues of bullying within the context of our existing healthy school climate initiatives and programs. These include:
 - 1. School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
 - 2. Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum; Grades K-2
 - 3. Talking About Touching: A Personal Safety Curriculum; Grades K-3
 - 4. The Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Curriculum; Grades K-12
 - 5. Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Curriculum; Grades 3-6
 - 6. Life Skills Training; Grades 4-10
 - 7. Safe Dates: An Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum; Grades 8-10
 - 8. Gang Prevention and Intervention Program

Under the guidance of the Health and Physical Health Education Liaison, school leaders, with input from families and staff, annually assess the adequacy of these current programs; review current policies and procedures; review available data on bullying and behavioral incidents; and assess available resources including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services. This "mapping" process assists our schools and district in identifying resource gaps and the most significant areas of need. Recommendations will be forwarded to the Deputy Superintendent for possible use at the district level to revise and develop policies and procedures; establish partnerships with community agencies, including law enforcement; and set priorities for the Worcester Public Schools.

The district and individual schools with support from the Quadrant Office collect and analyze 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). This information helps to identify patterns of behaviors and areas of concern, and informs decision-making for prevention strategies including, but not limited to, adult supervision, professional development, age-appropriate curricula, and in-school support services.

The Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee consists of school-based and central office staff members, student and parent representatives and community-based stakeholders. This committee will conduct annual needs assessments to inform revisions and improvements for the Plan.

C. Planning and oversight. The Bullying and Intervention Plan (“Plan”) is a comprehensive approach to

addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and the school or district is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with those constituencies we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening and responding to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation. The principal or designee is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan except when a reported bullying incident involves the principal or the assistant principals 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 target. If the Superintendent is the alleged aggressor, the School Committee, or designee shall be responsible for investigating the report and other steps necessary to implement the Plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged target.

The Chart below outlines the tasks and leader responsibilities in the Plan:

TASKS	LEADERS
Receiving reports on bullying	School Committee or Designee Superintendent or Designee School Principals Quadrant Office
Collecting and analyzing school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes	Quadrant Office Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
Creating a process for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors	Information Systems Officer Quadrant Office Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
Planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law	Manager of Professional Development Quadrant Office Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
Planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors	Coordinator of Counseling, Psychology, and Community Outreach Services Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or district will use	Health and Physical Education Liaison Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
Developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Plan, including an internet safety policy	Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
Amending student and staff handbooks and code of conduct to among other things, make clear that bullying of students by school staff or other students will not be tolerated.	Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
Leading parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials	Communication and School Support Coordinator Quadrant Office Safe and Secure Learning Environment Committee
Reviewing and updating the Plan each year, or more frequently	Safe and Secure Learning Environment Quadrant Office

II. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Worcester Public Schools provides 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 in compliance with the requirements of M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O.

- A. Annual staff training. Worcester Public Schools will conduct annual training for all school staff on the Plan. This training focuses on: identifying bullying behavior, types of bullying, roles of aggressors, targets, and bystanders, rights and responsibilities under M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, staff responsibilities under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the principal or administrative designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades throughout the Worcester Public Schools. Teams from each school, including the principal, assistant principals, counselors and health educators are trained in all aspects of the Plan. Each team then trains their building staff including teachers, administrators, counselors, nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians and advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals. Athletic coaches are trained by the Director of Athletics. Staff members hired after the start of the school year will be required to participate in this bullying prevention and intervention training as part of their orientation to the Worcester Public Schools.
- B. Ongoing professional development. Worcester Public Schools will continue to build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify and respond to bullying through on-going professional development. The content of school-wide and district-wide professional development is informed by research and includes information on:
 1. developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying
 2. developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents
 3. information regarding the complex interactions and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying
 4. research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students
 5. who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment
 6. information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying
 6. Internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying

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

Additional areas for professional development may include:

- promoting and modeling the use of respectful language
- fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference
- building relationships and communicating with families
- constructively managing classroom behaviors
- using positive behavioral intervention strategies
- applying constructive disciplinary practices
- teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others
- engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making; and maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students
- maintain a safe and caring classroom for all students
- 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

- C. Written notice to staff. The district provides all staff with an annual written notice of the Worcester Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties and bullying of students by school staff, in the Superintendent's Bulletin. It is also posted on the website and in each building.

III. ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

A key aspect of promoting a safe and secure learning environment throughout the Worcester Public Schools is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of targets, students, and aggressors are addressed. In order to enhance the district's capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, Worcester Public Schools has resources available that reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets, students, aggressors, and families.

- A. Identifying resources. The district's initiative in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) currently in 22 schools and alternative programs provides a strong framework for the establishment of common behavioral expectations and a culture of respect by all staff within each school. Resources available to support the use of this school-wide approach include staff trained in the skills of teaching socially appropriate behavior to students and creating positive school environments that support appropriate interpersonal behavior. "Successful strategies" from district schools implementing PBIS are available on the district website along with links to additional resources and the National Center on Positive Behavior Supports (<http://www.pbis.org>). The explicit teaching of socially appropriate behavior at every grade level by all adults in the school environment is consistent with other district initiatives including our involvement in the Central Massachusetts Child Trauma Center. Within PBIS schools an established structure for problem-solving operates to actively identify and address problem behaviors as they occur and develop strategies for prevention as needed. Connections to family and community-based sources of support are also formalized within PBIS schools.
- B. Counseling and other services. School Adjustment Counselors and School Psychologists are assigned to every school in either a part-time or full-time capacity by the Child Study Department (See Appendix for Child Study Department Description). Through their school assignments these mental health professionals are familiar, trusted members of each school community who are readily available to assist with situational assessments that involve bullying or intimidation among students. As appropriate they assist with development and implementation of Student Support Plans for students who have been the targets of bullying and also refer parents and students to sources of community-based support. Additionally, these members of the support staff reinforce the social skills curricula by pre-teaching or re-teaching skills that are addressed by the Health Education teachers for individual and small groups of students who need repeated exposures to these lessons. School adjustment counselors provide short-term individual and group counseling services to students, serve as case managers for students/families in developing a network of support services with community agencies and provide nonviolent conflict resolution and mediation services.

School Adjustment Counselors also serve as the district's Supervisors of Attendance, and as such may identify bullying that escalates to high levels of absenteeism due to school avoidance. Through collaborative work with Worcester Juvenile Court's Clerk Magistrate and Probation Departments applications for formal and informal assistance through these offices often expedites appropriate attention to these issues of concern.

The Student School Safety Center staffed by School Adjustment Counselors and a teacher with licensure in special education, provides a short-term (3-day) option within which students who have engaged in serious bullying and threatening behavior receive intensive needs assessment and portions of research-based curricula that develop positive interpersonal and non-violent conflict resolution skills. This educationally appropriate intervention serves to teach acceptable replacement behaviors, identify student needs and develop a plan of support for implementation when students return to their schools. The Safety Center also sends students a clear message regarding acceptable and expected behavior.

The Temporary Learning Center (TLC), provides short term assessment and stabilization for elementary students displaying a history of serious behavioral/emotional issues that impede their own educational progress and that of their peers in the mainstream classroom. Students exit the program within 2 to 3 weeks with a plan to support their academic, behavioral, emotional and social success in the mainstream classroom. In the TLC classrooms a small, highly structured and supervised setting enables intensive teaching of appropriate behavior. Additional support plans are tailored to the needs of each individual student and, as appropriate, to the needs of their families.

- C. Students with disabilities. For Worcester Public School students with a disability on the autism spectrum, the IEP team must consider and specifically address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid or respond to bullying, harassment or teasing. Whenever the IEP Team evaluation indicates that a student's disability makes him or her vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing, the IEP must address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.
- D. Referral to outside services. The School-Based Intake Process (see Guidelines in Appendix) provides a protocol for practice between the school district and mental health provider agencies, which expedites the referral and matching of appropriate area clinicians to students with needs for treatment related to their social-emotional functioning. Through the use of this process School Adjustment Counselors and School Psychologists are able to assist families who may otherwise have challenges engaging with an appropriate provider for mental health treatment. Furthermore, the release signed by the parent who consents to a School-Based Intake enables school staff to share information about the matters of concern that prompt the referral. Through this process concerns related to bullying behavior that are identified at school may be communicated to the community-based provider enabling the issues to be addressed within the overall treatment plan.

