

Roman Catholic Bishop of Worcester (a/k/a Diocese of Worcester)

Catholic Schools Office

BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

1. Introduction.

The Diocese of Worcester and the Catholic Schools Office (“CSO”) believe that each Catholic school in the Diocese of Worcester must be aware that its purpose is rooted in the mission of the Church. Each Catholic school, in fulfilling its role within the educational mission of the Church, must share and live out, through Catholic Christian tradition, the message of Jesus Christ and be committed to providing an integrated Catholic educational environment that permeates all aspects of its daily life and operations.

Each child should be challenged to reach his/her full potential, develop a love of learning and learn in an environment that fosters respect and understanding of one another. It is essential that a safe, positive and productive educational environment be established where students can achieve the highest academic standards and where no student shall be subjected to Bullying, Cyber-Bullying or Retaliation. Bullying, Cyber-Bullying or Retaliation or other like disruptive or violent behaviors constitute conduct that disrupts both a student’s ability to learn and a school’s ability to educate its students in a safe and embracing environment. Pastors, principals, faculty, staff and volunteers are expected to demand that all students behave appropriately and treat others with civility and respect. Bullying, Cyber-Bullying and Retaliation are not to be tolerated.

2. Definitions.

For purposes of this Policy, the following definitions shall apply:

“Bullying” is the repeated use by one or more students or by a member of a 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 Victim that:

- causes physical or emotional harm to the Victim or damage to the Victim’s property;
- places the Victim in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself, or of damage to his/her property;
- 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.

For the purpose of this Policy, whenever the term “Bullying” is used it shall include Cyber-Bullying.

“Cyber-Bullying” means 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:

- wire
- radio
- electromagnetics
- 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 the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or knowingly impersonates another person as author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in 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 the definition of Bullying.

“Hostile Environment” means 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.

"Perpetrator", a student or a member of a 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 or retaliation.

“Plan”, a Bullying prevention and intervention plan established by a school.

“Retaliation” means 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 Grounds” mean property on which a school building or facility is located or property that is owned, leased or used by a school for a school-sponsored activity, function, program, instruction or training.

“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, and paraprofessionals.

“Victim”, a student against whom Bullying or Retaliation has been perpetrated.

3. Prohibition Against Bullying and Retaliation.

Bullying is prohibited:

- On School Grounds owned, leased or used by a school;
- On property immediately adjacent to School Grounds;
- At any 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 any other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school; or,
- Through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school;

Bullying is also prohibited 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 if the act or acts in question:

- create a Hostile Environment at school for the Victim;
- infringe on the rights of the Victim at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

4. Prevention and Intervention Plan.

On or before December 31, 2010, the Principal (or the individual who holds a comparable position) (herein, the “Principal”) of each school in the Diocese that is subject to this Policy was responsible for overseeing the development of, and each school shall continue to adhere to and update, a prevention and intervention plan (a “Plan”), in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents and guardians, and any other stakeholders the Principal deems advisable, consistent with the requirements of this Policy, as well as Massachusetts and federal laws. In particular, reference is made to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 37O. The plan shall apply 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. The consultation shall include, but not be limited to, notice and a comment period for all families that have a child attending the school. *The Plan shall be reviewed and updated at least every two years, in consultation with other stakeholders as set forth above .*

The Plan *shall* include, but not be limited to:

- descriptions of and statements prohibiting Bullying, Cyber-Bullying and

- Retaliation;
- clear procedures for students, staff, parents, guardians and others to report Bullying or Retaliation;
 - a provision that reports of Bullying or Retaliation may be made anonymously; provided, however, that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report;
 - clear procedures for promptly responding to and investigating reports of Bullying or Retaliation;
 - the range of disciplinary actions that may be taken against a Perpetrator for Bullying or Retaliation; provided, however, that the disciplinary actions shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior;
 - clear procedures for restoring a sense of safety for a Victim and assessing that Victim's needs for protection;
 - strategies for protecting from Bullying or Retaliation a person who reports Bullying, provides information during an investigation of Bullying or witnesses or has reliable information about an act of Bullying;
 - procedures consistent with state and federal law for promptly notifying the parents or guardians of a Victim and a Perpetrator; provided, further, that the parents or guardians of a Victim shall also be notified of the action taken to prevent any further acts of Bullying or Retaliation; and provided, further, that the procedures shall provide for immediate notification by the Principal or designee to the local law enforcement agency when criminal charges may be pursued against the Perpetrator;
 - a provision that a student who knowingly makes a false accusation of Bullying or Retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action; and
 - a strategy for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for Perpetrators and Victims and for appropriate family members of said students.

