



Manchester Essex Regional School District
Anti-Bullying and Intervention Plan

Manchester Essex Regional School District **Anti-Bullying and Intervention Plan**

The Manchester Essex Regional School District recognizes the need to build the capacity of staff, students, and community to establish and sustain positive school culture throughout the district. Therefore, MERSD in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O presents its plan for the prevention of bullying and the development of a positive school culture. *Please note that we use the word “target” instead of “victim” and “aggressor” instead of “perpetrator.”*

DEFINITIONS:

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

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71, s. 37O, 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 himself or of damage to his 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.

Bullying may include conduct such as physical intimidation or assault, including intimidating an individual into taking an action against his/her will; oral or written threats; teasing; putdowns;

name-calling; stalking; threatening looks, gestures, or actions; cruel rumors; false accusations; and social isolation.

Cyber-bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71, s. 37O is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but 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 also includes:

- (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;
- (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 above in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying; and
- (iii) 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 above in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Cyber-bullying may include conduct such as sending derogatory, harassing or threatening email messages, instant messages, or text messages; creating websites that ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate others; and posting on websites or disseminating embarrassing or inappropriate pictures or images of others.

Hostile Environment, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, s. 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 person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

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

LEADERSHIP:

Overview

The MERSD School Climate Task Force was established in the fall of 2009 in advance of the passage of M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, The Task Force is comprised of administrators, staff and parents representing the district K-12. The Task Force was established to provide a multifaceted approach to deal consistently and effectively with behavioral issues, including bullying, and promote proactive, preventative steps toward building strong school communities that will diminish the likelihood that bullying and other inappropriate behaviors will occur. The Task Force led a multifaceted needs based assessment including: a review to behavior management (codes of conduct and procedures); an examination of curriculum and school initiatives that foster respect and caring; and surveyed students in grade four through twelve on perceptions of climate. The goal of the student survey was to find and ensure that students could identify an adult to which he/she could access for assistance. The result of this process was the establishment a “Bill of Rights and Responsibilities” to guide the relationship between the schools and parent community, particularly through the often thorny issues attached to children’s behavior.

Responsibilities

| Tasks | School/District Leader Responsible |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Receiving reports on bullying | Building Principal |
| Collecting and analyzing building- and/or school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes | Building Principal |
| Creating a process for recording and tracking incident reports and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors | Building Principal |
| Planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law | Leadership Team PDC School Council |
| Planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors | Leadership Team Child Study Team Student Assistant Team |
| Choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or district will use | Director of Curriculum & Technology Curriculum Councils |

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Plan, including an Internet safety policy, and designating key staff to be in charge of implementation of them | Leadership Team |
| Amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct | Building Principals |
| Leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials | Building Principals Lead Leadership Team – Support |
| Reviewing and updating the Plan each year, or more frequently | Leadership Team |

Commitments & Expectations

MERSD expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

MERSD is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying and cyber-bullying. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive effort to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

MERSD acknowledges that members of certain student groups, such as students with racial, ethnic, religious, physical disabilities, students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and homeless students may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing. The school or district will take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

We 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.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of the tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and

respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. The content of school-wide and district-wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

| ACTIVITY | TIMELINE/FREQUENCY | AUDIENCE |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Anti-bullying Legal issues | August 2010/Annual | Leadership Team |
| Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center Anti-bullying Awareness and Legal Responsibilities | Annual | MERSD Professional & Support Staff |
| Targeted Training | Ongoing / As Needed | Staff Identified by Leadership Team and Function to receive external training on key facets of research, practice, and implementation of current best practices for Anti-bullying education and support |
| Train-the-Trainer | As Needed | Guidance and Psychological Services |
| Cyber-bullying Parent Training | November 18, 2010 /Annual | Parent & Community |
| MARC Anti-Bullying Awareness Training | March 9, 2011 / Annual (pending funding) | Parent & Community |
| MARC Anti-Bullying Awareness Training | January 27, 2011 | Students Grades 4-12 |

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

In addition to continual development of skills and knowledge, MERSD as required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties, in the school or district employee handbook and the code of conduct.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES:

