

# Greater Commonwealth Virtual School



## Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

### *Our Mission and Vision*

*The Greater Commonwealth Virtual School, a public school of choice, serves students from across Massachusetts who need a learning community that is accessible and flexible. We give our students and their families choices in what, how, when, and where they learn.*

*As a pioneer of online personalized learning, we empower our educators to tailor learning experiences to each student's strengths, interests, and challenges. We redefine and change how students and teachers engage through innovative technology, while ensuring mastery of competencies embedded in a rigorous curriculum.*

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## **I. LEADERSHIP**

The GCVS leadership is committed to implementing the district's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan to promote and ensure a safe and positive teaching and learning environment.

All GCVS leaders have a primary role in teaching students to be civil to one another and promoting understanding of and respect for diversity and difference.

GCVS leadership is defined by our Executive Director and all members of our Senior Leadership and Administrative Leadership teams.

The GCVS Principal is responsible for setting priorities and for staying up-to-date with current research on ways to prevent and effectively respond to bullying.

This plan has been developed with the guidance of the GCVS Board of Trustees.

- A. Public involvement in developing the plan. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the plan is being developed in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, students, parents, guardians, and learning coaches.

Prior to the presentation of this plan to the Board of Trustees, a final draft of the plan will be made available on the GCVS website for Public Comment. The plan will be reviewed every two years.

- B. Assessing needs and resources. This plan is the blueprint for GCVS to prevent and respond to issues of bullying within the context of other healthy school climate initiatives.

At least once every four years beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, GCVS will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary-developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying and cyberbullying in our schools. Additionally, GCVS will annually report bullying incident data to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

GCVS will also consider conducting the following on a periodic basis:

- 1.) Student surveys on school climate and safety issues
- 2.) In person meet-ups to teach social skills for those students who may be vulnerable based on prior experiences of peer violence.
- 3.) Focusing on areas where students are most vulnerable in a virtual school setting: breakout rooms, Inscribe, shared online documents (Google docs, etc).
- 4.) Staff surveys on school climate and safety issues.

C. Planning and oversight. Consistent with applicable laws and regulations, the GCVS leadership with support of the Board of Trustees, will implement the following action plans:

- 1). Various members of the GCVS may receive reports of bullying and cyberbullying. These individuals may include but are not limited to: members of the Family Engagement Team, Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Administration, etc. All investigations of reports of bullying and cyberbullying will be conducted by the GCVS Vice Principals/Dean of Students under the direction of the Principal.
- 2). GCVS will collect and analyze building- and/or school-wide data on bullying and cyberbullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes. Such incidents may be filtered through by Gaggle alerts. All incidents of reported bullying will be logged in PowerSchool.
- 3). GCVS will implement a process for recording and tracking incident reports through PowerSchool adhering to the confidentiality laws, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors.
- 4). GCVS will plan for ongoing professional development that is required by Massachusetts state law.
- 5). GCVS will plan supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors such as working with the counseling staff, the Wellness Team, and the Family Engagement team.
- 6). GCVS will choose and implement the curricula that the school will use.
- 7). GCVS will continue to revise its current bullying policies, including the Empowered Digital Use Policy, located in the GCVS Family Handbook. The school Principal will be in charge of revising such policies in collaboration with the GCVS Technology Department.
- 8). GCVS will annually amend the Family and Staff handbooks and codes of conduct to, among other things, make clear that bullying and cyberbullying of students by school staff or other students will not be tolerated;
- 9). The GCVS Family Engagement Coordinator will lead family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials on an annual basis.
- 10). GCVS will review and update the plan as needed at least biannually.
- 11) GCVS will recognize incoming students who were victims of bullying in the previous school district and provide proactive additional support to assure safe and supportive transition.

#### D. Priority statements.

GCVS is committed to a safe and positive learning environment for all students, employees, volunteers and caregivers. All forms of bullying and cyberbullying are prohibited. Anyone engaging in bullying or cyberbullying shall be subject to appropriate discipline.

GCVS 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, or sensory, disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. GCVS will identify specific steps it will take 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.

