

# ***Reading Public Schools*** **Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan**

The Reading Public Schools created this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan required under M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, in consultation with administrators, teachers, parents, students, School Committee, and the community at large. The Plan’s format parallels the draft *Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework*, and is designed to be used by all schools as well as by the school district in a consistent manner.

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## I. LEADERSHIP

*Leaders have a primary role in teaching students to be civil to one another and promoting understanding of and respect for diversity and difference. Leadership includes all district and building administrators, teacher leaders, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and wellness teachers. Leadership is responsible for setting priorities and for staying up-to-date with current research on ways to prevent and effectively respond to bullying. It is also the responsibility of leaders to involve representatives from the greater school and local community in developing and implementing the Plan as well as evaluating it for effectiveness.*

- A. Public involvement in developing the Plan. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the Plan was developed in consultation with teachers, administrators, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, Reading Police Department, students, parents, and guardians. This consultation included a public comment period for feedback from parents as well as the community at large.
- B. Assessing needs and resources. The Plan shall serve as the school's and district's blueprint for enhancing capacity to prevent and respond to issues of bullying within the context of other healthy school climate initiatives. As part of the planning process, school leaders, with input from families and staff, have assessed the effectiveness of current programs; reviewed current policies and procedures; reviewed available data on bullying and behavioral incidents; and assessed available resources including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services. This "mapping" process has allowed individual schools and the district to identify resource gaps and the most significant areas of need. Based on these findings, the Reading Public Schools has reviewed and revised the district Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy which was approved by the Reading School Committee in September 2010. The district is continuing to work with the Reading Police Department in implementing this plan.

During the initial needs assessment, the following actions were taken.

1. A district-wide Anti-Bullying Plan Committee was assembled which assessed current school and district initiatives to identify gaps and needs at each of the levels including elementary, middle, and high school.
2. Each school completed *The Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework*.
3. Students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels completed a survey to identify specific data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying, in particular regarding vulnerable populations, "hot spots" within schools/ school grounds/buses. This information will continue to be used to identify patterns of behaviors and areas of concern, to inform decision-making for prevention strategies including, but not limited to, adult supervision, professional development, age-appropriate curricula, and in-school support services.

- C. Planning and oversight.

Oversight of the Reading Public Schools Bullying Prevention Plan will be provided by designated school and district administrators and leaders. The chart below identifies tasks as defined by the Bullying Prevention Plan that will be completed by designated leaders at the school and district level.

<b>Task</b>	<b>School Leader</b>	<b>District Leader</b>
1. Receive bullying reports	Principal Middle School and High School Assistant Principals	
2. Collect and analyze building and/or school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and measure improved outcomes	Principal Assistant Principal Designated Teachers Guidance Counselors	Assistant Superintendent Director of Pupil Services School Resource Officer
3. Implement the defined process for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors	Principal	Assistant Superintendent
4. Plan ongoing professional development as required by law	District Bullying Prevention Committee	Assistant Superintendent Director Of Pupil Services
5. Plan supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors	Principal Designated Teachers	Assistant Superintendent Special Education Team Chairs
6. Choose curricula and assessments	District Bullying Prevention committee	Assistant Superintendent
7. Implement selected curricula and assessments	Teachers	Assistant Superintendent
8. Develop new and revised policies and procedures as defined by the law that will include an Internet safety policy, and designate key personnel to oversee this	District Bullying Prevention Committee Technology Teachers	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent School Resource Officer
9. Amend student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct	Principal	Assistant Superintendent Director of Community Education
10. Lead parent and family engagement efforts and draft parent information materials	PTO School Council District Bullying Prevention Committee Principal	Assistant Superintendent
11. Review and update Plan biennially	District Bullying Prevention Committee Principal	Assistant Superintendent

#### D. Priority Statements

1. Reading Public Schools expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences. This includes staff/staff, staff/student, student/student relationships, parent/teacher, and administrator/teacher relationships. The district goal of “We will ensure a safe, healthy, and sustainable learning environment where all members are expected to be respectful and socially responsible” will frame all efforts of this Plan.

2. Reading Public Schools is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment 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.