IV. ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Worcester Public Schools provides age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention in each grade incorporated into the district's evidenced-based health curricula. Effective instruction includes classroom approaches and whole school initiatives with focused strategies for bullying prevention and social skills development.

The established priorities of the Worcester Public Schools:

- A. Specific bullying prevention approaches. Bullying prevention curricula continues to be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:
 - using scripts and role plays to develop skills
 - empowering students or school staff to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance
 - helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance
 - 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 Initiatives also include teaching students about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan at the beginning of each year through student assemblies, classroom instruction, and school-wide messaging.

The evidenced-based bullying prevention curricula are outlined below.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The Worcester Public Schools has system-wide health educators that teach all students in grades 4-6 in all of the elementary schools. Using the following evidence-based social skills and bullying and violence prevention curricula:

- Grades 4-6 Steps to Respect, Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education

Classroom teachers remain in the classroom when these classes are being taught to co-facilitate and reinforce the lessons throughout the week.

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Each middle school has a full time health educator who teaches violence and bullying prevention using Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders and Violence and Injury prevention, HealthSmart curricula and the Michigan Model Resources.

HIGH SCHOOLS

Health educators are teaching lessons using Teenage Health Teaching Module: Violence Prevention and the Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education, Violence and Injury Prevention and HealthSmart curricula resources.

The District Attorney's Office also provides workshops to students regarding bullying at other grade levels. They will help students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying by emphasizing cyber safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies.

The Worcester Public Schools recognizes the significance of this law and provides effective instruction including classroom approaches and whole school initiatives with focused strategies for bullying prevention and social skills development. This will ensure that all students in grades 4-12 will receive age-appropriate instruction.

- B. General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts. Worcester Public Schools emphasizes the following approaches in all schools because they 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 including iSafe curriculum
 - supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength

V. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION

To support safe and secure learning environments, Worcester Public Schools has policies and procedures in place for receiving and responding to reports of bullying or retaliation to ensure that members of the school community – students, parents, and school staff – know what will happen when incidents of bullying occur (Appendix). 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 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. The Plan describes detailed procedures for staff reporting of incidents, processes for communicating to students and families how reports can be made (including anonymous reports), and procedures to be followed by the principal or the administrative designee, or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant is the alleged aggressor, or school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor, once a report is made.

- A. Reporting bullying or retaliation. Reports of bullying or retaliation can be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. All oral reports must be recorded in writing through a Worcester Public Schools Administrators Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Reporting Form (Appendix). School and district staff members are required to report 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 or any instance of bullying or retaliation that the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses prior to the end of the day to the principal or the administrative designee. Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously. Worcester Public Schools has established a dedicated mailing address (Quadrant Office, 20 Irving Street Room 103), a dedicated fax number (508-799-3016) for reporting purposes. Anyone interested in reporting acts of bullying can also call the “Anonymous Bullying Reporting Line” at 508-799-3499.

Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. However, each school principal or administrative designee will be required to complete an Incident Report Form and Administrative Bullying Prevention on every report of bullying made by students, staff, parents, or other sources. Also, every school will: 1) include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in packets for students and parents/guardians. 2) make it available in the school's main office, the counseling office, the School Nurse office, and other locations determined by the principal or administrative designee; and 3) post it on the district's website (worcesterschools.org/bullying-prevention) and available at each school's website. The Administrative Bullying Prevention and 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 Worcester Public Schools 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 administrative designee, and the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, or the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor, will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks, on the school and Worcester Public Schools website (worcesterschools.org/bullying-prevention), 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 administrative designee, or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant 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. The requirement to report to the principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, or school committee or designee, when the Superintendent is the alleged aggressor, 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. This process may be initiated by completing the Teacher Referral or Office Discipline Referral Form or the Bullying Incident Report Form (Appendix).

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 or a school staff to report it to the principal or the administrative designee, or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, or school committee or designee when the superintendent 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. However, the anonymous report will be investigated. 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 administrative designee, or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant 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 administrative 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. 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 administrative designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The principal or administrative 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.