GCVS will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our virtual school environment or in school-related activities.

GCVS will promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target's sense of safety.

GCVS will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

The GCVS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and GCVS 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, cyberbullying, and retaliation. The Principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the plan except when a reported bullying incident involves the principal or the vice principal as the alleged aggressor. In such cases, the Executive Director 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 Executive Director is the alleged aggressor, the Board of Trustees shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged victim.

## **II. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Under M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O the GCVS Bullying Intervention and Prevention plans must provide ongoing professional development for all staff, including but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, the school nurse, and paraprofessionals.

### A. Annual staff training on the Plan.

School-based annual training for all school staff by the building Principal or designee will include:

- Staff responsibilities under the law.
- An overview of the steps that the Vice Principal/Dean of Students will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation
- Modeling bystander expectations and reporting procedures.
- An overview of the bullying prevention curricula and assemblies to be offered at all grade levels at each school in the district. Staff members hired after the start of the school year will be required to participate in this 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.

B. Ongoing professional development. The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of 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. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the content of schoolwide and district wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- Effective developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- Developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- Current research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment;
- Current information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying;
- Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

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.

Additional areas identified by the school or district for professional development 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;
- Maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students; and
- 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. GCVS will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the policy by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties in the employee handbook and the code of conduct.

### **III. ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES**

A key aspect of promoting a positive school climate is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of targets, student aggressors, families, and others are addressed. Below is a summary of strategies aimed to provide support and services necessary to meet these needs. In order to enhance the school's or district's capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, these services will be available to reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and to provide approaches to address the needs of targets and aggressors.

The Principal will regularly update and provide to GCVS a list of [mental health resources available in the community](#) as well as community programs/partnerships that support student well-being.

A. Identifying resources. GCVS will annually review its capacity to provide counseling and other services for targets, aggressors, and their families. This will include a review of current staffing and programs that foster positive school culture, as well as identifying any gaps in

services and resources that need to be addressed. Vice Principals/Dean of Students will assess the needs of their individual schools in order to analyze existing resources.

B. Counseling and other services. GCVS will work collaboratively with school mental health staff and outside agencies to maintain a list of providers that will support schools in developing safety plans for students who have been targets of bullying or retaliation, providing social skills programs to prevent bullying, and offering education and/or intervention services for students exhibiting bullying behaviors. Schools may consider current tools including, but not limited to: behavioral intervention plans, restorative practices, social skills groups, and other related resources and approaches. The district will reference the American School Counseling Association for guidance on these matters.

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.

D. Referral to outside services. The school district will use a referral procedure for referring students and families to outside services. Referrals must comply with relevant laws and local policies.

#### **IV. ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES**

GCVS seeks to create a safe, respectful and caring school and classroom environment for all students regardless of their race, color, national origin, creed, religion, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, age, physical appearance, socioeconomic status, family situation or disability.

A. Specific bullying prevention approaches. Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:

- Empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students or school staff engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- Helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- Emphasizing cybersafety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- Enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and



- Engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference.
- The Vice Principals/Dean of Students will review student behavioral expectations during the first week of school.
- The Gaggle tool alerts GCVS staff to any harmful or bullying related language on school issued devices and accounts.
- A variety of evidence-based prevention programs to promote diversity awareness and respect for self and others will be explored and offered. GCVS will use the following programs: Second Step, Responsive Classroom, MARC (Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center), and PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports)
- Schools will create opportunities for students to engage in a variety of virtual and in-person activities that are meaningful to them and that help them to feel positively connected to the school and/or the local community.

B. 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, particularly in a virtual school setting;
- 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; and
- Supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength with the GCVS Student Engagement Coordinator.

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

GCVS will investigate all bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation incidents in a fair, timely, and thorough manner while being mindful of personal privacy rights and the stigma that a student

may experience from being labeled in some way or another. Verified incidents of bullying, in all of its forms will be dealt with appropriately. Dispositions will begin with education and, when deemed necessary, will move to progressively sterner measures. All disciplinary actions will balance the need for safety and accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior and/or lagging social-emotional skills.

