

Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Overview

Rising Tide has developed a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (the Plan) as required under M.G.L. c. 71, § 370 in consultation with school personnel, state agencies, and Rising Tide families. The Plan is intended to continue the philosophy and practice of Rising Tide in the context of the state law. The Head of School, Assistant Head of School, and Deans of Students are responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan. This Plan applies to all students regardless of legal status. This section of the Student Handbook includes excerpts of the student-related sections of the plan.

The Rising Tide Charter Public School community is a close and caring group of students, Advisors, Teachers, staff, and parents. We value our relationships with one another and strive to develop an atmosphere of trust, respect for differences, support and understanding. Rising Tide is committed to providing a safe learning environment that is free from bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation.

At Rising Tide, we expect that all members of the school community, adults and students, will treat one another in a civil manner with respect for differences. All students deserve to feel respected and safe in our school community.

We understand that members of certain student groups, or people associated with certain student groups, may be more vulnerable to becoming victims of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including but not limited to: race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socio-economic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability.

Rising Tide takes specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for all populations in the school community, and provide 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, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the victim's sense of safety. We will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, staff development, extracurricular activities, and family involvement

Definitions

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:

1. causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property;
2. places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
3. creates a hostile environment at school for the victim;
4. infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
5. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyberbullying is 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, 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 (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) 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 (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 more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

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

Perpetrator is 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.

Victim is a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Retaliation Prohibited

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited on school grounds and property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by a school district or school.

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are also prohibited at a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the victim or witnesses, infringe on their rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited.

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

Prevention of Bullying

Expectations of the School Community

All members of the school community are expected to honor and uphold the Community Standards of Behavior, which are shared annually in the Student Handbook, the Staff Philosophy and Practice Handbook, and the school website. These standards are centered around four strong principles: Honesty, Trust, Respect, and Responsibility.

The structure at Rising Tide is designed to support students in upholding these Community Standards of Behavior, with relatively small class sizes, teams of Teachers who communicate about students, Advisors who support students at school and communicate directly with families, and a team of staff members who meet weekly about the overall wellness of individual students at the school. Team-building activities and Service Learning projects enable students to learn more about themselves and others in positive ways.

This Bullying and Intervention Plan, as well as summaries of the Plan, is shared with students, staff members and families annually on the school website.

Work with Students - Specific Approaches

Specific bullying prevention approaches with students are explored through the Comprehensive Health curriculum in addition to other curricular areas at Rising Tide. Teachers develop the curriculum from such resources as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Teaching Tolerance, and the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC). The bullying prevention curricula are informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:

- using literature to address bullying through identification, catharsis and insight;

- 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 cyberbullying, 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.

Students will also review the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan as a part of the Comprehensive Health curriculum.

Work with Student - General Approaches

General bullying prevention approaches with students are practiced at Rising Tide through an inquiry- and skills-based approach that is designed to support academic and personal growth in students.

The following approaches are integral to establishing and maintaining a safe and supportive school environment:

- setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
- creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including students listed in the *Overview* section of this plan;
- noticing and addressing gateway behaviors;
- using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- using positive behavioral supports;
- encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- using positive approaches to behavioral health, including collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution training, teamwork, and positive behavioral supports that aid in social and emotional development;
- using the Internet safely; and
- supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

Reporting Bullying, Cyberbullying 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 shall be recorded in writing. A Rising Tide staff member is required to report immediately to the appropriate Dean of Students 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 Rising Tide staff members, may be made anonymously. Rising Tide will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community, including a Bullying Reporting Form. Reports may be submitted to the appropriate Dean of Students, or any other Teacher or staff member. Reports may be made in writing or by calling or emailing. Students can report bullying, either anonymously or with their signature, in one of several drop boxes around the school.

Use of a Bullying Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report; however, Rising Tide will make the Bullying Reporting Form available in the school office, the counseling office, and the school nurse's office and post the Bullying Reporting Form on the school's website. The Bullying Reporting Form will be made available in the most prevalent language(s) of origin of students and parents or guardians.

Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others

Rising Tide 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 appropriate Dean of Students. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged perpetrator 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. To ensure their safety, 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 appropriate Dean of Students.

