

Bullying Prevention and Intervention

The Foxborough Regional Charter School Board of Trustees aims to cultivate a learning environment where students are free from intimidation, harassment, bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. In this policy, "bullying" encompasses both traditional and cyber forms. Recognizing that bullying negatively impacts not only its direct targets but also bystanders and participants, FRCS unequivocally condemns such behavior, acknowledging its adverse effects on student learning and success.

Bullying is the repeated use by one or more students or school staff members, 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 target that:

- inflicts physical or emotional harm upon the target or causes damage to their property.
- instills in the target a reasonable fear of harm to themselves or their belongings.
- generates a hostile school environment for the target.
- violates the target's rights within the school setting.
- substantially disrupts the educational process or the smooth functioning of the school.
- Cyberbullying entails using technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, Chromebooks, and the Internet. It encompasses various forms of communication, including email, instant messaging, text messaging, fax, social media platforms, and Internet interactions.
- Cyberbullying also includes the creation of a webpage or blog where the creator adopts the identity of another person or knowingly pretends to be someone else as the author of posted content or messages, resulting in any of the conditions outlined in the definition of bullying.
- Cyberbullying also includes disseminating via electronic means to multiple individuals or publishing material on an electronic platform accessible by one or more persons, leading to any of the conditions specified in the definition of bullying.

Acts of bullying and cyberbullying are explicitly prohibited:

- on school premises and areas directly adjoining school grounds
- during school-sponsored or school-related events, activities, or programs, regardless of location
- at designated school bus stops
- on school buses or any other vehicle owned, leased, or utilized by the school district or school
- through the utilization of technology or electronic devices owned, leased, or utilized by the school district or school
- if actions occurring in a setting, event, or program unrelated to the school, facilitated by technology or electronic devices not owned, leased, or utilized by the school district or school, result in:
 - establishing a hostile environment at school for the target or bystanders
 - violating the rights of the target within the school environment
 - significantly and disruptively impacting the educational process or the orderly functioning of the school

When allegations of bullying or cyberbullying arise, parents/guardians and families are anticipated to provide complete cooperation and assistance. Additionally, any form of retaliation against individuals who report bullying, furnish information during bullying investigations, witness bullying incidents, or possess credible information about such occurrences is strictly prohibited.

PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

The Executive Director or their designee will lead the development of a prevention and intervention strategy in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders within the District. These stakeholders may include teachers, school personnel, support staff, volunteers, administrators, community members, local law enforcement, students, parents, and guardians. This Plan will align with the provisions of this policy, as well as state and federal regulations. Regular review and updates to the bullying prevention and intervention plan will occur at least once every two years.

This Plan will acknowledge that certain students may be at increased risk of being targets of bullying and harassment due to various identifiable characteristics. These characteristics may include race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, socio-economic status, housing situation, academic standing, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnancy or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental or physical disabilities, developmental disorders, sensory impairments, or association with individuals possessing these traits.

Building principals or their designees are responsible for executing and supervising the implementation of the bullying prevention and intervention plan within their respective schools.

FRCS BULLYING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Reporting bullying or retaliation

Reports of bullying or retaliation can be submitted orally or in writing by staff, students, parents, guardians, or any concerned parties. Any oral reports received or made by a staff member will be documented in writing. School or district staff members must report any instance of bullying or retaliation promptly they witness or become aware of to the principal or their designate. Reports from students, parents, guardians, or other non-staff individuals may be submitted anonymously. The school or District will facilitate multiple reporting methods and provide an online Incident Reporting Form accessible to the school community. The use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition for making a report.

FRCS will:

- ensure that each student handbook contains a copy of the Incident Reporting Form for students, parents, or guardians.
- provide access to the form in various locations within the school premises, such as the main office, counseling offices, and the school nurse's office, as determined by the principal or their designate.
- publish the form on FRCS websites. Additionally, ensure that the Incident Reporting Form is available in the primary language(s) spoken by students and parents or guardians within the community.

At the start of every school year, the FRCS will provide the school community, comprising administrators, staff, students, parents, or guardians, with written notification of its policies regarding reporting incidents of bullying and retaliation. This will include an outline of the reporting protocols and available resources, along with the contact details of the principal or their designate. These details will be included in student and staff handbooks, on the school or district website, and in information disseminated to parents or guardians regarding the Bullying Plan.

