

Newton Public Schools
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy

All members of the school community deserve the opportunity to work and learn in an environment of mutual respect. In order to create and maintain such an environment, students and staff must treat each other with courtesy and consideration.

The Newton Public Schools is committed to adhering to a policy of non-discrimination based on race, gender, color, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity/national origin, age, or handicap/disability, in accordance with state and/or federal laws. These policies, as described in the "Right to an Equal Education" section of the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, specifically prohibit harassment based upon each of these protected classifications.

In addition, Newton Public Schools recognizes that bullying, intimidation or retaliation on any basis, whether or not it is related to membership in a protected class, has a negative effect on school climate. Students who are intimidated and fearful cannot give their education the attention they need for success. Bullying, intimidation or retaliation for any reason are prohibited in the Newton Public Schools. Prevention begins with a strong educational program and the establishment of a positive, caring school environment.

Creating a school culture free of harassment and bullying demands that all individuals recognize such behaviors and take action to stop them. Every student and staff member in the Newton Public Schools has the potential and the responsibility to have a positive effect on the school culture and should act in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Treat others with courtesy, consideration and respect.
- Tell individuals behaving in a disrespectful manner towards you that you want them to stop.
- Tell individuals behaving in a disrespectful manner towards someone else that you want them to stop.
- Report behavior to a trusted adult.

We understand that members of certain student groups, or students based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation,

mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics, may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying or harassment. Newton Public Schools seeks 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 or harassment.

Whenever the evaluation of the Individualized Education Program team indicates that the child has a disability that affects social skills development or that the child is vulnerable to bullying or harassment because of the child's disability, the Individualized Education Program shall address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying or harassment.

The intent of this policy is to meet the obligations of M.G.L. c.71 sec. 37O, as amended.

DEFINITIONS

Bullying (including cyberbullying) is the repeated use by one or more students or staff member, of a written, verbal, or electronic communication or expression, or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target. Bullying results in the outcomes that:

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

Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic means or communication, including, but not 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. Cyberbullying shall also include: (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the 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.

Hostile environment 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 the student's education.

Aggressor is a student or a staff member, including but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional, who engages in bullying or retaliation.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Staff Member includes, but is not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional.

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

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

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

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

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

SCOPE OF SCHOOL AUTHORITY

The Newton Public School System prohibits bullying (including cyberbullying):

- at school and at all school facilities;
- at school-sponsored or school-related functions, whether on or off school grounds;
- on school buses and school bus stops;
- through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, licensed or used by a school; and
- at non-school-related locations and through non-school technology or electronic devices, if the bullying affects the school environment.

BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

The Newton Public Schools has developed, and through the Superintendent and/or his/her designees, will update, as required by law, a Bullying and Prevention and Intervention Plan. The Newton Public Schools' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan addresses training and ongoing professional development for staff and identifies the bullying prevention curriculum of the Newton Public Schools for parents and guardians. Additionally, the Bullying and Prevention and Intervention Plan establishes clear procedures for: (i) students, staff, parents, guardians and others to report bullying or retaliation; (ii) the response and investigation of reports of bullying or retaliation; (iii) the determination, resolution and interventions, including discipline, if appropriate, of investigations; (iv) reporting and notification of the outcome of bullying investigations consistent with state and federal law; and (v) establishing a sense of safety for a target and strategy for the provision of or referral for counseling services, if appropriate.

(Note: The above policy statement will be incorporated into the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and Students' Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.)