

# **Northbridge Public Schools**

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## **Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan**

The Northbridge Public School District is committed to meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of our students. In accordance with state legislation, M.G.L. c. 71, S370, we have created this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan to guide our district in the implementation of our policies and procedures.

This plan reflects our zero-tolerance for bullying behaviors and incidents in all our schools. The plan was developed jointly by staff, students, and parents, with input from the Northbridge community.

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### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The Northbridge Public Schools ensures equal employment and educational opportunities for its employees and students and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex or sexual orientation, gender identity (M.G.L. c. 151B and 151C, Title VI, Title VII and Title IX), or on the basis of disability (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973/ADA) or homelessness. In addition, the Northbridge Public Schools does not discriminate against its employees on the basis of age (M.G.L. 151B/ADEA) on the basis of veteran's status, or genetic information.

The Northbridge Public School District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (the "Plan") meets the requirements of M.G.L. c. 71, S370 and is modeled after the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Model Plan for dealing with bullying behaviors in our schools. The Plan includes strategies for identifying, reporting and responding to bullying behaviors. This Plan reflects our Core Beliefs that state:

- Students should develop a sense of self-discipline, self-respect, self-reliance and demonstrate social and civic responsibility.
- Student learning is promoted through a safe and orderly environment, free of prejudice, violence, and harassment.
- All students should demonstrate respect and appreciation of the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of our community and society.

The Northbridge Public Schools district is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying and cyberbullying. 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.

This Plan complements our schools' student wellness and discipline policies, and aligns with the [Northbridge Anti-Bullying Policy JICFB](#). Please note the use of the words "target" instead of "victim" and "aggressor" instead of "perpetrator" throughout this document to be consistent with language used by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

## **I. LEADERSHIP**

Leadership at all levels plays a critical role in developing and implementing effective bullying prevention and intervention plans. Leadership is responsible for setting priorities and for staying up-to-date with current research on ways to prevent and effectively respond to bullying. Leaders have a primary role in teaching students and adults to be civil to one another, and to promote understanding of and respect for diversity.

Adult leaders include:

- district and school administrators, who set expectations and provide oversight for implementation of school and district policies and procedures
- department chairs and team leaders, who serve as liaisons between administration and their teams
- all classroom teachers and school staff, who model expectations for appropriate behaviors and are on the "front line" in observing and reporting bullying incidents

- members of School Advisory Councils, who review school goals and set priorities for school initiatives

- all parents, who also model appropriate behaviors for communication and collaboration

Student leaders include:

- members of organizations such as Student Council, National Honor Society, Student Advisory Council, Link Crew, Team Captains, student athletes, advisory program members, and other honor and service organizations, who model exemplary behaviors of tolerance and respect
- all student bystanders to bullying incidents who have the responsibility for stepping forward and saying “No” to bullying behaviors and/or reporting bullying incidents to an adult.

**A. Responsibility for implementation.** The Superintendent of Schools is responsible for ensuring that the district’s plan is communicated and implemented consistently throughout all schools. The Principal of each school is responsible for the coordination and oversight of the plan in his or her school; he or she may designate authority to an assistant principal or other appropriate staff to carry out elements of his/her responsibilities. All employees of the Northbridge Public Schools are responsible for helping to implement the plan by understanding the role they play in bullying prevention and intervention and acting in accordance with the Plan’s expectations.

**B. Public involvement in developing the Plan.** As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, this plan was developed in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents, and guardians. Consultation included notice and a public comment period before the Plan was approved by the School Committee.

**C. Assessing needs and resources.** The Northbridge Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is the 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, a Bullying Prevention Task Force, composed of administrators, teachers, school counselors, parents, and students, assessed available resources including curriculum and training programs, and reviewed district policies and procedures related to bullying response and interventions.

At least once every four years, the district will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary-developed survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our schools.

Northbridge Public Schools will annually report bullying incident data to the Department.

Building specific data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying will be analyzed by the Administration at each school building to identify vulnerable populations and “hot spots” in school buildings, on school grounds, or on school buses.