2. Obligations to Notify Others

- a. Notice to parents or guardians. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or administrative 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 administrative 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 private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the principal or administrative 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 administrative designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal or administrative designee 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 administrative 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 or administrative designee will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the Quadrant Office and other individuals the principal or administrative designee deems appropriate.
- C. Investigation. The principal or administrative designee will investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation within twenty-four hours, or the next school day, of receipt of the report, 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 administrative designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or administrative designee will remind the alleged student aggressor, target, and witnesses of the importance of the investigation, their obligation to be truthful and that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

The principal or administrative designee, or other staff members as determined by the principal or administrative designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, will conduct interviews as appropriate. To the extent practical and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the principal or administrative designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The principal or administrative designee will maintain a written record of the investigation (Administrator's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Report Form – Appendix).

If necessary, the principal or administrative designee will consult with legal counsel about the investigation. Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with the Worcester Public Schools policies and procedures for investigations.

- D. Determinations. The principal or administrative designee will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal or administrative 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 administrative designee will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action are necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the principal or administrative 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 administrative designee will notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation within twenty-four hours or the next school day of completion of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notices 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 administrative 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.

- Responses to Bullying.

- E. The Worcester Public Schools proactive approach to bullying prevention and intervention to ensure safe and secure learning environments for all students includes changing behaviors of aggressors.

1. Taking Disciplinary Action

If the principal or administrative designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the principal or administrative 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 code of conduct of the Worcester Public Schools. We will follow guidelines for discipline procedures for students with disabilities as outlined in the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). In response to bullying, the Worcester Public Schools will consider a range of consequences that may include loss of privileges, detention, suspension, Safety Center Referral, referral to outside agencies, community service, or development of an Aggressor Intervention Plan that may include educational components.

2. Teaching Appropriate Behavior through Skills-Building

Educational components of an Aggressor Intervention Plan may include instruction in appropriate behavior through skill-building (i.e. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Program, Second Step, Steps to Respect and Health Education) and/or Aggressor Intervention Meeting. Other skill-building approaches that the principal or administrative designee may consider include:

- providing individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's/district's bullying prevention curricula
- 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 pro-social 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 making a referral for evaluation

If the principal or administrative 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 administrative 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. Secondly, a Student Target Intervention Plan (Appendix) will be implemented on every student who has been confirmed as being targeted. All parents will be involved and receive a copy of their son/daughter's Student Target Intervention Plan.

Following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the principal or administrative designee will maintain on-going contact with 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 administrative designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

- F. Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation - Allegations of Bullying by School Staff. The Worcester Public Schools has developed policies and procedures that address how schools will respond and provide safety planning, notification to parent or guardians and others, investigation and response. Policies and procedures currently in place address unacceptable conduct by school staff. The principal or designee or the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant is the alleged aggressor or the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor will remind the alleged staff 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.

1. Safety

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal or administrative designee or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant is the alleged aggressor or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor, 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. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan. The principal or administrative designee or superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant is the alleged aggressor, or school committee or designee, will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying or retaliation of 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.

2. Obligations to Notify Others

- a. Notice to Parents or Guardians - Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and of the procedures for responding to it. There may be circumstances in which the principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee 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 private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee 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 administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal or administrative designee or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee 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 administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee 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 aggressor. In making this determination, the principal or administrative designee will, or the superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the Quadrant Office and other individuals the principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, deems appropriate.
- d. Investigation- The principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, will investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation within twenty-four hours or next school day, of receipt of the report, and, in doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the student (s) involved.

During the investigation the principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or administrative designee, superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, will remind the alleged school staff aggressor, target, and witnesses of the importance of the investigation, their obligation to be truthful and that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. The principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, or other staff members as determined by the principal or administrative designee, in consultation with the human resource manager, will conduct interviews as appropriate. To the extent practical and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the principal or administrative designee, superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. A written record of the investigation (Administrator's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Report Form – Appendix) will be maintained.

If necessary, the principal or administrative designee, or superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, will consult with legal counsel about the investigation. Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with the Worcester Public Schools policies and procedures for investigations.

- e. Determinations- The principal or administrative designee, superintendent or designee, or school committee 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 administrative designee, superintendent or designee, or school committee 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 administrative designee, or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee, will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action are necessary.

The principal or administrative designee, superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, will notify the parents or guardians of the target and the school staff aggressor about the results of the investigation within twenty-four hours, or next school day, of completion of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notices to parents must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of personnel records, the principal or administrative designee, superintendent or designee, or school committee 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.