3. Reading Public Schools understands that members of certain student groups, such as students with disabilities, students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and homeless students may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing. The schools and district will take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

4. Reading Public Schools 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/guardian involvement.

5. The Reading Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan ("Plan") is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying. Each school and the district are committed to working with students, staff, families, the Reading Police Department, 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 principal will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan at the school level with the Assistant Superintendent providing oversight at the district level.

## II. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O Reading Public Schools will provide ongoing professional development for all staff, including but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals. It also includes a description of the content and frequency of staff training and ongoing professional development that align with the school/district needs and required topics. All locally identified additional areas of training will be based on needs and areas of concern as identified by school and district staff.*

*The Reading Public Schools Bullying Prevention Plan will focus on the following six topics. :*

- A. 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 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 the school or district. All staff members hired after the start of the school year will participate in school-based training during the school year in which they are hired.
- B. Ongoing professional development. The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of curricula, programs, school initiatives, and bullying prevention and intervention strategies necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will increase the skills and knowledge base of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. As required by

M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the content of school-wide and district-wide professional development within the Reading Public Schools will be informed by research and will include information on the six topics as required by state law:

- (i) developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- (ii) developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- (iii) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) 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;
- (v) information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying; and
- (vi) 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 with autism or students whose disability affects social skills development.

The Reading Public Schools will also include a focus on the additional actions listed below as part of the school/district professional development:

- promoting and modeling the use of respectful and common language from preschool through grade 12;
- fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference;
- building relationships and communicating with families;
- constructively managing classroom behaviors;
- using positive behavioral intervention strategies;
- applying constructive disciplinary practices;
- teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others;
- engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making; and
- maintaining a safe and caring classroom and positive school environment for all students.

C. Written notice to staff. Reading Public Schools will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan through staff and district handbooks and on the district webpage.

D. Bullying Prevention Plan Professional Development and Staff Training

Each employee of the Reading Public Schools will participate annually in Bullying Prevention training and professional development as described below. This will be overseen by the Assistant Superintendent, Principals, and Assistant Principals. The following topics will be addressed.

	WHO	WHEN	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TOPICS
1.	All Administrators	August	Assistant Superintendent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review of district policy</li> <li>2. Review of district Bullying Prevention Plan</li> <li>3. Review of reporting procedures</li> <li>4. Review staff training requirements</li> <li>5. Completion of annual school initiatives/ programs form</li> <li>6. Review dates for staff training</li> </ol>
2.	All Teachers All Paraeducators All Custodians All Secretaries All Nurses All Cafeteria Staff	August Staff Meeting	Principal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review of district policy</li> <li>2. Review of reporting procedures</li> <li>3. Dissemination of training dates</li> </ol>
3.	New Staff	August	Assistant Superintendent Director of Pupil Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction to district policy</li> <li>2. Introduction to district Bullying Prevention Plan</li> <li>3. Overview of Bullying from MARC resources</li> </ol>
4.	Elementary Teachers	Ongoing	<p><i>Training to be provided by one or more of the following::</i></p> <p>District-based trainers Health and Wellness Teachers Library Media Specialists Principal School Psychologists</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open Circle Social Awareness Curriculum – K-5</li> <li>2. Life Skills Curriculum – 3-5</li> <li>3. Internet Safety - 3-5</li> <li>4. MARC Bullying Prevention Curriculum Resources - K-5</li> <li>5. Participation in School-wide Character Education Initiatives</li> </ol>

	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>	<b>PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>
5.	Middle School Teachers	Ongoing	<i>Training to be provided by one or more of the following::</i>  Health and Wellness Teachers Guidance Counselors School Psychologists Principal Library Media Specialists Technology Specialists	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bullying Prevention Curriculum Modules</li> <li>2. School-wide Programs</li> <li>3. Internet Safety/ Cyber-bullying Prevention</li> <li>4. Life Skills Curriculum</li> </ol>
6.	High School Teachers	Ongoing	<i>Training to be provided by one or more of the following:</i>  Health and Wellness Teachers Guidance Counselors School Psychologists Principal Library Media Specialists Technology Specialists	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School-wide Programs</li> <li>2. PE/Wellness Initiatives</li> <li>3. Internet Safety</li> <li>4. Cyber-bullying Prevention</li> <li>5. Freshman Advisory</li> <li>6. Decisions Classes</li> <li>7. Life Skills Curriculum</li> </ol>
7.	All Paraeducators All Custodians All Secretaries All Nurses All Cafeteria Staff All Bus Drivers	November	Assistant Superintendent Director of Pupil Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bullying Prevention and Intervention Strategies</li> </ol>
8.	Extended Day Staff	August/September	Assistant Superintendent Extended Day Director	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction to district policy</li> <li>2. Introduction to district Bullying Prevention Plan</li> <li>3. Overview of Bullying from MARC resources</li> <li>4. Prevention and Intervention Strategies</li> </ol>