At least once every four years faculty, staff, and parents/guardians will be surveyed to assist in determining school climate needs.

**D. Planning and oversight.** The Northbridge school district has developed and approved a comprehensive Bullying and Harassment Policy that details mandates for reporting, investigating, and responding to bullying complaints and incidents. As set forth in this policy, the building principal or his/her designee is responsible for receiving, investigating, and responding to all reports of bullying. Each building principal or his/her designee is responsible for implementing the Northbridge Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, and for amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct.

The Superintendent or her/his designee is responsible for developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Northbridge Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, including an Internet safety policy, and for designating key staff to be in charge of reviewing and updating them on an annual basis. The Superintendent or her/his designee is responsible for collecting and analyzing district data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes. The Superintendent or designee is also responsible for creating and maintaining a process for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors.

The District Leadership Team (central office administrators and school principals) is responsible for reviewing the Plan each year, planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law, leading the parent or family engagement efforts, and drafting parent information materials, and reviewing and updating these materials each year, or more frequently if necessary. The Leadership Team is also responsible for planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors, as well as for choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or district will use to instruct students about issues of bullying and cyberbullying.

The School Committee is responsible for the approval of any new policy.

## **II. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Northbridge Public School District is committed to providing ongoing anti-bullying professional development for all staff members, including but not limited to educators, paraprofessionals, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, and advisors to extracurricular activities.

**A. Annual staff training on the Plan.** The Northbridge Public School District will conduct annual training for all school staff on the Plan. This training 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 district. Staff members hired after the start of the school year are required to participate in school-based training during the school year in which they are hired, unless they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last year.

**B. Ongoing professional development.** The goal of the Northbridge Public School District professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, the content of school-wide and district-wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- Developmentally or age-appropriate strategies to prevent bullying
- Developmentally or age-appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents
- Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying
- 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
- Information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying
- 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.

Additional areas identified by the Northbridge Public School District for professional development include:

- Promoting and modeling the use of respectful language
- 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 (PBIS)
- 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 ·
- Maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students
- Participation in appropriate social-skills training programs for the prevention of bullying

### **C. Written notice to staff.**

The Northbridge Public School District will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties, in the school employee packet and the code of conduct.

## **III. ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES**

A key aspect of promoting positive school climates is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of all students are addressed. These students include targets, aggressors or bystanders of bullying or cyberbullying. The Northbridge Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan includes strategies for providing support and services necessary to meet these needs. In order to enhance our school system's capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, available services reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets, aggressors and bystanders. The schools will provide counseling or referral to appropriate services for students who are aggressors, targets, and/or family members of those students as needed.

**A. Identifying resources.** The Northbridge School District will annually review the resources devoted to counseling and other services for targets, aggressors, and their families. Additionally we will review the continued use of programs such as Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), Regulated Classroom, Second Step and other appropriate programs that support the creation of positive school environments by focusing on teaching respectful behavior and responding to all incidents of bullying and harassment. We will also focus on early interventions and more intensive student bullying education at the early grades to provide a strong foundation for positive behaviors.

The Northbridge Public School District will work in collaboration with local and state agencies to adopt evidenced-based curricula and to provide additional preventative services to students, parents and guardians, and faculty and staff.

**B. Counseling and other services.** School counselors, nurses, school psychologists and special educators provide a variety of skill-based services to students within the educational setting that include ongoing emotional support, risk assessment, crisis intervention, and help

with community based counseling referrals when appropriate. School counselors meet with parents and teachers as needed to help address students' academic, emotional, and

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behavioral concerns as collaboratively as possible. School counselors work with administrators to provide appropriate resources to identified families. School counselors maintain up-to-date information on community-based mental health referrals including Community Service Agencies (CSAs) within the local vicinity providing services to Medicaid eligible students. School counselors, school psychologists and special needs educators work collaboratively to develop behavior plans and social skills groups for students with social skill weaknesses. In addition, school counselors, school psychologists and special education professionals work together to educate and support parents, conduct parent workshops, and apprise parents of outside resources to enhance parenting skills and provide for the needs of children.