- Responses to Bullying

The Worcester Public Schools proactive approach to bullying prevention and intervention to ensure safe and secure learning environments for all student includes changing behaviors of aggressors.

1. Taking Disciplinary Action

The principal or administrative designee, superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, will send the Bullying Incident Report Form and the Administrator Bullying Incident Report Form which confirms bullying to the human resource manager, who will make a recommendation to the superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, regarding what, if any, disciplinary action should be considered. The human resource manager may conduct further investigations, if necessary. The superintendent or designee or school committee or designee will consider the nature of the offense, the employment history of the employee and other relevant information as may be available.

2. Teaching appropriate behavior through skills-building

Any staff member, who is determined to have engaged in conduct prohibited under this policy, will be required to contact the Worcester Public School's Employee Assistance Program (Deer Oakes 866 327 2400) prior to returning to their employment, as applicable. The staff member may also be required to participate in appropriate staff development as determined by the superintendent or designee or school committee or designee.

3. Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

A Student Target Intervention Plan (Appendix) will be implemented on every student who has been confirmed as being targeted. All parents will be involved and receive a copy of their son/daughter's Student Target Intervention Plan. The principal or designee, superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee will consider what adjustment, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of other as well. One strategy that the principal or designee, superintendent or designee, or school department or designee, may use is to reassign the staff member or the student within the building or the District. Following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the principal or administrative designee, superintendent or designee or school committee or designee, will maintain on-going contact with 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, or superintendent or designee, or school committee or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately. Up to and including progressive discipline of the staff member.

VI. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES

Resources for families and open communication with them are essential aspects of collaboration. The Worcester Public Schools will work closely with families to further increase the capacity of schools and the district to prevent and respond to bullying. Information shared with families focuses on: (i) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the school or district plan; (ii) the dynamics of bullying; and (iii) online safety and cyber-bullying.

Parents and guardians will also be notified in writing each year about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan in the language(s) most prevalent among the parents or guardians. School- or district-specific approaches to collaboration take into account age, climate, socio-economic factors, linguistic, and cultural make-up of students and the parents.

A. Parent education and resources. Worcester Public Schools offer educational programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and social competency curricula used by the district. The programs are offered in collaboration with the Parent Information Center, City-wide Parent Advisory Council, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory, and similar organizations.

B. Notification requirements. Each year the district informs parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. Parent letters are sent home by the principals and health teachers that provides information about the bullying prevention and intervention curricula their child is being taught. An opportunity to review the materials, speak with the instructor and attend an informational meeting available for all parents/guardians about the dynamics of bullying, including cyber-bullying and on-line safety. The district will send parent's written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the district's Internet Safety Policy. All notices and information made available to parents and guardians are in hard copy and electronic formats, and are available in the languages most prevalent among parents and guardians. The district has posted the Plan and related information on our website.

VII. PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

The Worcester Public Schools includes a statement prohibiting bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation in this plan and in the student code of conduct, the student handbook, and the Superintendent's Bulletin. The following statement is incorporated directly from M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O (b), and describes the law's requirements for the prohibition of bullying.

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

(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.

VIII. DEFINITIONS

Several of the following definitions are copied directly from M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, as noted below. Worcester Public Schools has not altered their meaning or scope.

Aggressor is a student or school staff who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

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

1. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the victim's property
 2. places the victim 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 victim
 4. infringes on the rights of the victim at school
 5. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school
- Bullying shall include cyberbullying

Cyber-bullying, 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, and bus drivers, and athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

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

IX. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the Worcester Public Schools, 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, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. 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. (Appendix – The Worcester Public Schools Policy and Procedures)

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. c71 §§41 and 42, M.G.L. c76 § 5 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.

X. APPENDIX

- Child Study Department
- School-Based Intake Process
- Worcester Public Schools Policies and Procedures on Bullying
- Worcester Public Schools Incident Reporting Form Process
- Worcester Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Report Form
- Worcester Public Schools Administrator's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Report Form
- Worcester Public Schools Teacher Referral Form
- Disciplinary Infraction Code
- Worcester Public Schools Student Aggressor Intervention Plan
- Worcester Public Schools Staff Aggressor Intervention Plan
- Worcester Public Schools Student Target Intervention Plan