	WHO	WHEN	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TOPICS
9.	Coaches Extracurricular Staff	At beginning of each sports season Or August/September	Assistant Superintendent Athletic Director Wellness Director	1. Review of District Policy and Plan and reporting procedures 2. Strategies for prevention and intervention
9.	Parents	September/October	Principals Assistant Superintendent	1. Review of District Policy and Plan 2. Review of Reporting Procedures 3. Review of Curriculum/ Programs for Bullying/Cyber-bullying Prevention 4. Presentations in conjunction with Middlesex Partnerships for Youth – DA’s Office
10.	Community Groups such as YMCA, Reading Recreation, Youth sports organizations	TBD through consultation with groups	Assistant Superintendent	1. Review of district Policy and Plan 2. Review of Reporting Procedures 3. Strategies for prevention and intervention

### III. ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Reading Public Schools is committed to promoting positive school climates to ensure that the underlying needs of targets, aggressors, families, and others are addressed. The Plan provides strategies for providing supports and services necessary to meet these needs. In order to enhance each school's or the district's capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, available services will reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets and aggressors. *The Plan includes a strategy for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for aggressors, targets, and family members of those students.*

#### A. Identifying resources.

Through the needs assessment process and work of the Bullying Prevention Committee, all current programs/curricula were reviewed and revised or supplemented as necessary. A review of services and support staff was also completed. In moving forward, this assessment process will continue through the oversight of the Assistant Superintendent working with the Principals and Pupil Services Director with ongoing monitoring for effectiveness. Each school has established a Safety Committee where further review can take place. There are two district committees, Safety and Diversity, which will provide a forum for ongoing conversations for resources. The results of *The Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework* will be reviewed for specific recommendations at the school and district level.

Elementary level:

Support for counseling and other services for targets, aggressors, and their families is led by the school psychologist from each school. Each psychologist will work closely with regular



education and special education teachers as well as administrators. Student needs and Plan effectiveness will be monitored through pre- and post-assessments.

**Middle School level:**

Counseling and other services for targets, aggressors, and their families will be led by the school counselors and school psychologists with support provided by other school based staff. Grade level team meetings with teachers and administrators will allow for ongoing monitoring of effectiveness of interventions and determination of alternative strategies as necessary. Students will participate in small group sessions that provide opportunities for teachers to focus on individual success and build a sense of community for all students.

**High School level:**

Support services for targets, aggressors and their families will be provided by the guidance counselors and school psychologists. Regular meetings between guidance, the school psychologists, administration, the school resource officer, the school nurse and the special education department chairperson will allow for ongoing monitoring of effectiveness of interventions and determination of alternative strategies as necessary. The high school would benefit from additional staff to provide counseling and services to targets, aggressors and their families.

**Outside resources**

A list of resources within the community of Reading and beyond as well as websites will be posted on the district homepage and available through school psychologists and guidance counselors.

- B. Counseling and other services. Through the school psychologists and Office of Pupil Services, appropriate cultural and linguistic resources within the school and district will be identified. In addition, staff and service providers will assist 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. Schools may consider current tools including, but not limited to, behavioral intervention plans, social skills groups, 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, 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. When appropriate, IEP teams will first consider general education initiatives, and make a determination of whether or not the child requires specially designed instruction beyond what is offered to all students. This specially designed instruction will be student specific and measured in both structured and less structured parts of the school day. Appropriate staff and resources will be identified and utilized accordingly.
- D. Referral to outside services. Schools and districts will establish a referral protocol for referring students and families to outside services. Clear protocols will help students and families access appropriate and timely services. Referrals will comply with relevant laws and policies. Current local referral protocols will be evaluated to assess their relevance to the Plan, and revised as needed. If resources need to be developed, the Plan should identify linkages with community based organizations, including Community Service Agencies (CSAs) for Medicaid eligible students.

