

Central Massachusetts Collaborative Student Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Overview Statement

The Central Massachusetts Collaborative (CMC) aims to ensure a safe and happy learning environment for all members of the school community. We recognize that bullying does occur, and we work to promote a culture that rejects bullying and provides support to any members of the school community who are bullied. Bullying behavior is recognized as being anti-social and unacceptable. Procedures are outlined in this plan for reporting bullying and responding to incidents.

The CMC also aims to work with students, teachers, families, community members and organizations to raise awareness, encourage reporting, and prevent bullying and to promote the values of tolerance and respect as well as the valuing of difference and diversity. This will be accomplished through public comment periods of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, parent workshops and presentations.

The policy applies to all members of the school community which includes students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents/caregivers and visitors to the school.

All members of the school community have responsibility to support and promote these objectives. They also have the right to be involved in ongoing collaboration to develop strategies to support the anti-bullying plan.

Definitions

Bullying: The repeated use by one or more students or by a member of a school staff, including but not limited school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional 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 and / or damage to the target's property;
- ii. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself and / or of damage to his property;
- iii. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- iv. infringes on the rights of the target at school;
- v. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of the school.

Cyberbullying

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, Cyberbullying shall also include

- The creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, of the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

- 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 person, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v) inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Aggressor

A student or member of the school staff 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, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

Target

A student against whom bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Hostile Environment

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

Any form of intimidation (verbal or physical), reprisal or harassment taken against any person who reports or makes a complaint of harassment, intimidation or bullying, or who participates in an investigation of the same.

School

Includes a classroom, on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, including at remote learning platforms, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school Collaborative or school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the school Collaborative or school

and

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 Collaborative or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the target, infringes on their rights at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Nothing contained herein shall require schools to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

Statement prohibiting bullying for all handbooks and policies**Prohibition of Bullying, Cyberbullying and Retaliation**

Acts of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation are prohibited;

- On school ground, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, including remote learning platforms, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a school Collaborative or school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school Collaborative or school and
- 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 a school Collaborative or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the target,

infringes on their rights at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Nothing contained herein shall require schools to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

Procedures for reporting bullying

Employees are *required* to report incidents of bullying.

Employees, students, parents, and visitors, however, **are strongly encouraged** to report *suspected incidents* to their program director and/or appropriate Collaborative administrator either verbally or in writing.

The Central MA Collaborative expects students, parents, guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the Program Director. Any individual who wishes to file such a complaint may request and shall be provided with assistance from a school 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 Program Director.

Each school has available at its office a form to be utilized upon request of a complaining party to initiate an investigation of the incident. Additional forms can be found in the clinicians' office, the school nurse's office and other locations determined to be appropriate by the Program Director. The form will be made available in the primary language of the student's household. (Appendix A, B) A report may be made anonymously, using the anonymous reporting box located inside your school's main entry, the CMC administrative offices at 14 New Bond Street. Anonymous reports can also occur by calling 508 538- 9100

No disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Each school within the Collaborative will include a copy of the Bullying referral form in the Student Handbook which is distributed in the beginning of each school year and upon intake for new students. A copy of the form will also be posted on the school's website.

The Collaborative will take appropriate steps to protect from retaliation persons who take action consistent with the Bullying Policy, or who report, file a complaint of, or cooperate in an investigation of a violation of the Bullying Policy. Threats or acts of retaliation, whether person-to-person, by electronic means, or through third parties, are serious offenses that will subject the violator to significant disciplinary and or other corrective action.

Any person found to have made an intentional false accusation; report or complaint of bullying upon proper investigation will be subject to disciplinary action and/or other appropriate consequences. This may include counseling, education, mediation or other opportunities for problem solving between all parties.

Procedures for responding to and investigating reports of bullying or retaliation

The program director or the appropriate Collaborative administrator will take specific steps to investigate all complainants of bullying. The program director or Collaborative administrator will use reasonable efforts to initiate an investigation of all reports of bullying within 1 school day and it will be the goal to complete the investigation within 10 school days after its initiation unless circumstances require additional time for the investigation to be completed.

Upon receiving a report of bullying the program director will confer with the complainant to obtain an understanding and statement of the alleged facts. If, based on the facts alleged, the Program Director determines that the conduct complained of would not constitute bullying as defined by M.G.L. c.71, s370 and Collaborative policies, the Program Director shall document that determination on the Bullying Referral Form and shall take no further action with regard to the complaint. If the Program Director determines that such facts, if true, would constitute bullying, as defined above, the Program Director will immediately initiate the following steps:

1. Contact the Parent/Guardian of the target
2. Contact the Parent/Guardian of the aggressor(s)

The program director shall conduct a factual investigation by means of discussions with the individuals involved, witnesses, if any, review of any documents and other written or electronic materials, etc.

