

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Priority Statement

It is the goal of the Mystic Valley Regional Charter School to provide a learning environment free from bullying. Such an environment of civility and good manners is most conducive to learning and high academic achievement. The school will support this goal in a variety of aspects, including the establishment of clear procedures for reporting and response, age-appropriate student instruction, staff development and parent or guardian involvement. The school's code of values, character education program, behavior management procedures and the present plan constitute a comprehensive approach to the establishment and maintenance of such an environment.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L.c.71, 370, 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 victim that: (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property; (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. For the purposes of this section, bullying shall include cyber-bullying.

Definition of Cyber-Bullying

Cyber-bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71, 370, is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyber-bullying shall also include (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Scope

The bullying intervention and prevention policies apply to all sites and activities under the supervision of the Mystic Valley Regional Charter School. Bullying shall be prohibited: (i) 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, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a school district or school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school district or school and (ii) 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 district or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim 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.

All staff members who become aware of bullying are required to report it to the Director, Assistant Directors or their designee. These individuals will conduct a prompt and reasonable investigation. The requirement to report the incident does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline. When appropriate, referral will be made to a law enforcement agency. Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, or who is a witness to or has reliable information about bullying is prohibited.

The school expects students, parents or guardians who witness or become aware of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the Director, Assistant Directors or designee. Students, parents or guardians and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with the Director, Assistant Directors or designee. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Anonymous reports, either regarding bullying or retaliation, may be made by mail to: Superintendent's Office, Mystic Valley Regional Charter School, 45 Lebanon St. Malden, MA, 02148 or by e-mail to anonreport@mvrcs.org.

Annual Staff Training

Annual training for all school staff on the Plan is incorporated into an extensive training period prior to the start of the school year. This training includes staff duties under the Plan, an overview of steps that the Director, Assistant Directors, or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of how bullying prevention curricula and character education will be integrated for students throughout the school.

Professional Development

Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. Such development will build on the school's character education program and include age-appropriate strategies to prevent and intervene in bullying incidents, cyber-bullying incidence and nature, internet safety, research on students at risk for bullying, and information on power differentials and interactions among witnesses, aggressors and targets of bullying. Additional areas for professional development include the use of positive behavioral interventions, applying constructive disciplinary strategies and maintaining a safe and caring community.

Access to Resources and Services

Students who are targets or aggressors in a bullying situation and require counseling resources may be referred to the school's on-site contracted counseling professionals for appropriate services as well as external counseling/medical professionals. Targets, aggressors and appropriate family members of involved students will have access to counseling as needed. Counseling will be arranged in consultation with school authorities and parents. Evaluation and services will be coordinated through the Director and Assistant Directors in consultation with parents, school nurses and others, including IEP teams and Special Education professionals as necessary.

Academic and Non-Academic Activities

Daily character education classes incorporate age-appropriate strategies and lessons on the necessary skills and habits required for the maintenance of respectful communication and a caring community. Friendship and healthy relationships are promoted through examples, positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior and empowering students to take action when witnessing acts of bullying or retaliation.

A school-wide accountability plan and card system promotes the ongoing development of good habits along with appropriate consequences for disrespectful or negative behavior. This system is an integral part of every school day and uniformly implemented across all grades. Students are consistently presented with clear expectations and established school and classroom routines. Such routines and expectations maintain a safe environment and provide essential boundaries and encouragement of appropriately respectful behavior.

Responding and Reporting Procedures

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made orally or in writing. Oral reports will be recorded in writing. The school has established a Bullying Incident Reporting Form for the recording of details regarding specific incidents. The form is available on the school website and at the main office of all school campuses. The Director, Assistant Director, or designee will investigate promptly all reports of bullying while maintaining a written record of the investigation.

Upon the reporting of an incident, steps will be taken immediately to ensure the target's safety and assess the target's need for assurance. If after investigation, the allegations are substantiated, the investigator will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and determine what disciplinary action is necessary. A range of disciplinary actions may be taken, including but not limited to in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, meeting with parents and other authorities and expulsion. The target's safety needs will be addressed through meetings with parents, teachers, students, relevant authorities and counselors, as appropriate. These meetings will address such issues as creating a personal plan, seating, scheduling, and additional steps as needed to promote the target's safety. The Director or designee will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying a student who a) reports bullying, b) provides information during an investigation of bullying, c) witnesses or provides reliable information about an act of bullying. Parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor will be notified about the results and actions taken to address the current issue as well as to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation. Discipline will be consistent with the school's established code of conduct and behavioral expectations/procedures.

False accusations of bullying or retaliation will be addressed by the school's disciplinary procedures that include meetings with parents, detentions, suspensions, and other disciplinary action as needed. Protection of all students will be provided, regardless of their status under the law.

Notifications

The school's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be distributed in summary form to all parents each year and also published in plenary form along with pertinent materials on the school's website. Every other year the Plan will be subject to updating as needed. Parents and guardians will also be notified of opportunities to learn more about the school's Plan as it relates to parental responsibilities, with a particular focus on internet safety and the encouragement of good habits at home. Parent/Guardian information on the dynamics of bullying, as well as ways to reinforce the school's prevention plan at home will also be provided. The Plan will also be included in each year's Parent/Student Handbook as part of the school's annual preparation for signature of the School and Home Compact.

Definitions

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

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

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