#### IV. ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

*Reading Public Schools has developed a comprehensive approach for with age-appropriate bullying prevention and intervention with the schools and district. These are described below.*

A. Specific bullying prevention approaches within all schools and district. 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 engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- emphasizing cybersafety, 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 provide instruction about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan in developmentally appropriate manner. The Plan will be presented to all students within the first 2 weeks of school in September. Any new students who enter school after the initial training will participate in a meeting with the principal, teacher, or other designee along with a parent or guardian to review the plan within two weeks of entry.

##### Elementary level

- All K-5 students will participate in the Open Circle social awareness program to promote healthy social and emotional development. All teachers will teach defined lessons that support bullying intervention strategies, especially for bystanders. This program will be taught in the regular education classroom with reinforcement by specialists and parents.
- Teachers will use the MA Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) bullying prevention lessons in grades K-5.
- Each elementary school will promote a school-wide character education program to promote clear values that support a positive school culture and socially responsible student behavior.
- Students in grades 3-5 will participate in the Life Skills Program which will promote decision making skills and reinforce personal responsibility.
- Students in grades 3-5 will receive Internet safety lessons through collaboration with regular education teachers and library media specialists.
- The Reading Police Department will offer programming for students (RAD Kids).

##### Middle School

- All students will participate in bullying prevention through specific curriculum lessons.
- Each middle school will identify specific programs to promote strong core values. These may include programs such as Project Rachel, Anti-Defamation League "World of Difference" resources, and Challenge Day.
- Students will participate in the Life Skills Program which will promote decision making skills.

- Students in grades 6, 7, and 8 will participate in literature discussions and role-playing scenarios to identify bullying behaviors and possible intervention strategies.
- All students in grades 6, 7, and 8 will receive Internet safety lessons through collaboration with the library media specialist and the technology instructor. They will also participate in cyber-bullying prevention lessons.

#### *High School*

- All students in grades 9-12 will participate in cyber-bullying prevention lessons
- All 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders will participate in cyber-bullying awareness lesson through Wellness classes, Advisory, and Decisions classes.

#### *K-12 Staff and Students*

- All students and staff will sign the revised Acceptable Use Policy
- All schools will recognize “No Name Calling Day” each 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of January

B. General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts. Reading Public Schools is committed to the following approaches which are considered 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 students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students;
- using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- using positive behavioral supports;
- encouraging staff members or other 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.

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

The Reading Public Schools has implemented The Harassment, Discrimination, Bullying, and Hazing policy and procedures to receive and respond to reports of bullying or retaliation. This policy and procedures will ensure that members of the school community – students, parents, and staff – know what will happen when incidents of bullying occur. All reporting forms and procedures will be shared with all school staff members and parents and guardians at the beginning of school each year, included in new student packets throughout the year, and posted on each school’s and the district websites. An anonymous reporting procedure will also be available to families. Anyone who files a report will be informed of the next steps in the investigatory process.

The following procedures are based on the requirements of M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O and *Reading School Committee Harassment, Discrimination, Bullying, and Hazing Policy*.

A. Reporting bullying or retaliation. Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students,

parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member will be recorded in writing. A school or district staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously. The school or district will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form,<sup>1</sup> a dedicated mailing address, and an 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 copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents or guardians; 2) make it available in the school's main office, the counseling office, the school nurse's 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 or guardians.

At the beginning of each school year, the school or district will provide the school community, including administrators, staff, students, and parents or 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, 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 when he/she witnesses or becomes 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 or Guardians, and Others

The school or district expects students, 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 principal 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. 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.

### B. Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation.

#### 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; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for Reporting Form.

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 implement 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

2. Obligations to Notify Others

- a. Notice to parents or guardians. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the 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 Reading Police Department. 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 Reading Police Department if he or she has 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, consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate.

