

The School Committee is committed to maintaining an environment in Westford's schools that is free from all forms of bullying. Bullying can have far-reaching impacts on a victim. It can create unwarranted anxiety and damage to self-esteem that can affect a child's ability to concentrate during class. Bullying can affect a child's willingness to engage in everyday school activities such as: walking in corridors, eating in cafeterias, playing in the school yard, participating in extra-curricular activities, riding on the bus, or even attending school at all. To ensure that every child can achieve his or her full potential, (s)he must feel emotionally safe engaging in any facet of classroom life and participating in any other school-related activity. Promoting such an environment is the intent of this policy.

Definitions

Bullying refers to actions or gestures that repeatedly inflict injury, or threaten injury, on a target, a target's property, or a target's emotional well-being. Such actions include, but are not limited to, physical contact, verbal assault, attacks on an individual's property, obscene gestures or facial expressions, and the intentional exclusion of an individual.

When bullying is conducted electronically, such as via text messages, emails, or internet posts, it is considered to be a form of bullying called "cyber-bullying". Some specific activities which may be considered examples of cyber-bullying include:

- the creation of a web page or blog which portrays private information or misinformation about an individual without permission,
- a series of web postings intended to result in immediate or eventual emotional discomfort for a victim, either when viewing the postings directly or when suffering negative social consequences after others view the postings
- the online impersonation of anyone in an attempt to elicit potentially embarrassing responses from the targeted victim, or to otherwise intentionally hurt that target
- the distribution to one or more persons by electronic means of intentionally unkind or untrue text about another individual, or graphics/photos likely to humiliate another individual
- the posting of such material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons.

Responsibilities

The administration shall create and implement a plan to prevent bullying where possible, and to address bullying when encountered. The plan shall be built in collaboration with representatives of all groups who may be affected by or asked to help enact the plan. Further input shall be sought via a public comment period. Once complete, the plan shall be posted and maintained current on the district website. The plan shall contain all the plan elements identified in MGL Ch71, section 37N.

Annually, the administration shall:

- Provide written notice to students and parents or guardians of the plan's areas pertaining to the role of students and parents in preventing, refraining from, or responding to bullying.
- Provide written notification to staff of the updated plan
- Train staff shall in a manner pursuant to the professional development specified in MGL Ch71, section 37N
- Present to the School Committee results of its efforts to ascertain the effectiveness of anti-bullying measures.
- Update the plan and curriculum to reflect changes consistent with evidence of anti-bullying effectiveness.

Each principal is responsible for implementing the plan at his/her school. Principals shall be responsible within their respective schools for promoting an understanding that bullying will not be tolerated within the school community.

All staff are responsible for watching for and reporting any instance of bullying of which (s)he becomes aware, and responding in a manner consistent with the plan and staff training.

Anti-bullying Measures

The curriculum in each grade shall incorporate age-appropriate, evidence-based instruction on the prevention of, recognition of, and responses to bullying.

Bullying will be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including suspension or expulsion for students, and termination for employees.

Instances of alleged bullying shall be investigated promptly and, if bullying is deemed plausible, shall trigger notification of the parents/guardians of victim(s) and perpetrator(s), notification of law enforcement when appropriate, and/or notification other school district(s) if any non-WPS student(s) were involved.

In the event that bullying has been determined and the victim or other directly involved student falls under the protection of Section 504 or Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the district will promptly convene an IEP or 504 meeting regardless of the basis of the bullying. The meeting will determine the impact of the bullying and whether the student's needs have changed such that the student is no longer receiving a Fair and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

There shall be no retaliation against any victim, witness, or other provider of information relevant to instances of potential or actual bullying. No individual will be subject to coercion, intimidation, retaliation or discrimination for filing, or intending to file, a report of bullying. The consequences for retaliation will be the same as for the bullying. However, false accusations made in bad faith will be subject to the same disciplinary action as the bullying itself.

Westford Public Schools References:

P4203 – Staff Harassment

P5303 – Harassment

P5203 – Religious Expression

P6301 – District Computing Environment

P6302 – District Acceptable Internet Use

MGL Ch71, Sect. 37O

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