

# The Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts

## Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

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**PREFACE:** This plan represents one component of the Amherst Regional Public Schools' comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and harassment. The district is committed to fostering a safe learning environment for all students. Even if an individual investigation does not meet the legal definition of bullying, the district will implement necessary safety measures, support systems, and intervention strategies to address behaviors that compromise the safety and well-being of students.

### I. INTRODUCTION

All schools must provide a welcoming, caring and safe environment, whereby each member of the school community is respected, valued, supported and challenged academically. The mission of our schools is to provide all students with a high-quality education that enables them to be contributing members of a multiethnic, multicultural, pluralistic society. We seek to create an environment that achieves equity for all students and ensures that each student is a successful learner, is fully respected, and learns to respect others. Our staff is committed to working together to create, monitor and support such a welcoming and safe environment for all students; and to support students in developing the skills necessary to maintain such an environment.

### II. PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

Consistent with M.G.L. c. 71, sect. 37O and 603 CMR sect. 49.00, the Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts have developed this anti-bullying policy. Any and all acts of bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation based upon the reporting of bullying to the school administration are prohibited in the Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts.

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

- (i) on school grounds and 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 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.

### III. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are copied directly from M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O.

**Aggressor** is a student or 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 their 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, and Internet postings. 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.

**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

### IV. LEADERSHIP

#### A. Public Involvement in Developing the Plan.

The Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts clearly recognize that leadership at all levels will play a critical role in the development and implementation of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (the Plan) in the context of other whole school and community efforts to promote positive school climates. Leaders have a primary role in teaching students to be civil to one another and in promoting understanding of and respect for diversity and difference. Leaders are responsible for setting priorities and for staying up-to-date with current research on ways to prevent and effectively respond to bullying.

As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, this plan has been developed in consultation with all district staff, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents and guardians by providing notice and a public comment period before being adopted by the School Committee. A 15-day review period will be given to all stakeholder groups to review the plan and submit comments.

## B. Assessing Needs and Resources

The Plan will serve as the blueprint for enhancing the districts' capacity to prevent and respond to issues of bullying within the context of positive behavior and intervention supports that the schools currently have in place. Bullying and other behavioral incidents are routinely analyzed and assessment of available resources including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services is ongoing.

School and district leadership teams will routinely monitor bullying reports and outcome data. District leadership is responsible for developing and monitoring the systems to collect and respond to reported incidents. Leadership teams are responsible for the ongoing review of selecting and implementing curriculum resources to support efforts to address and support student needs.

## C. Planning and Oversight

The Plan identifies the school and district leaders responsible for the following tasks:

- Receiving reports on bullying
- Collecting and analyzing building and/or school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes
- Creating a process for recording and tracking incident reports and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors
- Planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law
- Planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors
- Choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or district will use
- Developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Plan and designating key staff to be in charge of implementation of them
- Amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct to among other things, make clear that bullying of students by school staff or other students will not be tolerated
- Leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials
- Reviewing and updating the Plan annually, or more frequently

## D. Developing Priority Statements

The Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts' current vision reflects a commitment to balancing students' academic progress with expressive, personal, physical, civic, and social development. The districts are committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying and cyberbullying. This commitment is an integral part of the comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

We recognize that certain groups of 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, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnancy or parenting status or mental, physical or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. Understanding this, the districts will take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community and will provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

Unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, will not be tolerated in school buildings, on school grounds, or at school-related activities. All reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, will be investigated **within 5-10 school days** and immediate action will be taken to end that behavior and restore the target's sense of safety. The districts will support this commitment in all aspects of the school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

This Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and the districts are committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with these constituencies, the districts have established the 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 assistant principal as the alleged aggressor. In such cases, the Superintendent or designee shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the Plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged victim. If the Superintendent is the alleged aggressor, the School Committee, or its designee shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the Plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged victim.

This plan applies to students and members of a school staff, including, but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activity and paraprofessionals. Because the plan is applicable to members of the school staff, a student may file a bullying complaint against a staff member.

## **V. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

A. Annual staff training on the Plan. The Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts will provide annual training on this plan for all school staff that will include staff duties; responsibility to report bullying that they have witness or become aware of to the principal or designee; an overview of the steps that the principal 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 districts. 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. Staff members hired after the beginning of the year will be given building-based information and training regarding bullying.

All district volunteers, mentors, tutors and substitute teachers will be provided with information on the Bullying Policy, the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, the Anti-Discrimination and the Anti-Harassment Policy, and Grievance Procedures. Everyone will be asked to sign an acknowledgement form for the receipt and understanding of this information with a copy maintained by the Human Resources department.

All training will specify the policies and procedures used when investigating and dealing with issues related to bullying, as mandated by the Bullying Law (M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O ).

The Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties and bullying of students by school staff, in the district employee handbook and in the code of conduct.