- C. Investigation. The principal or designee will investigate promptly all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in doing so, 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 students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal 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.

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 given his/her 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 of 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.

At any point after receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, the principal shall notify the Reading Police Department and School Resource Officer if the principal has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor. Notice shall be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. The principal shall document the reasons for his or her decision to notify law enforcement. Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to require reporting to a law enforcement agency in situations in which bullying and retaliation can be handled appropriately within the school district or school.

- D. Determinations. The principal or designee will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. 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 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.

Upon investigation and determination that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal shall promptly notify the parents of the target and the aggressor of the determination and the school district or school's procedures for responding to the bullying or retaliation. The principal shall inform the target's parent of actions that school officials will take to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. Nothing in this provision prohibits the principal from contacting a parent of a target or aggressor about a report of bullying or retaliation prior to a determination that bullying or retaliation has occurred. This communication should be done in the primary language of the home.

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.

E. 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). Reading Public Schools administrators and staff may consider the following skill-building approaches:

- 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; and making a referral for evaluation.

## 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 school's or district's code of conduct.

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 transition times and in locations where bullying is known to have occurred or is likely to occur.

Within a reasonable period of time 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.

## **VI. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

Reading Public Schools is committed to promoting a strong home-school partnership regarding bullying prevention. Each school will provide information to families that will support common language across the district as well as sharing prevention and identification strategies. Communication between home and school will be via school notices, school and district web sites, and parent conferences/presentations on a regular basis.

It will also focus on school and district-specific approaches to collaboration which will take into account age, climate, socio-economic factors, linguistic, and cultural make-up of students and the

parents.

- A. Parent education and resources. The school or district 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. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTO, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, or similar organizations.
- B. Notification requirements. Each year the school will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the bullying prevention curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyber-bullying and online safety. The school or district will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school's or district'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 or district will post the Plan and the district Bullying Prevention and Harassment Policy and related information on its website.

## **VII. PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION**

The following information will be included in the Bullying Prevention Plan, all student handbooks, staff handbooks, and in the student code of conduct in accordance with *M.G.L. c. 71, § 370(b)*.

Acts of bullying, which include cyber-bullying, are prohibited:

(1) Bullying shall be prohibited on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a school district or school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school district or school. Bullying 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, shall be prohibited if the bullying: (a) creates a hostile environment at school for the target; (b) infringes on the rights of the target at school; or (c) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

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

As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

## **VIII. DEFINITIONS**

The following definitions are taken from Reading Public Schools Policy Harassment, Discrimination, Bullying, and Hazing Policy as adopted by the School Committee on September 27, 2010 and are in alignment with M.G.L. c. 71, § 370,

- A. Definition-Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when school system actions, procedures, policy or personnel treat an individual adversely in an educational or employment context solely on the basis of the



individual's race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, ancestry, sexual orientation, age or disability. Discrimination on the basis of sex shall include, but not be limited to, sexual harassment.

B. Definition-Hostile Environment

A "Hostile Environment" 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 the student's education.

C. Definition-Sexual Harassment Prohibited

"Sexual Harassment" means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other inappropriate verbal, written, electronically transmitted, or physical conduct of a sexual nature, including but not limited to unwelcome comments, touching, written notes, pictures/cartoons or other inappropriate conduct such as leering, whistling, brushing up against the body, commenting on sexual activity or body parts or other activity referred to by the Model MCAD policy prohibiting such behavior.

Sexual harassment includes advances, requests or conduct by a student to a student, an adult to a student, an adult to an adult or student to adult. Sexual harassment can include advances, requests or conduct directed from male to female, female to male, male to male, or female to female.

Sexual Harassment has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or learning environment that takes place under any of the following circumstances:

1. When submission to such conduct is made, explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of employment, instruction, or participation in school activities or programs;
2. When submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used by the offender as the basis for making personal or academic decisions affecting the individual subjected to sexual advances;
3. When such conduct has the effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's work, attendance at school or participation in academic or extracurricular activities, or
4. When such conduct has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or learning environment through severe or pervasive behavior which substantially and materially interferes with work or school opportunities.

