

# ROCKLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS BULLYING PLAN

## Position Statement

Rockland Public Schools will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyber bullying, or retaliation, in our school 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 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.

## Definitions

**“Bullying”** is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself, or of damage to his/her property;
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- Infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school

**“Cyber bullying”** means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a:

- Wire
- Radio
- Electromagnetic
- Photo-electronic or photo-optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications.

Cyber bullying shall also include the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or knowingly impersonates another person as author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

Cyber bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

## Parental Cooperation

The prevention of bullying in our schools must be a joint effort involving both school staff and parent/guardians. The role of the parent of the target and or aggressor in understanding the bullying situation and working with their child and the schools is crucial to the student's development of appropriate social skills.

## **Investigation Process**

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 district staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee 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.

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 school administration 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 administrators, staff, 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, 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.

## **Reporting by Staff**

A staff member will report immediately to the school administration when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report to the school administration 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.

For isolated incidents of peer aggression, staff will use the schools incident form. The school administration will monitor all incident forms to determine if there is repeated behavior. If repetition is determined, then the Bullying Incident Reporting Form will be used.

## **Reporting by Student, 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 school administration. 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 school administration.

## **Responding to a Report of Bullying**

Prior to fully investigating the school administration will ensure the safety of the alleged target and/or protect the target from possible further incidents. The school administration will also ensure that all parties understand the definition and prohibition of retaliation.

## **Investigation**

The school administration will use the Bullying Investigation Form as a template for the investigation process.

Interviews may be conducted by the school administration, other staff members as determined by the principal 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 school administration will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The school administration will maintain a written record of the investigation.

A copy of the completed Bullying Investigation Form will be sent to the Superintendent's office.

## **Determinations**

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

## **Notifications**

The school administration 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 school administration 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. In the case of Cyberbullying, the parents of any student mentioned in/on the bullying medium (text, social networking page, etc) will be notified.

## **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 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.

## **Notice to Law Enforcement**

At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the principal 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 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.

## **Responses to Bullying**

### **Teaching Appropriate Behavior**

The teaching of appropriate social skills is a key part of preventing future bullying incidents. The school may:

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

## **Discipline**

Discipline will be administered according to the school's handbook. All discipline must be balanced with the requirement to teach appropriate behavior.

If the school administration decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the school administration, 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.

Sanctions may include:

- Detention
- Loss of privileges to participate in school activities
- Suspension

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 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.

## **Professional Development**

The district will provide professional development to its staff that includes the following components:

- Developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents
- Developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents
- Information regarding complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, victim and witnesses to the bullying
- Research finds on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment
- Information on the incidence and nature of cyber bullying
- Internet safety issues as they relate to cyber bullying

## **Curriculum**

The district will develop or purchase age appropriate curriculum to be incorporated into the districts academic offerings.

Instruction will take place at the class level in elementary schools and will be coordinated by the school psychologists.

At the Middle and High Schools, the curriculum will be taught by the health teachers. This will be supplemented by individual or group activities supervised by the guidance departments and social workers.

## **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
- 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
- Supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength

# Appendix A

## **Definitions**

*Several of the following definitions are copied directly from M.G.L. c. 71 § 370, as noted below. Schools or districts may add specific language to these definitions to clarify them, but may not alter their meaning or scope. Plans may also include additional definitions that are aligned with local policies and procedures.*

**Aggressor** is a student who engages in bullying, cyber bullying or retaliation.

Bullying as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, is the repeated use of one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property
- Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the target
- Infringes on the rights of the target at school
- Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school

**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 § 370 for the legal definition of cyber bullying.

**Hostile environment**, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeate 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.

**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, cyber bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

# Appendix B

## ROCKLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION INCIDENT REPORTING FORM

1. **Name of Reporter/Person Filing the report:** \_\_\_\_\_

(Note: Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report.)

2. **Check whether you are the:**      **Target of the behavior**       **Reporter (not the target)**

3. **Check whether you are a:**       **Student**       **Staff member (specify role)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent**       **Administrator**       **Other (specify)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your contact information/telephone number:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. **If student, state your school:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_

5. **If staff member, state your school or work site:** \_\_\_\_\_

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6. **Information about the Incident:**

**Name of Target (of behavior):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Aggressor (Person who engaged in the behavior):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date(s) of Incident(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time When Incident(s) Occurred:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location of Incident(s) (Be as specific as possible):** \_\_\_\_\_

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7. **Witnesses (List people who saw the incident or have information about it):**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  **Student**  **Staff**  **Other**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  **Student**  **Staff**  **Other**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  **Student**  **Staff**  **Other**

\_\_\_\_\_

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8. **Describe the details of the incident** (including names of people involved, what occurred, and what each person did and said, including specific words used). **Please use additional space on back if necessary.**

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FOR ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY

(Note: Reports may be filed anonymously)

10. Form given to: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

# ROCKLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION INVESTIGATION REPORT

### INVESTIGATION

1. Investigator(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Position(s): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Interviews:

- Interviewed aggressor Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Interviewed target Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Interviewed witnesses Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Any prior documented incidents by the aggressor?  Yes  No

If yes, have incidents involved target or target group previously?  Yes  No

Any previous incidents with findings of BULLYING, RETALIATION?  Yes  No

Summary of Investigation:

(Please use additional paper and attach to this document as needed)

### CONCLUSIONS FROM THE INVESTIGATION

1. Finding of bullying or retaliation:  YES  NO  
 Bullying  Incident documented as \_\_\_\_\_  
 Retaliation  Discipline referral only \_\_\_\_\_

2. Contacts:  
 Target's parent/guardian Date: \_\_\_\_\_  Aggressor's parent/guardian Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 District Equity Coordinator (DEC\_) Date: \_\_\_\_\_  Law Enforcement Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ Other parents/guardians (please list on additional page) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Action Taken:  
 Loss of Privileges  Detention  STEP referral  Suspension  
 Community Service  Education  Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Describe Safety Planning: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Follow-up with Target: scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_ Initial and date when completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Follow-Up with Aggressor: scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_ Initial and date when completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Report forwarded to Principal: Date \_\_\_\_\_ Report forwarded to Superintendent: Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 (If principal was not the investigator)

Signature and Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_