A. Identifying resources

Elementary

Child Study Team (CST) meetings are held regularly or as needed (the CST is comprised of the school psychologist, school counselor, a literacy specialist, the individualized learning center teacher, the nurse, the Principal, and classroom teachers). At these meetings, ongoing concerns are discussed, issues between students are identified, and any new concerns are shared. The CST is intended to be a pre-referral process/resource that can help to provide teachers with a plan for going forward that is best suited to the individual needs of the given child and his or her situation. Outside of the CST process, students also have access to the counselors at each elementary school. The school counselor helps students to open the doors of communication in hopes of decreasing the feelings of isolation and encouraging open communication between students and between students and adults (both parents and school staff). The hope is that by getting some of these social topics out into the open it helps students to become more aware of how their actions impact those around them, while also providing students with a chance to see that they are not the only ones experiencing certain emotions or struggles and that there are people in their lives who can listen and help. Students are encouraged throughout this process to use their teachers and counselor as resources in the event that they need help with problem solving, are struggling with a certain emotion or social issue, or if they just need to vent in a safe environment without the worry of their thoughts or feelings being repeated as is often the case when children confide in peers.

Middle School

The process at MERMS for identifying its capacity to provide counseling and other support services for the targets, the aggressors and the families of all children involved in bullying, begins with the Student Assistance Team (SAT). This team consists of the Principal, the Assistant Principal, the School Psychologist, Guidance and Adjustment Counselors, the School Nurse and a rotation of Teaching Staff Members. This “gate-keeping” team meets bi-weekly and is driven by a dynamic agenda that includes referrals and reviews of all students of concern. Referrals initiated for all services recommended both in and out of the school setting, are made by this team of school professionals. Re-evaluation of the referrals, the services rendered and the results of those services are conducted routinely. Current programs that support a positive school environment and that address early intervention include a Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum and Health Education. Services that offer both early intervention and post-traumatic intensive

services include Adjustment Counseling, School Social Work and Social Skills Groups. Local processes that help to identify existing resources and any needed resources include the School Climate Task Force and the Community Collaborative Initiative (both described in detail below).

High School

The process at MERHS for identifying its capacity to provide counseling and other support services for the targets, the aggressors and the families of all children involved in bullying, begins with the Student Assistance Team (SAT). This team consists of the Principal, the Assistant Principal, the School Psychologist, Guidance and Adjustment Counselors, the School Nurse and a rotation of Teaching Staff Members. This “gate-keeping” team meets bi-weekly and is driven by a dynamic agenda that includes referrals and reviews of all students of concern. Referrals initiated for all services recommended both in and out of the school setting, are made by this team of school professionals. Re-evaluation of the referrals, the services rendered and the results of those services are conducted routinely. Current programs that support a positive school environment and that address early intervention include a Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum, Student Advisory and Health Education. Services that offer both early intervention and post-traumatic intensive services include Adjustment Counseling, School Social Work and Social Skills Groups. Local processes that help to identify existing resources and any needed resources include the School Climate Task Force and the Community Collaborative Initiative (both described in detail below).

B. Counseling and other services

Elementary

Staff includes Guidance Counselor, School Psychologist, School Nurse, and Principal. The current tools include, but not limited to Responsive Classroom, small social skills groups, health curriculum, individual behavior plans, individual counseling, daily check-ins and monitoring with identified students. Additional activities include, Action Plan for Change, large group discussion, and student surveys (from Creating Bully Free Classrooms). Linkages with community service organizations are another routine practice as SAT members meet monthly as part of the Community Collaborative Initiative (CCI). Representatives from the District Attorney’s Office, police, and state agencies collaborate with school personnel around the identification of at-risk youth including Medicaid eligible students.