B. Ongoing professional development. There will be on-going school-based and district-wide professional development to improve staff skills in the areas of prevention, identification and response to bullying. The goal of professional development is to create a common understanding of the tools necessary 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 district-wide professional development will include information on:

- (i) developmentally (or age) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- (ii) developmentally (or age) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- (iii) developmentally (or age) appropriate strategies to support bystanders and their capacity to intervene successfully in bullying events;
- (iv) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;

- (v) 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;
- (vi) information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- (vii) internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying;
- (viii) developmentally (or age) appropriate strategies to support students to be aware of and recognize cyberbullying and to be able to intervene successfully.

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 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;
- managing classroom behaviors constructively;
- using positive behavioral intervention strategies;
- applying constructive disciplinary practices;
- teaching students skills including positive communication, conflict resolution, and empathy for others;
- engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making;
- maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.
- teaching bystander intervention skills;
- understanding faculty interactions and recognizing how they may be perceived and/or experienced as bullying; 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. in contrast to bullying behaviors.

- C. Written notice to staff. The school or district will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties and bullying of students by school staff, in the school or district employee handbook and the code of conduct.

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

A key aspect of promoting positive school climates is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of targets, student aggressors, families, and others are addressed. Below, this Plan describes strategies for providing supports and services necessary to meet these needs that are intended to reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets and student aggressors, strategies for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for student aggressors, targets, and family members of those students.

- A. Identifying resources. The District works with principals, the student services department, the curriculum department and the student and family engagement office to survey and map all of the available resources. As appropriate, the District develops recommendations and action steps to fill resource and service gaps.
- B. Counseling and Other Services. In addition to school-based counseling services, the District collaborates and consults with staff and community-based service providers, who may assist the 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. The district works to develop and maintain partnerships with community-based organizations who can provide culturally and linguistically appropriate resources given our District's demographic population.

The District also considers a variety of tools including, but not limited to: behavioral intervention and support plans, social skills programs, and individually focused curricula.

- 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 their 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. Additionally, for students identified with a disability on the autism spectrum, the IEP Team must consider and specifically address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.
- D. Referral to Outside Services. The District has established a referral protocol for students and families to access 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.

## VII. ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

The Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying and teasing prevention that is incorporated into each grade. A whole-school approach, evidence-based classroom curricula, and focused strategies for bullying prevention are all part of the districts' approach to bully prevention. The districts are committed to creating school environments that prevent the development and occurrence of bullying behaviors and to focusing on behaviors rather than labeling individual students.

- A. Periodic Student Survey on School Climate and bullying prevention. In accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O(b), the district will conduct a student survey at least once every four years to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying. The survey will:
- Gather data on students' experiences with bullying, perceptions of school safety, and overall school climate.
  - Inform district policies and intervention strategies by identifying trends and areas needing improvement.
  - Support ongoing bullying prevention efforts through data-driven decision-making.
  - Be reviewed to guide improvements in school climate.
  - Be made available to stakeholders as part of the district's commitment to transparency and continuous improvement.

By incorporating this periodic assessment, the district reinforces its commitment to fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive school environment while aligning with ongoing initiatives in positive behavioral interventions, staff training, and community collaboration.

- B. Specific bullying prevention approaches. 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 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 cyber-safety, 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.

Each school will teach students about the student-related sections of the Bullying and Intervention Plan.

C. 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;
- creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including for those students who may be more vulnerable due to their race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnancy or parenting status or mental, physical or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics;
- protection for all students regardless of legal status;
- 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.

As a safe environment is created within each school, appropriate and positive responses are the approaches supporting the bullying prevention goals. When intervening at the individual level, both targets and aggressors will be approached in a uniform and immediate manner. Incident reports and documentation will be completed accordingly, as appropriate. Parents/guardians will be informed and any further bullying incidents will be closely monitored. Bullying prevention education will include 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.

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

To support efforts to respond promptly and effectively to bullying and retaliation, the Amherst-Pelham and the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts revised the policies and procedures for receiving and responding to reports of bullying or retaliation. The policies describe how staff will report incidents, the processes for communicating to students and families, how reports can be made (including anonymous reports), and procedures to be followed by the principal or designee, or the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, or the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor once a report is made.

### **A. Reporting Bullying or Retaliation.**

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents/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 any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses immediately to the principal or designee or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor. Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously. Each school in the district will make a variety of reporting resources available including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, and at least one building administrator's email address.

Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. The school or district will: 1) include a link to the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents/guardians; 2) make it available in each school's main office, and other locations determined by the principal or designee; and 3) post it on the school's website. The Incident Reporting Form will be made available in the most prevalent language(s) of origin of students and parents/guardians.

At the beginning of each school year, the school or district will provide the school community, including but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals, students, and parents/guardians with written notice of its policies for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the name and contact information of the principal or designee, and the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal 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**

A staff member will report immediately to the principal or designee or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor, or to the school committee or designee when the superintendent is the alleged aggressor when they witness or become aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation.

The requirement to report to the principal or designee does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school or district policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

### **2. Reporting by Students, Parents/Guardians, or Others**

The school or district 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 principal or designee or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action can 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 designee or to the superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor.

Please note that nothing in this policy shall be construed to limit personnel's ability to call 911 where a threat to safety of the student and/or other individuals is present. If there is concern about anyone's immediate physical safety, please call 911 first, then notify an administrator.

