

Sacred Heart of Jesus School

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Introduction

Sacred Heart of Jesus School acknowledges that its purpose for existence is rooted in the mission of the Church. In fulfilling its role within the educational mission of the Church, the school must share and live out, through Catholic Christian tradition, the message of Jesus Christ and be committed to providing an integrated Catholic educational environment that permeates all aspects of its daily life and operations. Each child must be challenged to reach his/her full potential, by fostering in each child a love of learning, and by providing an environment that also fosters respect and understanding of one another. In this regard, it is essential that a safe, positive and productive educational environment be established where students can attain the highest academic achievement and where no student shall be subjected to bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation. Bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation or other similar disruptive or violent behaviors, constitute conduct that disrupts both a student's ability to learn and the school's ability to educate its students in a safe and embracing environment. The school's staff is expected to demand that all students behave appropriately and treat others with civility and respect. Bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation are not to be tolerated.

Accordingly, our school hereby promulgates this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan as required by the Diocese of Worcester Bullying Prevention Policy.

Definitions

For the purpose of this plan, the following definitions shall apply:

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

"Aggressor" means a student who engages in bullying or retaliation.

"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 the school; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

By way of example only, bullying may involve, but is not limited to:

unwanted teasing, threatening, intimidating, stalking, cyber-stalking, physical violence, or theft; sexual, religious, racial or any other type of harassment, public humiliation, destruction of school property, social exclusion, including incitement and /or coercion, rumor or spreading of falsehoods.

For purpose of this plan, whenever the term "bullying" is used it is to denote either bullying or cyber-bullying (as defined below).

"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, electro-magnetic device, 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 included in the definition of bullying.

Cyber-Bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of any communication to more than one person of 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 listed in the definitions of bullying.

"Hostile Environment" means 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.

"Retaliation" means 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 Grounds" means property on which the school building or facility is located or property that is owned, leased or used by the school for school-sponsored activities, functions, programs, instruction or training.

"Staff" includes, but is not limited to educators, faculty, administrators, counselor, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, and paraprofessionals.

Planning and Oversight

Sacred Heart of Jesus School staff receives and responds to all reports on bullying. We annually collect and analyze building and school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problems and to measure improved outcomes. We have created a process for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors. We have plans for ongoing professional development, and supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors. We have chosen and are implementing the **Steps to Respect** curricula with our students. We will continually develop new, and revise current, policies and protocols under this plan. We will continue to make family engagement efforts and draft parent information materials. We will review and update this plan annually or more frequently as needed.

Priorities

Sacred Heart of Jesus School expects that all members of the school community treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

Our school is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from 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.

Our school takes specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and together with parents, provides all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying.

We will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying or retaliation, in our school, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying and retaliation and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target's sense of safety. We support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement. This plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, and the school is 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 and retaliation. The Principal, working under the oversight of the Pastor, and Board of Trustees, is responsible for the implementation and oversight of this plan.

Prohibition Against Bullying and Retaliation

Bullying is prohibited: on school grounds, on property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at any school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at our school bus stop, on a school bus, or any other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the school.

Bullying is also prohibited at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by the school if the act or acts in question: 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 the school.

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

Training and Professional Development

Annual training on the plan for all school staff and, in the discretion of the Principal, volunteers who have significant contact with students, will include staff duties under the plan, an overview of the steps that the Principal or his or her designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of any bullying prevention curricula to be offered at the school. Staff members hired after the start of 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.

Written Notice to the Staff At the beginning of each school year, the Principal or designee shall provide written notice to the school staff of the Diocese of Worcester Bullying Prevention Policy and this Plan. The plan relating to the duties of school staff shall be included in the school staff employee handbook.

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 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, guardians, or other individuals who are not school staff members may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. The school will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, a voicemail box, a dedicated mailing address, and an email address.

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

At the beginning of the school year, the school will provide the school community, 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 website, and in information about the plan that is made available to parents or guardians.

Reporting by Staff

Staff members will report immediately to the Principal or designee when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report to the Principal or designee does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school policies or procedures for behavior management and discipline.

Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others

The school 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. 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.

Responding to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation

Safety: Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Principal or designee will take steps to assess the need to restore 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 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.

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 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 MA state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.
- b. **Notice to Another School.** 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 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 any 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 aggressor. In making this determination, the Principal will, consistent with this plan and with applicable school

policies, consult with other individuals the Principal or designee deems appropriate (including, but not limited to, the Office of the General Counsel of the Archdiocese).

Investigation: The Principal or designee will investigate promptly 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, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The Principal or designee will remind the alleged aggressor, target and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the Principal or designee, or other staff members as determined by the Principal. 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. If necessary, the Principal will consult with the Office of the General Counsel of the Archdiocese about the investigation.

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 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 on the circumstances, the Principal or designee may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s), and the target's or aggressor's parents or guardians, to identify any underlying social or emotion 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 MA 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.

Responses to Bullying

Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-building:

Upon the Principal or designee determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the school use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. (MA General Laws Ch. 71, Section 370.) Skill-building approaches the Principal or designee may consider include:

- a. offering skill-building sessions based on the **Steps to Respect** curricula;
- b. providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with other appropriate school personnel;
- c. implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals;
- d. meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home;
- e. adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills, and
- f. making a referral for evaluation.

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 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 this plan and with the school's Code of Conduct.

Discipline procedures for students with disabilities may be governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which should be read in cooperation with Massachusetts 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.

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 will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

Collaboration with Families

Parent Education and Resources: The school will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTO.

Notification Requirements: The school will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the plan and the school's Internet Safety Policy. All notices and information made available to parents or guardians will be in hard copy and electronic formats, and will be in the language most prevalent among parents or guardians. The school will post this plan and its related information on its website.

Relationship to Other Laws

Consistent with MA and federal laws, and the policies of the school, nothing in this plan prevents the school from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, MA, or federal law, or School policies.

In addition, nothing in this plan is designated or intended to limit the authority of the school to take disciplinary action or other action under MA Gen. Laws Ch 71, Section 370 (d) (v), other applicable laws, or local school policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the plan covers the behavior.

In no event should this plan be construed in any way as to limit or modify the obligation of mandated reporters to timely make required so-called "51-A Reports" where appropriate.