3. Determine if any actions need to be taken to maintain the safety of the target or other witnesses/reporters during the investigation. Such interventions may include, but are not limited to, creating a personal safety plan for the target; 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 Program Director may take additional steps deemed necessary by the school administration to protect the safety of the target and any witnesses while the investigation is ongoing.
4. Interview reporter
5. Interview target if different from reporter
6. Determine witnesses (if any) and interview
7. Interview the aggressor
8. Identify any adults present, interview
9. Investigate actions by aggressors’ friends or others on his/her behalf
10. Ask about online involvement
11. Question about behaviors which are threatening in the context of bullying but are not explicitly forbidden in the school’s discipline code
12. Determine the merit and the plausibility of the report
13. Prepare a written report and findings
14. Determine if the incident should be reported to Law Enforcement. At any point after receiving a report of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation, the Program Director will notify the local law enforcement agency if the Program director has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor or if any MOU with the local police or other law or regulation requires the notice. Notice to law enforcement agencies will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and other applicable state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to student records and privacy. In making this determination, the Program Director may consult with the school resource office, if any, and other individuals the Program Director or designee deems appropriate.
15. Notify another school or district as appropriate. 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 Program Director or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the Program Director 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.

Develop a Response Plan that includes:

- (1) Safety Plan for the target and
- (2) determine disciplinary actions taken against the aggressor for bullying or retaliation (keep in mind that the law states the “disciplinary actions shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior”).

Consider referral for the target and aggressor for in-school services such as counseling or the need to involve outside agencies.

Notify the target’s parents of the findings of the investigation, the plan and steps that will be taken to deter any further acts of bullying or retaliation.

Notify the parents of the aggressor(s) of the findings of the investigation, corrective actions, referrals, and/or disciplinary actions that will be imposed.

In notifying the parents of a target or aggressor of an investigation or the Program Director’s findings thereon, the Program director shall maintain the privacy and confidentiality of any individual or child who is not the child of the parents to whom the notice is provided. The Program Director shall ensure that any notice to the parents complies with applicable state regulations including, but not limited to 603 CMR 49.00, and shall not report specific information to the target’s parent(s) about the disciplinary action taken against an aggressor unless it involves a “stay away” order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

Documented on “Investigation Report” Appendix C

Responses to Bullying

1. Education Skill Building

In determining the appropriate response to an incident of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation, the Program director shall consider a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. M.G.L. c.71, s.37O(d)(v). Skill-building approaches that the Program Director or designee may consider include, but are not limited to:

- Offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the collaborative’s anti-bullying curricula;
- Providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students; in consultation with counselors and other appropriate school personnel;
- Implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help student s attainment of 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.

2. Range of Disciplinary Actions

Consequences for confirmed bullying will include referrals, interventions, and /or disciplinary actions as outlined by the Student Code of Conduct.

If a student has been found in violation of the bullying policy, the Collaborative may impose disciplinary measures and/or corrective action to end and prevent further occurrences of the action(s). The

Collaborative will take into account harm suffered by the target(s) as well as any damage to school or Collaborative property. The nature of the action taken must comply with Collaborative and school disciplinary policies. Any disciplinary or corrective action shall conform to the due process requirements of federal and state law. Action concerning students may include a written warning; classroom transfer, suspension (short- or long-term); exclusion from school-sponsored functions, after-school programs and/or extra-curricular activities; limited or denied access to parts or areas of the building; exclusion, expulsion, referral to law enforcement authorities; adult supervision on school premises; parent conferences; awareness training; empathy development awareness programs; counseling or any other action authorized by and consistent with the Student Code of conduct and/or school disciplinary code. The Collaborative complies with federal and state laws and regulations pertaining to the discipline of students with disabilities.

3. Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Program Director shall, in conjunction with relevant school personnel, consider what adjustments or interventions, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of any witnesses. Any such adjustments or interventions to be provided for the target shall be documented in writing in an Individual Safety Plan.

4. Monitoring of Interventions

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

Professional Development

1. Annual staff training on the Plan

Annual training for all school staff on the Plan will include staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the Program director or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades throughout the collaborative. Staff members hired after the start of the 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.

2. 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, s.37O, the content of school-wide and district-wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- 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;
- 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;
- Information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.
- promoting and modeling the use of respectful language;
- fostering an understanding 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; and
- maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.

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' Individual Education Programs (IEP's). this will include a particular focus on the needs of the students with autism or students whose disability affects social skills development.

District-wide Anti-Bullying Curriculum

The Central Massachusetts Collaborative shall implement age and grade appropriate anti-bullying curricula in each grade, inclusive of grades K-12. bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:

- Using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
- Empowering students to take action when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- Helping student understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- Emphasizing cyber safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- Enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and
- Engaging student in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference.

Initiatives will also teach students about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

Regardless of the specific curricula adopted, the Central Massachusetts Collaborative supports and encourages the use of general teaching techniques that support bullying prevention efforts. Those approaches include:

- setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
- 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.

Collaboration with Families

Parent Education and Resources:

The Collaborative 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 Collaborative or school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.

Each year the school will inform parent or guardian 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 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 available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The Collaborative will post the Plan and related information on its website.

Publication of Policies, Procedures and Information on Bullying

All student handbooks will refer to and include age appropriate summaries of the Central Massachusetts Collaborative's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and policy on bullying. In addition to the information provided in each student handbook, copies of the Collaborative Plan will be available on the Collaborative's website and in each school's main administrative office, Clinicians' Office, Nurses' Office and in other locations determined to be appropriate by the school administration.

The Collaborative 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 Collaborative Employee Handbook and the code of conduct.