Reporting by Staff

A staff member will report immediately to the principal or designee when they witness or become aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report to the principal or designee does not limit the staff member's authority to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school or district policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline. Staff members are encouraged to apply their bullying intervention and prevention training as applicable to the situation.

Reporting by Students, Parents, Guardians and Others

The school or District expects students, parents, 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 based on an anonymous report. Students, parents, 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. A target, however, shall not be subject to discipline for failing to report bullying.

Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation

Student Safety

Before initiating a full investigation into allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal or their designate will evaluate the need to restore a sense of safety for the alleged target and protect them from further incidents. Measures to enhance safety may include but are not limited to arranging predetermined seating for the target and aggressor in classrooms, at lunch, or on buses; appointing a staff member to serve as a "safe person" for the target; and adjusting the aggressor's schedule and proximity to the target. Throughout and following the investigation, the principal or their designate will undertake additional safety-promoting actions as deemed necessary.

The principal or designee will implement appropriate strategies to safeguard students who have reported incidents of bullying or retaliation, those who have witnessed such occurrences, individuals providing information during investigations, or those possessing credible information about reported incidents of bullying or retaliation.

Obligations to Notify Others

1. Notice to parents or guardians

Upon confirming the bullying or retaliation, the principal or their designate will promptly inform the parents or guardians of both the target and the aggressor. They will also provide information about the procedures for addressing the report. In certain situations, the principal or their designate may contact parents or guardians before initiating any investigation. Notification will adhere to state regulations outlined in 603 CMR 49.00.

2. Notice to Another School or District

If the reported incident involves students from one or more educational institutions, including other school districts, charter schools, non-public schools, approved private special education day or residential schools, or collaborative schools, the principal or their designate who receives the initial report will promptly inform the principal or their designate of the other involved school(s) via telephone.

This enables each school to take necessary action. All communications will strictly adhere to state and federal privacy laws and regulations, as well as 603 CMR 49.00 guidelines.

3. Notice to Law Enforcement

If at any point following receipt of a report regarding bullying or retaliation, including post-investigation, the principal or their designate possesses reasonable grounds to suspect potential criminal behavior associated with the incident, they will promptly notify both the local law enforcement agency and the Executive Director or their designee. Such notification will comply with the stipulations outlined in 603 CMR 49.00. Additionally, in cases where an incident occurs on school premises involving a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled, the principal or their designate will contact the appropriate police department if there is reasonable suspicion of criminal conduct associated with the incident.

Investigation

The principal or their designate will conduct swift investigations into all reports of bullying or retaliation, considering all pertinent information available, including the specifics of the allegations and the ages of the students implicated. They will utilize the FRCS Incident and Investigation Report Form for this purpose. During the investigation, the principal or their designate will interview students, staff, witnesses, parents, guardians, and other relevant individuals as needed. They will also remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Additionally, the principal or their designate (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will ensure the preservation of evidence, such as text messages or social media posts, that is pertinent to the allegations. The principal or their designate may conduct interviews with other designated staff members and, when appropriate, consult with the school counselor. While maintaining their duty to investigate and address the matter thoroughly, the principal or their designate will strive to maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. A written record of the investigation will be maintained.

Efforts will be made to complete the investigation within *fourteen school days* from the date of the report. However, additional time may be required for a comprehensive investigation in some cases. The principal or their designate will keep the parents/guardians informed about the status of the investigation.

Determinations

Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, school officials are generally prohibited from informing the complainant of specific disciplinary action taken against a student—unless it involves a "stay away" or other directives that the target should be aware of so as to report violations. After reviewing all facts and circumstances, the principal or their designate will reach a determination. If bullying or retaliation is substantiated following the investigation, the principal or their designate will take measures to prevent recurrence and ensure that the target is not hindered in participating in school activities or benefiting from school resources. Specifically, they will identify any necessary remedial actions, if applicable, and determine appropriate responsive and/or disciplinary actions.

Depending on the situation, the principal or their designate may consult with the students, teachers, school counselors, and the parents or guardians of the target or aggressor. This consultation aims to identify any underlying social or emotional issues contributing to the bullying behavior and assess the need for further social skills development.