Responding to a Report of Bullying, Cyberbullying or Retaliation

Safety

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the appropriate Dean of Students will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged victim and/or to protect the alleged victim 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 victim and/or the perpetrator in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the victim; and altering the perpetrator’s schedule and access to the victim. The appropriate Dean of Students will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The appropriate Dean of Students 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.

Investigation

The appropriate Dean of Students 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. Procedures for investigating reports of bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation will be consistent with Rising Tide’s procedures for investigating reports of student concerns.

During the investigation the appropriate Dean of Students will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The appropriate Dean of Students will remind the alleged perpetrator, victim, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

The School Counselor, Advisors, and other Teachers may support the appropriate Dean of Students with the investigation as appropriate. As with all disciplinary matters at Rising Tide, student confidentiality will be maintained during the investigative process. The appropriate Dean of Students will maintain a written record of the investigation. If necessary, the appropriate Principal or designee will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

Determinations

The appropriate Dean of Students will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation is substantiated, a Discipline Committee will be held for the perpetrator. The procedures for a Discipline Committee meeting are included in the Student Handbook; the disciplinary process is designed for a student to admit a mistake, understand the reasons for the mistake, and to find ways to learn from and not repeat a mistake.

If, after investigation, it is determined that a student has knowingly made a false accusation of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation, a Discipline Committee will be held for the student who knowingly made a false accusation.

The Discipline Committee will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the victim is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities.

The appropriate Dean of Students will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the victim and the perpetrator about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying, cyberbullying, 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 appropriate Principal or designee cannot report specific information to the victim's parent/guardian about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the victim must be aware of in order to report violations.

The appropriate Dean of Students shall inform the parent/guardian of the victim about the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system, regardless of the outcome of the bullying determination.

Responses with Involved Students

Rising Tide will use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. M.G.L. c. 71, § 370(d)(v).

Taking Disciplinary Action

A Discipline Committee will determine disciplinary consequences and remedial responses for a student on the basis of facts reviewed during the meeting, 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. Disciplinary actions will remain consistent with the disciplinary practices at Rising Tide, practices that are outlined in detail in the Student Handbook.

The Discipline Committee will work 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.

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.

No disciplinary action will be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-building

Any students involved with bullying, including the perpetrator, victim or others, may benefit from the following skill-building approaches:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's bullying prevention curricula;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with the School Counselors and Teachers;
- 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 bullying prevention curricula and social skills building activities at home;
- adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills.

Promoting Safety for the Victim and Others

The appropriate Dean of Students will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the victim's sense of safety and that of others as well. Specific responses to promote safety are described in the previous section of the Plan, titled *Safety*.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the responses with involved students, the appropriate Dean of Students will contact the victim to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the appropriate Dean of Students will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

Notification to Parents, Other Schools, Law Enforcement

Notice to parents or guardians

Upon determining that bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has occurred, the appropriate Dean of Students will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the victim and the perpetrator 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.

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 Dean of Students 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.

Notice to Law Enforcement

At any point after receiving a report of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the appropriate Dean of Students has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator, the appropriate Dean of Students will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the Principal or designee shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator.

Access to Resources and Services

Support Services

School personnel, including the Adjustment Counselors, the Nurse Practitioner, and the School Nurse, are available to provide assistance to the victim, the perpetrator, and others. The Adjustment Counselors support students individually and run social skills groups. When deemed appropriate, students and their families may be referred to community-based agencies for outside counseling or other services. Rising Tide Charter Public School maintains a list of outside agencies and services available for students and families. Parents/guardians should contact an Adjustment Counselor at Rising Tide to obtain assistance and/or referral to an outside agency.

Students with Disabilities

At each IEP meeting, the Team will discuss whether the student has a disability that affects social skills development or if the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her disability. If the Team determines that this is the case, it 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.

Identifying Resources

The committee that reviews the Plan annually will work to identify any gaps in the resources or services available to the school community in providing a safe and supportive school environment; from this review, recommendations may be made to improve such resources or services.

Problem Resolution System

Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014 amended Section 370 of chapter 71 of the General Laws to include (g) (v): The Plan shall inform parents or guardians of the victim about the Department's problem resolution system and the process for seeking assistance or filing a claim through the problem resolution system. This information will be made available in both hard copy and electronic formats:

Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the district may do so with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa>, emails can be sent to compliance@doe.mass.edu or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information are also available at the school.