



BULLYING AND PREVENTION POLICY

(Appendix F of Student & Family Handbook – Updated May 6, 2016)

I. LEADERSHIP & PROCESS

Priority Statement

At Brooke Charter Schools, students are held to the highest behavioral standards and we work to foster a positive and safe learning environment.

The school 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.

We understand 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 school 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.

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

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan ("Plan") is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying, and the school is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. We have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan.

In June 2013, the Massachusetts anti-bullying law (MGL chapter 71, section 37O) was amended in order to extend protections to students who are bullied by a member of the school staff, who are defined to include but are not limited to an "educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional." Based on these amendments, all districts and schools, include Brooke Charter Schools, have updated their Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans to reflect these changes.

Needs Assessment

In an analysis undertaken at the original Brooke School, the Dean of Students found five instances of bullying and cyber-bullying took place over the previous two years, but found that there were no identifiable patterns by grade level or gender or sexual identity on the part of target or aggressor among those instances. The Dean found further that each of those instances resulted in strong consequences for the aggressor (out-of-school suspension in all cases). In only one instance was there a repeat offense of bullying on the part of the aggressor.

Each year, the Dean of Students will file and monitor incidents of bullying (using the bullying incident report form in each case) in order to track outcomes under the plan.

At least once every four years beginning with 2015/16 school year, the school will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary-developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our schools. Additionally, the school or district will annually report bullying incident data to the Department. Similar tools to the student survey can be used with faculty, staff, and parents/guardians to assist in determining school climate needs.

Plan Development and Input

The Principal is responsible for developing the Bullying Prevention Plan and ensuring that the Plan is updated as necessary. The draft of the Plan will be posted on the school's website, and parents will be notified via the school newsletter of the opportunity to provide input on the plan.

The Principal will be responsible for planning professional development for staff around bullying prevention, implementing the character education curriculum (including its bullying prevention components), amending student and staff handbooks, and ensuring that families are informed of the Plan and have the opportunity to provide input on the Plan.

Brooke Charter Schools recognizes that certain students may be more vulnerable to become targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including race, sex, color, creed, religion, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, socio-economic status, housing status or homelessness, special need, physical appearance, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement,, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The school will identify specific steps it will take 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.

Bullying is unacceptable and hurts individuals and the community. Acts of bullying may include: teasing, name calling, taunting, making threats, spreading rumors, excluding someone from a group on purpose, physical or verbal altercations, and other consistent aggressive behaviors. If you feel like you are being bullied, this is what you should do: every adult at Brooke Charter Schools is here to help you, so make sure to bring the problem to your teacher, the Dean of Students, the Principal, or any other staff member. Know that this school is a safe place and the adult you speak to will help you solve the problem and protect you and your privacy. Bullying is serious and there are serious consequences.

II. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Annual Staff Training – Procedures

Each August, during pre-service orientation, staff will be trained in all of the following:

- An overview of the steps the Dean of Students will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and
- Overview of our bullying prevention curriculum.

The Bullying Prevention Plan will also be printed in its entirety in the Staff Handbook.

All staff hired after the beginning of the school year will receive this training as part of their induction, unless they can show they have had the training in the last two years.

Ongoing Professional Development

Staff will receive ongoing professional development throughout the year including a focus on the following areas:

1. Age-appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
2. Age-appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying;
3. Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and amongst aggressor, target, and witness;
4. Research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying at school;
5. Information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying;
6. Internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying; and
7. Ways to prevent and respond to bullying of students with disabilities (particularly those affecting social skills, like autism).

III. ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Identifying resources

The school will make the school counselor available as necessary, to either or both the target and the aggressor in reactions to incidents of bullying. In the event that students require counseling in a language other than English, the school will arrange for counseling in the child's native language. In the event that the school is incapable of providing necessary services, the school's Director of Student Support will work with families to arrange for outside services.

The most important resource we have in creating a positive and healthy school climate is the development of strong relationships between students and the adults in our school. All of our efforts to develop and sustain a positive school climate are assets in this regard, including the maintenance of small "total-student-loads" for teachers, ensuring that classroom teachers are responsible for no more than twenty students and therefore have the capacity to develop strong relationships with each one.

For students on the autism spectrum, the IEP team will consider and specifically address the skills needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

When an evaluation indicates a disability that affects social skills development, or when the student's disability makes him/her vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing, the IEP will be drafted to address the skills needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

IV. ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Specific bullying prevention approaches

The school's general approach to preventing bullying is incorporated into our character education program. Time will be reserved within character education lessons to present and review the Bullying and Prevention Plan with students.