## **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 principal or designee 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 immediately upon receiving the report, which may include pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target; and altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target. The principal or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.



The principal or designee will consider, as appropriate, the implementation of 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. If appropriate, the principal or designee will develop safety and support plans for the target while the investigation is pending.

## 2. Obligations to Notify Others

### a. Notice to parents or guardians

Upon receipt of a bullying report, the principal or designee will immediately 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 principal or designee 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 principal or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the principal or designee of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and 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 principal or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the principal or designee shall contact the local law enforcement agency if they have a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor. In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, if any, and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate.

## C. Investigation

Upon receipt of a report or complaint that, if true, would constitute bullying or retaliation as defined in this Plan, the principal or designee will complete an investigation **within 5-10 school days** and in conducting the evaluation, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved.

During the investigation the principal or designee will, among other things, interview relevant students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or designee will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation against someone who reports bullying or provides information during a bullying investigation is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the principal or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, as appropriate. To the extent practicable and appropriate, and given their obligation to investigate and address the matter, the principal or designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The principal or designee will maintain a written record during 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 principal or designee will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

D. Determinations

The investigator, the building principal and the district mental health director will make a determination based upon a preponderance of the evidence. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal or designee will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. The principal or designee will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the principal or designee may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or school counselor, and the target's or student aggressor's parents or guardians, 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.

E. Notice of the Outcome of the Investigation

Upon making a determination that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor **within 2 school days** 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.

The notice to the target shall include information about the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's ("DESE") Problem Resolution System and the process for seeking assistance or filing a claim through the problem resolution system. The parents of the target should be provided the following contact information: Problem Resolution System, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906, Telephone: 781-338-3700; TTY: N.E.T. Relay: 1-800-439-2370.

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 principal or designee cannot report specific information to the target's parent or guardian about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

F. Responses to Bullying

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

Upon the principal or designee 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 curricula;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with guidance 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.

## **2. Taking Disciplinary Action**

If the principal or designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the principal or designee, including the 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 district's or school's code of conduct outlined in our Student and Family Handbooks.

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 principal or designee 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 principal or designee will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of others as well. One strategy that the principal or designee may use is to increase adult supervision at transitions and in locations where bullying is known to have occurred or is likely to occur.

**Within 30 school days** following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the principal or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the principal or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

## **4. Other Restorative Practices**

Where appropriate, offer the target and the aggressor opportunities to engage in voluntary restorative practices with a focus on repairing the harm done to people and relationships that are consistent with the District's policies and procedures.

### **G. Responding to a Report of Bullying by School Staff.**

An investigation into bullying allegations against a member of the staff will be conducted promptly by the employee's supervisor or designee and/or the Director of Human Resources. Such investigation will be conducted consistent with the collective bargaining agreement, if any, which is applicable to the staff member as well as any policies and/or protocols which are applied when conducting investigations. If it is determined bullying has occurred, then the staff member shall be subject to discipline consistent with the terms of the collective bargaining agreement, if applicable, as well as any statute which may be applicable.

## **IX. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

The Plan includes strategies to engage and collaborate with students' families in order to increase the capacity of our districts to prevent and respond to bullying. Resources for families and communication with them are essential aspects of effective collaboration.

### A. Parent Education and Resources

The school districts, in collaboration with SEPAC, MLPAC, and PGOs, 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.

Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Districts' schools proactively and reliably involve parents/guardians in all aspects of the educational learning process at the beginning of each new school year. The methods for consistent communication include the School Handbook, which includes the district oversight information and is updated in the summer before each new school year, posted on the website and distributed in paper copy as well as the Code of Conduct, disciplinary guidelines, and anti-bullying legislation which are presented to all families in detail.

### 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 annual written notice about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school's or districts' 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.

## **X. APPEAL PROCESS**

Any parent wishing to appeal the outcome of the bullying investigation may do so by submitting a written request to the superintendent **within 30 school days** of receiving notification of the outcome.

## **XI. 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 <http://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 are also available at the Superintendent's office.

## **XI. 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 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.

## **OTHER REMINDERS RELATED TO THE LOCAL PLANS:**

The Plan shall be developed in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents and guardians. Furthermore, the consultation shall include, but not be limited to, notice and a public comment period (although non-public schools shall only be required to give notice to and provide a comment period for families that have a child attending the school).

The Plan shall be updated at least biennially.

The school/district shall provide to students and parents or guardians, in age-appropriate terms and in the languages which are most prevalent among the students, parents or guardians, annual written notice of the relevant student-related sections of the Plan.

The school/district shall provide to all school staff annual written notice of the Plan. The faculty and staff at each school shall be trained annually on the Plan applicable to the school. Relevant sections of the Plan relating to the duties of faculty and staff shall be included in a school district or school employee handbook.

The Plan shall be posted on the website of each school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private day or residential school and collaborative school.

Each school principal or the person who holds a comparable position shall be responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan at his school.

Lastly, while not required, some communities may wish to include a timeline for implementation of training and professional development efforts, changes and/or additions to the curricula, and collaboration with families.