

# Arlington School

## Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

The Arlington School expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

Our commitment to providing a safe learning environment includes one that is free from bullying and cyber-bullying. This commitment is an integral part of our 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.

Many students who enroll at Arlington School have already been the targets of bullying harassment, or teasing. We will therefore take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for our vulnerable population within our school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

We will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target's sense of safety. We will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

The Arlington School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan ("Plan") is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying, and we are committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The Director or designee is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan.

### **DEFINITION OF BULLYING, CYBER-BULLYING, AND RETALIATION**

For the purpose of this Plan, aggressor will be used to identify the person(s) who has engaged in the bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliative behavior target will be used to represent the person(s) to whom the action is directed.

**Bullying** is defined as 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 target that:

- a. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- b. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property;
- c. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- d. infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- e. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

For the purposes of this policy, bullying will include cyber-bullying.

**Cyber-bullying** is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which will include, but will 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, text messages or facsimile communications.

Cyber-bullying will also include:

- a. The creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or
- b. 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 (a) to (e), inclusive, of the definition of bullying above.
- c. 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 (a) to (e), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

**Retaliation** and intimidation will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action.

This includes:

- Retaliation against or intimidation of a person who reports bullying;
- Retaliation against or intimidation of a person who provides information during an investigation of bullying;
- Retaliation against or intimidation of a person who has witnessed or has reliable information about bullying.

**Other behaviors** which are rude and hurtful but do not meet the criteria to be termed bullying, may not require reporting under the law, but will be addressed as a behavioral infraction.

## **DEFINITION OF SCHOOL STAFF**

Arlington School's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan extends protections to students who are bullied by any member of the school staff. This includes, but is not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, advisors in extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals and licensed and unlicensed school counselors.

## **LOCATIONS**

Bullying is prohibited:

- a. **On school grounds.** Including 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
- b. **Off school grounds.** Including 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 target, infringes on the rights of the target at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

## **REPORTING**

Arlington School director or designee will ensure safety and support anonymity, if possible, of all involved in reporting, witnessing or interviewing about incidents of bullying. If the school cannot be sure of the safety of all involved, we will then contact the Belmont Police Department per our procedure.

All students will be afforded equal protection, regardless of their legal status.

**Any staff member** (i.e. anyone employed by Arlington School) will report immediately to the Director or designee when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report to the Director or designee 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. This requirement includes, but is not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, clinician, support staff member or substitute teacher.

**School volunteers** will report immediately to the Director or designee any conduct that may be bullying, cyber-bullying, retaliation, or intimidation when s/he has witnessed it or becomes aware of it. They will be notified of and trained in the reporting requirement.

**Parents/guardians.** The Arlington School expects parents or guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the Director 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. Parents or guardians, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. This report to the Director or designee is best if done in direct conversation but may also be done by email, phone message, or other written communication.

**Students.** The Arlington School expects students, who believe they have been subjected to bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, or who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the Director or designee. This report may also be made to the student's teacher, counselor, or any adult staff member.

Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with the Director or designee, or with a staff member. This report is best if done in direct conversation with the staff member, but may also be done by other means or through the student's parent/guardian. The report may also be submitted anonymously.

**Anonymous reports** of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation, or reports by students or parent/guardians who wish to remain anonymous may be submitted to teachers and school administrators and will be investigated. No disciplinary action will be taken based solely on an anonymous report.

**A Reporting Form** will be available in the secretary's office for use by any party. This form may be submitted directly to the Director or designee or sent anonymously to the Director or designee of the school.

**False Reports** submitted knowingly alleging bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action, possibly including community service, meetings with parents and school personnel, suspension or other appropriate consequences.

## **INVESTIGATING AND RESPONDING TO REPORTS**

Upon receipt of a report of possible bullying, cyber-bullying, retaliation, or intimidation, the Director or designee will, before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, 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; 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. If all of these measures do not restore safety to the target, an emergency team meeting will be called to discuss placement. The Director or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

In conducting an investigation, the Director or designee, will consider how the bullying behavior might impact the general learning environment of the school or the impact it may have on bystanders or other students in the school. Consequences may be necessary even if the target indicates the aggressor(s) behavior is permissible.

The Director or designee will promptly conduct an investigation. During the investigation the Director or designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The Director or designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

The Director or designee is required to investigate all reports of potential acts of bullying or cyber-bullying. This obligation exists regardless of requests from reporters to not investigate or talk with certain students or individuals. We encourage reporting, but reporting on the condition that no action will be taken or limits placed on the investigation cannot be accepted.

Steps of the Investigation:

- a. Report is received;
- b. Interview the target and assess the level of threat present;
- c. Interview reporter, if other than target, and note and interview other witnesses (especially adults) or any online involvement;
- d. Interview the alleged aggressor(s);
- e. Determine the merit and plausibility of the report; and
- f. Determine the circumstances and establish disciplinary or other consequences, if necessary.