The bullying prevention elements in our curriculum are informed by research, which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:

- Knowing what to do when students witness an act of bullying, including seeking adult assistance;
- Helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- Emphasizing cyber-safety;
- Enhancing student skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communication; and
- Creating a safe and supportive school environment that is respectful of differences.

General Teaching Approaches

The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These activities support our bullying intervention and prevention initiatives:

- Setting clear routines and clear behavioral expectations;
- Creating safe school and classroom environments for all students;
- Creating a positive and focused school culture;
- Developing positive adult relationships with students;
- Modeling appropriate behaviors and relationships for students; and
- Using the internet safely.

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

A1. Reporting Overview

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. All reports should be made or related to the Dean of Students. School staff members are required to transmit any reports directly to the Dean of Students. Reports can be made anonymously.

Information on reporting procedures will be made available each year to all students, families, and staff via the Staff Handbook and the Student and Family Handbook. Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action.

A2. Reporting by Staff

A staff member will report any bullying incidents immediately to the Dean of Students in addition to following all other customary disciplinary procedures.

A3. Reporting by Students, Parents, or Guardians, and Others

The school expects all members of the school community who witness an incident of bullying to report it to the Dean of Students. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

B. Responding to a Report of Bullying or Cyber-bullying or Retaliation

Before investigating, the Dean of Students will take steps to ensure safety of targets and witnesses.

Upon determining that an incident of bullying has taken place, the Dean of Students will notify parents of all involved parties as well as the Principal. Notice will be consistent with 603 CMR 49.00.

If the reported incident involves students from another school, the Principal will notify by telephone the Principal or designee of the other school(s) involved in the incident so that each school may take appropriate action.

If the Principal has reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the Principal will notify the police. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00. If an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in the school, the Principal shall contact the police if he/she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor.

C. Investigation

The 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. The Dean will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. To the extent possible, the Dean will maintain confidentiality during the process. The Dean will make a written record of the investigation.

D. Determinations and Responses to Bullying

The Dean of Students will make a determination based upon all the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the Dean will take steps to ensure:

1. The target and/or reporter (if different from the target) is made to feel safe and is in no way restricted in participating in school or benefitting from school activities. As part of this process, the Dean will meet with the target and his/her family in order to assess the target's need and to ensure the successful restoration of the target's safety, including a possible counseling referral; and
2. The aggressor faces stiff disciplinary action and that the aggressor and the family of the aggressor are given access to additional educational resources (including possible counseling referral) and further understand that any repeated instance will meet with increasingly severe consequences.

Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). All students will be provided with protection under the law and under this policy regardless of their legal status.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination, the Dean will contact the target and/or reporter (if different from the target) to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the Dean will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

The principal or their designee shall inform the parent or guardian of the target and the aggressor in incidents of bullying 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. Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the school 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 will also be made available by the Principal and/or the Co-Director(s) of Brooke Charter Schools.

VI. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES

As part of the school's character education curriculum night held through the Parent Involvement Council, the school will educate parents on the character education standards and curriculum, including its anti-bullying components: (i) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the school or district plan; (ii) the dynamics of bullying; and (iii) online safety and cyber-bullying. In future years, once fully developed, the school will post its character education standards and curriculum on-line.

Each year, the school will include its Bullying Prevention Plan in its Student and Family Handbook (in the family's languages of preference) and will post it on its website.

VII. Prohibition Against Bullying and Retaliation

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

- (i) 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; and
- (ii) 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 target 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 MGLMGL c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

VIII. DEFINITIONS

Several of the following definitions are copied directly from MGLMGL c. 71, § 37O, as noted below. Schools or districts may add specific language to these definitions to clarify them, but may not alter their meaning or scope. Plans may also include additional definitions that are aligned with local policies and procedures.

Aggressor is a student or staff member who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Bullying, as defined in MGL c. 71, § 37O, 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:

1. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
2. places the target 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 target;
4. infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
5. Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyber-bullying, is bullying through the use of 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 MGLMGL c. 71, § 37O for the legal definition of cyberbullying.

Hostile environment, as defined in MGLMGL c. 71, § 37O, 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.

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.

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.

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

IX. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the school or district, no person shall be discriminated against in admission to the school or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and access to the courses of study programs, activities, and extracurricular activities of the school on account of race, sex, color, creed, religion, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, sexual

orientation, gender identity or expression, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, socio-economic status, housing status or homelessness, special need, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement. 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.

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 MGLMGL c. 71, § 37H or 37H½, 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.