Prompt notification will be provided to the parents or guardians of both the target and the aggressor regarding the investigation results and any actions taken to prevent future incidents. All notifications to parents must adhere to relevant state and federal privacy laws.

Due to legal obligations concerning student record confidentiality, school officials generally cannot disclose specific disciplinary actions taken against a student to the complainant unless they involve directives such as "stay away" orders that the target should be aware of to report any violations.

Responses to Bullying

Once the principal or their designate confirms the occurrence of bullying or retaliation, the building administration will employ a diverse array of responses. These responses will seek to strike a balance between ensuring accountability and educating students about appropriate behavior.

Student Learning Opportunities

Skill-building approaches that the principal or designee may consider include:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's anti-bullying resources
- organizing educational activities tailored to individual students or groups in collaboration with guidance counselors and other relevant school staff.
- introducing various academic and non-academic positive behavioral supports will guide students in understanding constructive methods to attain their objectives.
- convening meetings with parents and guardians to secure their support and reinforce anti-bullying curricula and social skills development at home.
- incorporating behavioral plans that emphasize the cultivation of particular social skills.
- referring students for special education evaluation when deemed necessary.

Disciplinary Action

If the principal or their designate determines that disciplinary action is warranted, it will be based on the facts uncovered during their investigation. Factors considered include:

- the nature of the behavior.
- the age of the student(s) involved.
- the necessity to balance accountability with the instruction of appropriate conduct.

Discipline will align with the school's code of conduct and adhere to state and federal laws.

Should a school staff member be identified as an aggressor in a bullying incident, disciplinary measures will be consistent with Massachusetts General Law and FRCS policies.

Disciplinary procedures for students with disabilities are regulated by the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and will be administered per state laws concerning student discipline.

If the principal or their designate determines that a student knowingly made a false accusation of bullying or retaliation, that student may face disciplinary consequences.

Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

The principal or their designate will assess whether any adjustments are necessary in the school environment to enhance the sense of safety for the target and others. In cases where bullying has been confirmed to occur on school premises, the principal or their designate will take steps to increase adult supervision during transition periods and in areas where bullying has been identified or is likely to occur.

Following the determination of the incident and the implementation of any remedial or disciplinary actions, the principal or their designate will contact the target within a reasonable timeframe. This communication aims to ascertain if the prohibited behavior has recurred and whether additional supportive measures are required. If necessary, the principal or their designate will collaborate with relevant school staff to promptly implement these measures.

Record Keeping

Each school must document any reported incident of bullying per this policy, and the principal or their designate will retain a record. Upon the conclusion of an investigation, a completed Incident and Investigation Report Form will be submitted to the main office. Additionally, all incidents will be logged in the Student Management System to facilitate the provision of necessary reports to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

ONGOING PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The FRCS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is the District's framework for enhancing its ability to prevent and address bullying issues, integrated within broader initiatives promoting a healthy school climate. During the planning process, school leaders, in collaboration with families and staff, will periodically:

- assess the effectiveness of current programs.
- review existing policies and procedures.
- analyze available data on bullying and behavioral incidents.
- evaluate available resources, including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services.
- review proactive and preventive measures and strategies.
- conduct regular needs assessments, including:
 - surveys of students, staff, parents, and guardians to gauge school climate and safety.
 - collection and analysis of building-specific data on bullying prevalence and characteristics, identifying vulnerable populations and "hot spots" within school premises and transportation.
 - This data will inform the identification of behavioral trends and areas of concern, guiding decision-making for prevention strategies such as enhanced supervision, professional development, age-appropriate curricula, and in-school support services.

The assessment process will assist in pinpointing resource needs and areas of highest priority for individual schools and the District as a whole. In response to these findings, the following steps may be taken:

- reviewing or crafting policies and procedures to better address identified needs.
- forging partnerships with community organizations, including law enforcement agencies.
- establishing clear priorities to address the most pressing concerns and effectively allocate resources.

The Executive Director, along with the District and building leadership teams, will oversee the implementation of the Bullying Prevention Plan. Specific duties have been designated to school and district leaders to guarantee the Plan's effective execution and ongoing enhancement. The distribution of responsibilities is outlined as follows:

Building Principals will be responsible for:

- overseeing the receipt of bullying reports.
- implementing the curricula.