The Plan shall afford all students the same protection regardless of their status under the law.

Each plan shall recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have 1 or more of these characteristics. The plan shall include the specific steps that the school shall take to support vulnerable students and to provide all students with the skills, knowledge and strategies needed to prevent or respond to bullying or harassment. A school may establish separate discrimination or harassment policies that include categories of students. Nothing in this Policy, nor in the Plan, shall alter the school's obligations to remediate any discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, Massachusetts or federal law.

Although not required by Massachusetts law applicable to non-public schools such as

ours, the Plan may include:

A. A provision for ongoing professional development to build the skills of all staff members, including, but not limited to, the Principal, educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals and volunteers, to prevent, identify and respond to Bullying. The content of such professional development may include, but need not be limited to:

- developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent Bullying incidents;
- developmentally 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 a Perpetrator, Victim 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 Cyber-Bullying; and
- internet safety issues as they relate to Cyber-Bullying.

B. Procedures for collecting and maintaining bullying incident data which may include but need not be limited to:

- (i) the number of reported allegations of bullying or retaliation;
- (ii) the number and nature of substantiated incidents of bullying or retaliation;
- (iii) the number of students disciplined for engaging in bullying or retaliation; and
- (iv) any other information the school may believe helpful in assessing, preventing or addressing bullying.

The Plan shall include provisions for informing parents and guardians about the Bullying prevention curriculum of the school and shall include, but not be limited to: (i) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school or school plan; (ii) the dynamics of Bullying; and (iii) online safety and Cyber-Bullying.

As noted above, the Plan shall be reviewed and updated at least every two years in consultation with other stakeholders as set forth above.

The Principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Bullying prevention and implementation plan within his or her school.

5. Retaliation.

Retaliation against a person who reports Bullying, provides information during an investigation of Bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about Bullying shall be prohibited.

6. Training.

As required by M.G.L. c. 71, sec. 37O(e)(2), annual training on the Plan shall be provided for Staff; and, at the discretion of the Principal, for volunteers who have significant contact with students.

7. Publication and Notice.

Pursuant to Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 71, Sec. 37O(e)(2): At the beginning of each school year, the Principal or his or her designee shall provide notice to the Staff of this Policy and the Plan. Relevant sections of the Plan relating to the duties of Staff shall be included in the school employee handbook.

Pursuant to Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 71, Sec. 37O(e)(1): Annual written notice of the relevant student-related sections of the Plan shall be included in the school handbook provided to students and their parents or guardians, in age-appropriate terms and in languages which are most prevalent among the students, parents or guardians.

Pursuant to Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 71, Sec. 37O(e)(3): **The Plan shall be posted on the school's website. Failure to do so is a violation of law. It is not sufficient to include a copy of the statute on the web site, nor to merely refer to the Plan or Policy thereon as being available elsewhere, e.g., in the principal's office.** *Ideally both the Plan and this Policy should be posted on the web site- both in the school's student/parent handbook and as separately listed items.*

8. Reporting.

A member of a 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, shall immediately report any instance of Bullying or Retaliation the staff member has witnessed or become aware of to the school Principal or to the school official designated in the Plan as responsible for receiving such reports, or to both the Principal and such designee.

9. Investigation.

Upon receipt of such a report, the Principal or his or her designee shall promptly conduct an investigation.

10. Minimum Required Actions.

If the Principal or his or her designee determines that Bullying or Retaliation has occurred, he/she shall:

- notify the local law enforcement agency if the Principal or his or her designee believes that criminal charges may be pursued against a Perpetrator;
- take appropriate disciplinary action;
- notify the parents or guardians of the Perpetrator; and
- notify the parents or guardians of the Victim and, to the extent consistent with Massachusetts and federal law, notify them of the action taken to prevent any further acts of Bullying or Retaliation.

If the reported incident of Bullying or Retaliation involves students from more than one school district, Catholic school or other non-public school, charter school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the Principal or his or her designee of the school first informed of the incident shall, consistent with and subject to Massachusetts and federal law, promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school district or school(s) of the incident so that each school district and school may take appropriate action.

If an incident of Bullying or Retaliation occurs on School Grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the Principal or his or her designee informed of such incident shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the Perpetrator.

11. Victim Assistance.

Each school shall provide counseling or referral to appropriate services, including guidance, academic intervention, and protection to students, both alleged Victims and Perpetrators, affected by Bullying or Retaliation, as necessary.

12. Available Consultation.

If any Staff member has questions concerning this Policy, he or she is encouraged to contact the Catholic Schools Office.