The district has also included a page in the Handbook that includes contact information to local community-based resources for students and families.

**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 or that the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her disability, the Team will consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

**D. Referral to outside services.** The Northbridge Public School District will refer students and families to outside services as needed in order to provide students with additional support and education. Referrals will comply with relevant laws and policies. Current local referral protocols will be evaluated annually to assess their relevance to the Plan, and revised as needed.

#### **IV. ACADEMIC AND NONACADEMIC ACTIVITIES**

The Northbridge Public School District will provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention, incorporated into the school's curriculum, in each grade level.

**A. Specific bullying prevention approaches.** Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following possible approaches:

- Using scripts and role playing 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 cyber-safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies

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- Enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications
- Engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and differences

At the beginning of the school year, all staff, as part of the process of setting school expectations, will review the student-related sections of the Northbridge Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan at an age-appropriate level. Throughout the year, leadership assemblies, continued classroom discussions, and targeted individual and small group sessions will be held to promote and reinforce aspects of the Plan, anti-bullying activities, and a safe school environment.

**B. General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts.** The following approaches are 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 that respect human differences, including differences related to disability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race, religion, appearance, socioeconomic status (including homelessness) or other characteristics or traits of an individual
- 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
- Supporting students' interest and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

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

To support efforts to respond promptly and effectively to bullying and retaliation, the Northbridge Public School District has policies and procedures in place for receiving and responding to reports of bullying or retaliation. These policies and procedures ensure that members of the



school community – students, parents, and staff – know what will happen when incidents of bullying occur.

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**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 must be recorded in writing.** All employees are required to report immediately to the principal or designee any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses using the [Incident Report/Complaint Tracking Form](#). Reports made by students, parents/guardians, or other non-employees may be made anonymously, including through the Anonymous Alert link on district and school websites. Link: [Anonymous Alert Form](#). Each school will make reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, the Northbridge Public Schools' Incident Report/Complaint Tracking Form, available on the Northbridge Public School District's website ([www.nps.org](http://www.nps.org)) .

Use of the Northbridge Public Schools' Incident Report/Complaint Tracking Form is not required as a condition of making a report by parents and students, however, it is the best method of reporting to ensure that all necessary details of the incident are provided for the investigation. As such, schools will 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, it will be posted on the school's website. (*see above*)

### **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 using the Incident Report/Complaint /Tracking Form. 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 each school's policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

### **2. Reporting by Students, Parents/Guardians, and Others**

The school system 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 on the basis of 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.

## **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 immediate 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. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents/guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.

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Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; predetermine seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target; and altering the aggressor’s schedule and access to the target. 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. The confidentiality of students and witnesses reporting alleged acts of bullying will be maintained to the extent possible given the school’s obligation to investigate the matter.

## **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/guardians of the target and the aggressor by phone and/or letter, and of the procedures for responding to it.

### *b. Notice to Another School or District:*

If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, nonpublic 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/headmaster 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.

### *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 or designee 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, 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 aggressor.

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In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with local law enforcement/school resource officer, 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 allegations and the ages of the students involved.

During the investigation the principal or designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents/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 will 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 district policies and procedures for investigations and for possible disciplinary action. If necessary, the principal or designee will consult with the Superintendent regarding consultation with legal counsel pertaining to the investigation of the alleged report.

### **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 student's 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 skill development.

The principal or designee will promptly notify the parents/guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notice to parents must

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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.

School personnel may, however, share information with the family of the target regarding the process that was followed to investigate and determine whether bullying occurred; what general measures are being taken to protect the target from further acts of bullying or retaliation; and what is being done to ensure that the target is reassured, receives help, and is provided with appropriate ways to communicate ongoing concerns.

The principal or designee shall inform the parent/guardian of the target 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. (see Section VIII)

## **E. Responses to Bullying:**

The Northbridge Public School District has incorporated a range of individualized strategies and interventions that may be used in response to remediate a student's skills or to prevent further incidences of bullying and/or retaliation.