- providing annual professional development to the faculty and staff.
- collecting, submitting, and analyzing school data on bullying.
- employing support in response to the needs of targets and aggressors.
- updating handbooks and codes of conduct in conjunction with stakeholders, students, and staff.
- conducting an annual review of the Bullying Plan.

District Leadership will be responsible for:

- developing strategies for continuous professional development as needed to execute bullying prevention and intervention effectively.
- curriculum adoption.
- creating a process for recording and tracking incident reports and accessing information related to targets and aggressors.
- developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Bullying Plan, including an Internet safety policy, and designating key staff to be in charge of implementing them.
- reviewing and revising the Bullying Plan at least every two years or as required.

District Technology and Student Information Personnel

- Collaborating with principals, designing and implementing the essential features within the data management system, enabling schools to efficiently document and monitor incident reports, swiftly access details about targets and aggressors, and compile and assess school data regarding bullying incidents.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Principals or their designee will conduct annual training sessions on the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan for all school staff. This training will cover staff obligations under the Bullying Plan, an outline of the procedures followed by the principal or designate upon receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention resources and education. Newly hired staff members during the school year will receive school-specific training unless they can demonstrate participation in a comparable program within the past two years. Additionally, the District will ensure that all staff members receive an annual written notification of the Bullying Plan by including information in each school's faculty handbooks.

Furthermore, ongoing professional development will be provided to enhance staff members' skills in preventing, identifying, and responding to bullying incidents. The content of both the individual school-level and district-wide professional development sessions will be informed by research and will encompass:

- appropriate strategies tailored to different age groups for preventing bullying.
- effective intervention strategies to promptly address bullying incidents.
- understanding the complex dynamics and power differentials between aggressors, targets, and witnesses.
- research findings on bullying, including insights into specific student groups particularly vulnerable to bullying in the school environment.
- insights into the prevalence and nature of cyberbullying.
- education on Internet safety concerns related to cyberbullying.

Professional development will include strategies for preventing and addressing bullying or retaliation aimed at students with disabilities, emphasizing integrating these considerations into the creation of Individualized

Education Programs (I.E.P.s). Special focus will be given to addressing the needs of students with autism or those whose disabilities affect their social skills development.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Identifying Resources

Any student identified as being at risk for bullying or engaging in bullying behavior will be directed to their respective counselor. The counselor will evaluate the situation and, if deemed suitable, offer the student continuous emotional support and coping mechanisms. Collaborating with the building administration, the counselor may recommend the student and family to external agencies for additional support services. Should administrative intervention be required, the counselor will facilitate communication with a principal or assistant principal to address associated administrative concerns.

Counseling and Other Services

Apart from individual counseling, each school provides various services such as social groups and educational sessions conducted by administration or school resource officers. Additionally, curricular offerings will further support prevention and intervention through education at each developmental stage.

Students with disabilities

As required by M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, when the I.E.P. Team determines the student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing because of their disability, the Team will consider what should be included in the I.E.P. to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment or teasing.

Referral to Outside Services

The FRCS will annually update and review a district-wide Counseling Referral list comprising local and state agencies and private therapists. The District facilitates referrals to external service providers when deemed necessary.

DEFINITIONS

Aggressor is a student or a member of 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, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

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

Hostile environment as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, 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 a student's education.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, 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 target that:

- causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property
- places the target in reasonable fear of harm to themselves or of damage to their property
- creates a hostile environment at school for the target
- infringes on the rights of the target at school
- materially and substantially disrupts a school's education process or orderly operation.
- Cyberbullying is bullying through technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 370 for the legal definition of cyberbullying.

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

Staff includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan also protects all students regardless of their legal status. Nothing in the Plan 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.

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: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/>, emails can be sent to compliance@doe.mass.edu or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information is also available at the Superintendent's office.

In addition, nothing in the Bullying 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, §37H1/2, or §37H ¾, 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.

LEGAL REFS.: 603 CMR 49.00

M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010

M.G.L. c. 71, § 37 0

M.G.L. c. 71, §37H, §37 H1/2, of §37H ¾,

Massachusetts Equal Educational Opportunities Regulations, 603 CMR 26.00