Middle School

MERMS identifies both culturally and linguistically appropriate resources for students and their families as needed. The service providers are recommended and chosen in part, for their match to the student and family needs. Linkages with community service organizations are another routine practice as SAT members meet monthly as part of the Community Collaborative Initiative (CCI). Representatives from the District Attorney's Office, police, and state agencies collaborate with school personnel around the identification of at-risk youth including Medicaid eligible students. Together they address community concerns and initiate prevention and intervention training programs for students that include information opportunities for families, faculty, staff and the community at large. In developing safety plans, the SAT works to identify targets of bullying and/or retaliation as well as the aggressors. Behavioral Intervention Plans and Functional Behavioral Assessments are tools that are utilized as needed in the assessment of and the training for a student in need. Counseling and coaching are often recommended for targets of bullying as are Social Skills Programs that offer practice at self-advocacy education. Services for the aggressors include administrative intervention around the re-education of school policies as well as legal rights and responsibilities of all involved. Counseling is part of the re-education process for all aggressors. Guidance Counseling offered 1:1 and 1:10 respectively, offers a routine series of opportunities for students to meet with an adult whom they have come to know and trust. These professional relationships offer a more intimate approach to the MERSD Anti-Bully Prevention education. The School Climate Task Force which consists of the Principal, the Assistant Principal, Counselors and Parents have together and regularly addressed the issues of bullying and harassment by creating a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for students, staff and parents, have identified Individually Focused Curricula in K-12 Core Values, have identified a District-Wide Reporting System, have designed and utilized a Student Climate Survey, offered MARC training for faculty, students and families, and have supported counselor professional development training in School Safety and SOS Suicide Prevention.

High School

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Community Collaborative Initiative (CCI). Representatives from the District Attorney's Office, police, and state agencies collaborate with school personnel around the identification of at-risk youth including Medicaid eligible students. Together they address community concerns and initiate prevention and intervention training programs for students that include information opportunities for families, faculty, staff and the community at large. In developing safety plans, the SAT works to identify targets of bullying and/or retaliation as well as the aggressors. Behavioral Intervention Plans and Functional Behavioral Assessments are tools that are utilized as needed in the assessment of and the training for a student in need. Counseling and coaching are often recommended for targets of bullying as are Social Skills Programs that offer practice at self-advocacy education. Services for the aggressors include administrative intervention around the re-education of school policies as well as legal rights and responsibilities of all involved. Counseling is part of the re-education process for all aggressors. Guidance Counseling and Student Advisory offered 1:1 and 1:10 respectively, offers a routine series of opportunities for students to meet with an adult whom they have come to know and trust. These professional relationships offer a more intimate approach to the MERSD Anti-Bully Prevention education. The School Climate Task Force which consists of the Principal, the Assistant Principal, Counselors and Parents have together and regularly addressed the issues of bullying and harassment by creating a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for students, staff and parents, have identified Individually Focused Curricula in K-12 Core Values, have identified a District-Wide Reporting System, have designed and utilized a Student Climate Survey, offered MARC training for faculty, students and families, and have supported counselor professional development training in School Safety and SOS Suicide Prevention.

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

District

As principals collect reports of situations of bullying, if the target is a student receiving special services, then the Principal will notify the case manager for that student and convene a team meeting to ensure that current supports are being implemented and

whether additional supports are needed.

D. Referral to outside services. Schools and districts should establish a referral protocol for referring students and families to outside services. Clear protocols will help students and families access appropriate and timely services. Referrals must comply with relevant laws and policies. Current local referral protocols should be evaluated to assess their relevance to the Plan, and revised as needed.

District

The referral protocol for students and families in need of outside services is handled by the Student Assistance Team. All members of the team remain current and aware of services available in the community as well as the providers and their specialties. Clear protocols are observed, and the referral for student and family services are appropriate and timely. In addition to the bi-weekly Student Assistance Team meetings, the team will meet as needed to respond in any crisis. Compliance with federal and state laws as well as district policies are routinely evaluated to assess relevance to the Anti-Bully Prevention Plan and to make revisions where needed.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION:

Any person who believes s/he has been the target of aggression by a student or employee of the Manchester Essex Regional School District or any third person with knowledge or belief of conduct which may constitute aggression should report the alleged acts immediately to the appropriate school official. The reporting party or the complainant should use the **report form** available from each Principal of each school or available from the School District's Central Office. Oral reports will be considered complaints as well and will be documented by the intake person. Nothing in this plan shall prevent any person from reporting alleged bullying to a different administrator than the administrator designated.