### **1. Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-Building**

Once the principal or designee has determined 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).

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

- 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 school 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;
- making a referral for evaluation.

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## 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 Northbridge Public School District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and with the school's code of conduct/student handbook and discipline matrix.

The range of disciplinary action includes, but is not limited to, one or more of the following: verbal warnings, written warnings, reprimands, reflective writing assignments intended to educate the aggressor, detentions, short-term or long-term suspensions, or expulsions from school as determined by the school administration, subject to applicable procedural requirements. Nothing in this plan is intended to prevent the school administration from taking disciplinary action against a student for conduct that does not meet the definition of bullying or cyberbullying, as defined above, but nevertheless is inappropriate for the school environment. Disciplinary actions will be in accordance with administrative disciplinary policies and applicable state and federal laws.

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 consistent with the school's code of conduct/student handbook.

## 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.

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. It is the responsibility of the target and his/her parents/guardians to notify the principal or designee immediately if there has been a recurrence of the bullying or retaliation. If so, the Principal or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately. If so, the principal or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement

them immediately.

#### 4. Ongoing Monitoring

The principal or designee will monitor data such as bullying incident reports, behavior referrals, etc. on a monthly basis through meetings with staff, Early Intervention Teams, and parent meetings to promote accountability and to make changes to programming and

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intervention strategies as soon as possible to prevent significant problems and to ensure the integrity of the programming being implemented.

## **VI. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

The Northbridge Public School District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan includes strategies to engage and collaborate with students' families in order to increase the capacity of each of our schools as well as the district to prevent and respond to bullying. Resources for families and communication with them are essential aspects of effective collaboration. Provisions for informing parents/guardians about the bullying prevention and intervention initiatives undertaken by the schools will include sending the district Bullying and Harassment Information Letter home in the first day packet. This letter includes definitions of bullying and cyberbullying, a summary of the state law prohibiting bullying, tips for dealing with and reporting bullying, and a sign-off form for parents and students to "pledge to support the zero tolerance policy for any bullying behaviors."

Schools will annually inform parents/guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. Parents and guardians will also be notified in writing each year about the student-related sections of the Northbridge School District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and Internet Empowered Use Policy which can be found on the Technology page of the district website ([Empowered Use Policy](#).)

Schools will collaborate with School Councils, PTA, and SPED PAC to create parent resource and information networks. Schools will join with these parent groups to 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 school(s).

All notices and information made available to parents/guardians will be in hard copy and electronic formats, and will be available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The district will post the Northbridge Public School District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and related information/forms on its website.

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

The Northbridge Public School District will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior,

including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses and at school bus stops or in school-related activities by 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. Schools will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target's sense of safety.

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The Northbridge Public School District will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

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 through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by a school district
- 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, 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 M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

## **VIII. PROBLEM RESOLUTION SYSTEM**

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 (PRS). That information can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa>, emails can be sent to [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu) or individuals can call 781-338-3700.

## **IX. DEFINITIONS**

Several of the following definitions are copied directly from M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, as noted below.

**Aggressor** is a student who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

**Bullying**, as defined in M.G.L. 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:

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

**Cyberbullying** 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. Under M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O the legal definition of 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.

Cyberbullying shall also include (1) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (2) 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 the above definition of bullying.

Cyberbullying 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 the definitions of bullying listed above.

**Hostile environment**, as defined in M.G.L. 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, paraprofessionals, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, and advisors to extracurricular activities.

**Target** is a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated. 16

## **X. 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 a public school of any town or in obtaining the advantages, privilege and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sex or sexual orientation, gender identity (M.G.L. c. 151B and 151C, Title VI, Title VII and Title IX), or on the basis of disability (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973/ADA) or homelessness. Nothing in the Northbridge Public School District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention 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 Northbridge Public School District's Bullying Prevention and Intervention 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 37H½, other applicable laws, or local school or district policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether this Plan covers the behavior.