D. Definition-Harassment Prohibited

Harassment on the basis of race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, ancestry, sexual orientation, or disability includes any unwanted physical or verbal action toward another that has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive learning or working environment. Harassment of this form includes advances, requests by a student to a student, an adult to a student, an adult to an adult, student to adult, male to female, female to male, male to male and female to female.

E. Definition-Bullying Prohibited

Bullying may take a variety of forms. It is unacceptable in a school or work environment. As a result, no student or employee shall be subjected to harassment, intimidation, bullying, or cyber-bullying in a public educational institute:

1. "Bullying" means the repeated use by one or more students or adults of an unwelcome 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 the target's property; student or employee, (ii) places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his 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. For the purposes of this section, bullying shall include cyber-bullying.

The behavior must interfere with an employee's ability to perform his or her duties or with a student's academic performance or ability to learn, or interfere with a student's ability to participate in or benefit from services, activities, or privileges:

- a. that are being offered through the school district; or
  - b. During any education program or activity; or
  - c. While in school, on school equipment or property, in school vehicles, on school buses, at designated school bus stops, at school-sponsored activities, at school-sanctioned events; or
2. "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 a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photoelectronic or photo optical system, including but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communication. Cyber-bullying shall also include (i) knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creator or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or persons.
    - a. Cyber-bullying may occur through the use of data, telephone or computer software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, or computer network or any public education institute.
    - b. As used in this Section, "electronic communication" also means any communication through an electronic device including, but not limited to a telephone, cellular phone, computer or pager.
  3. "Aggressor" is a person who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.
  4. "Target" is a student against whom bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

F. Definition-Hazing Prohibited

The term "hazing" shall mean any conduct or method of initiation, even if consented to, into any student organization, whether on public or private property, which willfully or recklessly endangers the physical or mental health of any student or other person.

1. Such conduct shall include, but is not limited to, whipping, beating, branding, forced calisthenics, exposure to the weather, forced consumption of any food, liquor, beverage, drug or other substance or any other brutal treatment or forced physical activity which is likely to adversely affect the physical health or safety of any such student or person, or which subjects such student or other person to extreme mental stress, including extended deprivation of sleep or rest or extended isolation.
2. Whoever knows that another person is the target of hazing and is at the scene of such activity, shall, to the extent that such person can do so without danger or peril to himself or others, report such activity to an appropriate law enforcement official as soon as reasonably practicable. Whoever fails to report such behavior shall be subject to discipline.

#### **IX. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS**

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the Reading Public Schools, no person shall be discriminated against in admission to a public school in Reading or in obtaining the advantages, privilege and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in the 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 37H<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, other applicable laws, or local school or district policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.

**APPENDIX A  
READING PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
STAGE 1  
HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT FORM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date    /    /   

School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Who was responsible for the alleged harassment or discrimination?

Describe the alleged harassment or discrimination:

Date, time and place the alleged harassment or discrimination occurred:

Were there others involved with the alleged harassment or discrimination? If so, who were they?  
Describe their involvement:

List any witnesses and describe what they may have seen or heard

What was your reaction to the alleged harassment/discrimination?

Describe any subsequent incidents.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Complainant

**APPENDIX B  
READING PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION REPORTER FORM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date    /    /   

School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Name of individual harassed / discriminated against:

Who was responsible for the alleged harassment/discrimination?

Describe the alleged harassment/discrimination:

Date, time and place the alleged harassment/discrimination occurred:

Were there others involved with the alleged harassment/discrimination? If so, who were they?  
Describe their involvement:

List any other witnesses and describe what they may have seen or heard.

Describe any subsequent incidents.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Reporter

**APPENDIX C  
READING PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
STAGE 1 HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT - INITIAL INVESTIGATION  
ADMINISTRATIVE FOLLOW-UP FORM**

Date of Complaint \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Name of Complainant \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person(s) allegedly harassing or discriminating

Description of Complaint:

Date of Conference \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Description of Investigation:

Action Taken:

Date of follow-up conference with complainant: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

( ) Resolved. Describe action taken - \_\_\_\_\_

( ) Referred to Assistant Superintendent or Human Resources Administrator

( ) Not Resolved. Further action to be taken is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Administrator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Guidance Counselor  
(if form is completed by counselor)

DRAFT