- All staff are mandated to report any instance of bullying or retaliation s/he has witnessed or become aware of to the school principal or designee.
- In each school building the principal or designee is the person responsible for receiving oral or written reports of bullying.

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES:

Pre-Investigation: Even before fully investigating allegations of bullying or retaliation, school personnel will consider whether there is a need to take immediate steps to support the alleged target and/or protect the alleged target from further potential incidents of concern. In taking any such action, however, the rights of both the alleged target and alleged aggressor must be considered.

The Investigation: The investigation may consist of personal interviews with the complainant(s), the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed, and others that may have knowledge of the alleged incident(s) or circumstances giving rise to the complaint. The investigation may also consist of any other methods and documents deemed pertinent by the investigator. In determining whether "alleged conduct" constitutes a violation of the bullying policy, the investigator shall consider the surrounding circumstances: the nature of the behavior, past incidences or continuing patterns of behavior, the relationship between the parties involved and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred. Whether a particular action or incident constitutes a violation of this policy requires a determination based on all facts and surrounding circumstances. In instances of confirmed bullying, parents of all individuals involved will be notified.

Written statement of the complaint: The investigator will seek to determine the basis of the complaint, gathering information from the complainant, including such matters as: what specifically happened, who committed the alleged acts, who was present or may have information about the events, when the events occurred (date, time of day), and where the events occurred.

It is helpful to have these facts in writing. If age appropriate, the complainant may be asked to put the complaint in writing and to sign and date it. If the complainant cannot or chooses not to write a complaint, the investigator will record the allegations, read them to the complainant to confirm accuracy, and ask the complainant to sign the document. If the complainant cannot or chooses not to sign, the investigator may sign and date the document her/himself.

The investigation will be completed as soon as practicable and the building principal will file a written report and record the incident. The report will include a determination of whether the allegations have been substantiated as factual and whether they appear to be violations of this policy.

During the entire process of reporting, investigation, and corrective action (if applicable), confidentiality will be maintained to every extent possible.

CORRECTIVE ACTION:

Upon completion of an investigation and substantiation of the complaint, the school will take

appropriate corrective action. Such action may include, but is not limited to, an apology, direction to stop the offensive behavior, counseling, warning, detention, suspension, expulsion.

At the close of an investigation, School staff will promptly provide notice to the parent/guardian of a target and an aggressor about whether or not the complaint was substantiated and, if substantiated, what action is being taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation. Specific information about disciplinary action taken will not be released to the target's parents or guardians—unless it involves a “stay away” or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

If appropriate, within a reasonable time period following closure of the complaint, the administrative staff or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been any recurrence of the prohibited conduct.

The district will retain a report of the complaint, containing the name of the complainant, the date of the complaint, investigator, school, a brief statement of the nature of the complaint, the outcome of the investigation, and the action taken.

REPRISAL:

The school will discipline or take appropriate action against any student, teacher, administrator, or school employee who retaliates against any person who reports an alleged violation of this policy or any person who testifies, assists, or participates in an investigation, or who testifies, assists, or participates in a proceeding or hearing relating to such harassment. Retaliation includes, but is not limited to, any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment.

COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES:

A. Parent education and resources. The school or district will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula used by the district or school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTO, School Councils, and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council.

B. Notification requirements. Each year the school or district will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyber-bullying and online safety. The school or district will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school's or district'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 available in the

language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The school or district will post the Plan and related information on its website.

PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION:

The Manchester Essex Regional Schools absolutely prohibits bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation as defined above. Students who engage in bullying or retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action, however, disciplinary action taken must balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. The range of disciplinary action includes, but is not limited to, one or more of the following: verbal warnings, written warnings, reprimands, detentions, short-term or long-term suspensions, or expulsions from school as determined by the school administration and/or school committee, subject to applicable procedural requirements. Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent the school administration and/or school committee from taking disciplinary action against a student for conduct that does not meet the definition of bullying or cyber-bullying, as defined above, but nevertheless is inappropriate for the school environment.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS:

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the school or district, no person shall be discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town or in obtaining the advantages, privilege and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in this Plan prevents the school or district from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state, or federal law, or school or district policies.

In addition, nothing in this 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, other applicable laws, or local school or district policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.