**The GCVS Vice Principals/Dean of Students will lead all bullying investigations as defined below. All investigations will be conducted with guidance from the GCVS Principal.**

**A. 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 or district staff member is required to report immediately to the Vice Principal 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 GCVS staff members, may be made anonymously. GCVS will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, the [GCVS Bullying/Harassment Reporting Form](#) and [speakup@gcvs.org](mailto:speakup@gcvs.org).

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 enrollment packets for students and parents or guardians; 2) make it available on the school's website, the virtual counseling office, the virtual school nurse's office, and other locations determined by the principal or designee; and 3) post it on the classroom Schoology page. 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, but not limited to, educators, administrators, the school nurses, advisors to extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals, students, and parents or guardians, learning coaches, 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students, and the Executive Director or designee when the principal or the Vice Principal/Dean of Students is the alleged aggressor, 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.

1. Reporting by Staff

GCVS staff members will report immediately to the Vice Principal/Dean of Students, or to the Executive Director when the Principal or the Vice Principal/Dean of Students is the alleged aggressor, or to the school committee or designee when the Executive Director is the alleged aggressor when they witness or become aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report as provided does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with GCVS policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

## 2. Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Learning Coaches

GCVS expects students, family members, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the Vice Principal/Dean of Students, or Executive Director when the Principal or Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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. 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students, or the Executive Director when the Principal or Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 shared classroom settings; 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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. (Include locally established student safety planning policies and procedures here.)

## 2. Obligations to Notify Others

a. Notice to parents or guardians. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 within the GCVS setting with a former GCVS student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the Vice Principal/Dean of Students shall contact the local law enforcement agency if they have a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the student aggressor.

In making this determination, the Principal will, consistent with the plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult any other individuals the Principal or designee deems appropriate.

### **C. Investigation.**

The Vice Principal/Dean of Students will promptly investigate 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The Vice Principal/Dean of Students will remind the alleged student aggressor, target, and witnesses 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.

Interviews will be conducted by the Vice Principal/Dean of Students and in consultation with the others as appropriate. To the extent practicable, and given their obligation to investigate and address the matter, the Vice Principal/Dean of Students will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The Vice Principal/Dean of Students will maintain a written record of the investigation.

Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with school or district policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, the Vice Principal/Dean of Students will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

#### **D. Determinations.**

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

Depending upon the circumstances, the Vice Principal/Dean of Students may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or the school wellness team. The Vice Principal/Dean of Students may also contact the target's or student aggressor's family 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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.

The Vice Principal/Dean of Students shall inform the parent or guardian of the target about the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system, regardless of the outcome of the bullying determination.

#### E. Responses to Bullying.

##### 1. Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-building

Upon the Vice Principal/Dean of Students determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the school or district use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O (d) (v). Skill-building approaches that the principal or designee may consider include:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's/district's anti-bullying curriculum;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with GCVS 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; and
- making a referral to the Wellness Team for evaluation.

##### 2. Taking Disciplinary Action

If the Vice Principal/Principal decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the Vice Principal/Dean of Students, 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 school's or district's code of conduct.

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 student discipline.

If the Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the Vice Principal/Dean of Students 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 Vice Principal/Dean of Students will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

## **VI. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

A. Family education and resources. GCVS 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 School Council and the Family Engagement Team.

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 cyberbullying 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.

## **VII. PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION**

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

- (i) during any school related event, or through the use of technology owned by the school district

(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.

As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

### **VIII. Problem Resolution System:**

Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the district may do so with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/>, emails can be sent to [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu) or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information is also available at the Superintendent's office.

### **VIII. DEFINITIONS**

Aggressor is a student or a member of a school staff who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation towards a student.

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

- i. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- ii. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- iii. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- iv. infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- v. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.



Cyberbullying, 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, Zoom chat, shared virtual documents, and Internet postings such as Discord, SnapChat, etc.. 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, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

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

## **X. 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, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person<sup>17</sup> who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. 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.

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. c. 71, §§41 and 42, M.G.L.c 76 § 5, or 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.