## **CONSEQUENCES AND RESPONSES TO BULLYING**

If the Director or designee determines that bullying, retaliation, or intimidation has occurred and consequences are merited, the Director or designee will:

- a. promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation.
  - *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 Director 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.*
- b. take appropriate disciplinary action; and
- c. notify the local law enforcement agency if she/he has a reasonable basis to believe that the incident may result in criminal charges against the alleged aggressor.
  - i. If the local law enforcement is notified, the Director or designee shall document the reasons for the decision.
  - ii. If the local law enforcement agency is not notified or if it determines that its involvement is not necessary, the Director or designee shall respond to the behavior as is appropriate within the Arlington School Policies and Procedure Manual.

- iii. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Arlington School, Belmont Police Department and Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office exists that outlines the nature of this reporting.
- d. If an incident of bullying, retaliation, or intimidation involves students from more than one school, the Director or designee will promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school or school district so that both may take appropriate action.

## **CONSEQUENCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

Bullying behavior can take many forms and can vary dramatically in its seriousness and its impact on the target and other students. Accordingly, there is no one prescribed response to verified acts of bullying and retaliation. Consequences and disciplinary action will be applied in accordance with the Arlington School Policies and Procedures Manual. The responses will range from redirection of future behavior to suspension and possible expulsion from school. These actions will escalate in severity for repeated offenses or with the severity of the implication of the negative conduct. Actions may be accompanied by the referral to additional counseling or other therapeutic support for all aggressors and their families. The specific action will be age appropriate, concrete, and immediate. The nature and extent of disciplinary action imposed or consequences applied, is a matter within the sound discretion of the Director or designee. The Director or designee will balance the need for accountability and safety with the need to teach appropriate behavior to maintain a positive and supportive educational environment.

Consequences and discipline for acts of retaliation will be imposed at the same, or more severe, level as the underlying bullying, cyber-bullying or inappropriate behavior.

Students who are not primary participants in the reported act of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation but join in, may be subject to disciplinary action or consequences as if they were primarily involved. "Joining-in" is a form of endorsing the behavior.

Consequences or disciplinary actions taken in an instance of bullying will be shared with the appropriate school staff members to ensure awareness and follow through.

When it is determined that a target is in fear or is being threatened, the Director or designee will develop a safety plan to immediately take steps to limit and control the behavior of aggressor(s) who are causing the threat. The safety plan will be developed in collaboration with the appropriate staff and shared with staff to ensure enforcement and follow-up. The procedure for restoring target safety could include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target; altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target; and supervised mediation. Referral to additional counseling and other therapeutic supports will be considered for all targets and their families. If all of these measures do not restore safety to the target, an emergency team meeting will be called to discuss placement.

The Director or designee will periodically follow-up with the target(s) and their parents, as well as his/her school clinician to ensure the student believes the situation has improved and that any threat or fear has been significantly reduced or eliminated.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND TRAINEES**

**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 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 school. Staff members hired after the start of the school year are required to receive the training during the school year in which they are hired.

**Ongoing professional development.** Arlington School will provide professional development on an ongoing basis to all staff. 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, § 37O, the content of school professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- a. developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- b. developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- c. regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- d. 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;
- e. the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying; and
- f. internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying.

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 whose disability affects social skills development.

Additional areas identified by the school for professional development include:

- a. promoting and modeling the use of respectful language;
- b. fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference;
- c. building relationships and communicating with families;
- d. constructively managing classroom behaviors;
- e. using positive behavioral intervention strategies;
- f. applying constructive disciplinary practices;
- g. teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others;
- h. engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making; and maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.

**Written notice to staff.** The school 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 Arlington School Policies and Procedures Manual.

## **PARENT AND STUDENT EDUCATION OF THIS PLAN**

### **a . Parent education and resources.**

The school will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula.

### **b . Notification requirements.**

Each year the school 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 cyber-bullying 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 school will post the Plan and related information on its website.

## **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

The school will provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention incorporated into the curriculum. The curriculum will be evidence-based. The plan will describe the curriculum to help parents and others understand the school's bullying prevention efforts. Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following:

- a. using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
- b. empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- c. helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- d. emphasizing cyber safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- e. enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and
- f. engaging students 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.

The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of our bullying intervention and prevention initiatives:

- a. setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
- b. creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and students who are homeless;
- c. using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- d. using positive behavioral supports;
- e. encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- f. modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- g. 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;
- h. using the Internet safely; and
- i. supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

## **APPLICATION TO STUDENTS ON INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

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 that the student may participate in, or is vulnerable to, bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her 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. This will include a particular focus on the needs of students whose disability affects social skills development.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING**

In order to monitor the success of the Plan and to help determine the effectiveness of interventions, curricula and actions the Arlington School will collect student and staff survey data, parent survey data and the number and nature of bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation instances. Reports will be reviewed annually by the school's leadership staff.