



MetroWest Jewish Day School Anti-Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan



Approved by MWJDS BOD
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MWJDS BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

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INTRODUCTION:

MWJDS is a young, growing Jewish community day school, currently grades K-6, whose mission is to provide a program of academic excellence combining secular and Jewish studies curricula, within a setting epitomizing the meaning of community; by inviting and nurturing a wide range of students, from a broad range of family backgrounds, reaching out to neighboring institutions, and thereby creating a stimulating and supportive environment for all its youngsters.

MWJDS has always been committed to providing a safe environment for all of our children. We already address these issues in our utilization of Responsive Classroom programs and social skill curricula, both within the classrooms and in targeted small group work designed to foster social skill development. Further, we believe that our Jewish studies curricula establish and regularly reinforce clear expectations for moral behavior in our school community.

In addition to our current efforts, we are taking further steps to specifically address issues of bullying prevention and intervention. Preliminary steps will include identification of a leadership group for this plan, consultation, and needs assessment, as follows:

- **Leadership:** leadership for this undertaking will reside ultimately with the Head of School (HOS). HOS will be actively supported by members of the MWJDS Learning Team (Curriculum Consultant, School Psychologist, and Learning Specialist.) This group will be designated the MWJDS Bullying Prevention and Intervention team, (henceforth, the BPI Team)
- **Consultation:** The BPI team will seek consultation from the school’s Board of Directors, its Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), its Parent –Teacher organization (“Family Connection”), its teachers and student representatives, legal counsel, and community secular and religious leaders.
- **Needs assessment:** To better understand bullying issues at MWJDS, the BPI team will systematically elicit comment from students, staff and families with regard to school climate and school safety issues. We will do this by first meeting with school staff, and next, by convening a school community forum, inviting families and other community members to discuss school climate and safety issues at MWJDS. Then, within each classroom, members of the BPI team will engage students in a discussion of bullying, and invite students, where age-appropriate, to respond to anonymous surveys to convey their experiences as target and/or aggressor in bullying incidents.

DEFINITIONS:

In the MWJDS plan, the following definitions will be used:

Aggressor: a student who engages in bullying, cyber bullying, or retaliation.

Bullying: is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- i. Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target’s property;
- ii. Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- iii. Creates a hostile environment at school for the target;

- iv. Infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- v. Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

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.

Hostile environment: is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

Retaliation: 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, school nurses, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, support staff, and volunteers or paraprofessionals.

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

PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

The following information prohibiting bullying, cyber bullying, and retaliation will be included in the school's Family Handbook, posted in age-appropriate language in the classrooms, reviewed regularly with students, and included in the MWJDS staff handbook.

For the purpose of this policy, whenever the term bullying is used, it denotes either bullying or cyber bullying.

Acts of 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.
- (iii) Nothing in this Plan requires MWJDS to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs (v. M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O.)
- (iv) 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.

REPORTING:

Students who believe that they are a target of bullying, or observe an act of bullying, or who have reasonable grounds to believe that these behaviors are taking place, are obligated to report incidents to a member of the school staff. Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate

ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with the HOS or other staff. However, the target shall not be subject to discipline for failing to report bullying. Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying shall be subject to disciplinary action.

A school staff member is required to report immediately to the HOS any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses.

Parents, guardians and members of the community are encouraged to report an incident of bullying to the HOS or other designated staff as soon as possible.

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing. Reports may be made anonymously. However, no formal disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report. (i.e. investigation must uphold the report.)

The school will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including an Incident Reporting Form, a voicemail box, a dedicated mailing address, and an email address. All of these means will be described in the Staff Handbook, in the Family Handbook, and to students in their classes.

RESPONDING TO A REPORT:

Safety

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the HOS will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety will include creating a personal safety plan; such a plan may include pre-determining 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 HOS will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The HOS 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.

Obligations to Notify Others

Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the HOS will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor of this determination, and of the procedures for responding to it. In addition, if such bullying or retaliation involves students from another school, the HOS, consistent with Massachusetts and federal law, will promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school or district having jurisdiction so that appropriate action may be taken there as well. There may be circumstances in which HOS contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Actions taken to prevent further acts of bullying shall be discussed.

If the HOS has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor under Massachusetts law, including c. 71, sec.37 O (bullying), c. 265, sec. 43 (stalking) and sec. 43 A (criminal harassment) and c. 269, sec. 14 A (harassing phone calls),, the HOS will consult with the school’s board and legal counsel to determine if criminal charges are warranted. If it is determined that criminal charges are warranted the local law enforcement agency will be notified.

INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES:

Promptly following receipt of viable relevant information, the HOS will investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation. During the investigation the HOS may interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The HOS 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 HOS, and in consultation with the BPI team as appropriate. To the extent practicable, and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the HOS will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process.

The HOS will maintain a written record of the investigation.

If necessary, the HOS will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

The investigation shall be completed within fourteen school days from the date of the report. Parents/guardians shall be contacted upon completion of the investigation and informed of the results, including whether allegations were found to be factual, whether a violation of the policy was found, and whether disciplinary action has or shall be taken. At a minimum the HOS or member of the BPI team shall contact the parents/guardians as to the status of the investigation on a weekly basis.

Determinations. The HOS will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the HOS 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 HOS will determine what remedial action is required, if any, and determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the HOS may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or school psychologist, and the target's or aggressor's parents or guardians, to identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying behavior and to assess the level of need for additional social skills development.

The HOS will promptly notify the parents or guardians of both target and 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.

Taking Disciplinary Action

If HOS decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined appropriate to 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 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.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Annual staff training on the Plan. Annual training shall be provided for school employees and volunteers who have significant contact with students, in preventing, identifying, responding to and reporting incidents of bullying. Such training will recognize age appropriate prevention and intervention approaches, will reflect current research, and will include discussions of Internet safety and cyber bullying. 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 two years.

Ongoing professional development: Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying, including both specific bullying prevention approaches and general teaching approaches:

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

- Using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
- Empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- Helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- Emphasizing cyber safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- Enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and
- Engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference.

General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts. The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment:

- Promoting and modeling the use of respectful language;
- Setting clear behavioral expectations for students;
- Fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference;
- Teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others;
- Creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and economically disadvantaged students;
- Using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES (for target, aggressor and bystanders/witnesses)

MWJDS currently has on staff a licensed clinical psychologist with ties to service providers in local communities, should referral to outside services for guidance and clinical intervention be needed. In-school preventive efforts already in place include Responsive Classroom curricula, Engine Run curricula, and a variety of in-house social development programs. MWJDS staff have within their repertory the capacity to put in place behavioral intervention plans, social skills groups, and individually focused curricula and regularly consult with the school psychologist about the appropriate use of these interventions.

COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES: Parent education and resources.

The school will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula used at MWJDS. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the Family Connection, or as workshops by qualified school staff or invited speakers.

PUBLICATION AND NOTICE:

At the beginning of each school year, the school will provide the school community, including administrators, staff, students, volunteers and parents or guardians, with written notice of its policies for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation, as well as contact information for use in reporting incidents.

MWJDS will include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents or guardians; make it available in the school's main office and post it on the school's website.

Relevant sections of the Plan relating to duties of faculty and staff shall be included in the school employee handbook.

REFERENCES:

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 's Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

Consultation with Naomi R. Stonberg, Attorney, Wellesley Hills MA
Consultation with Anne Gilligan, Supervisor, MA Department of Education

IMPLEMENTING the MWJDS BPI PLAN – TIME LINE

FIRST STEPS: RAISING AWARENESS – January-February 2011

- **Professional Development for Staff:** on January 6th, school staff will meet with the HOS and BPI Team to discuss teacher perspectives on bullying incidents, with an eye to defining, preventing and intervening in bullying in a way most appropriate to our particular setting;
- **Student surveys and discussion:** Week of January 31st following the staff discussion and initial parent notification, we will meet in each classroom to engage the students in a discussion of bullying; where age appropriate, students will be invited to respond to anonymous surveys, to convey their experiences as target and/or aggressor.
- **School Community involvement:**
 - The Board of Directors will be engaged - December 21, 2010 policy review;
 - The PAC will be engaged; January 13th
 - Family Connection will be engaged;
 - A community meeting will be held on February 9th to engage the parent body in this process as full partners.

PROCESSING FEEDBACK - DEFINING THE ISSUES – Feb-March 2011

- What does bullying look like in our school community? Our initial aim is to understand bullying within our school context, in a way that captures the experience of students at MWJDS.
- After our initial awareness-raising meetings, we will go back to our staff, students and families, with an outline of the problems we have prioritized, and a proposal of how to

address them.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM -SPRING 2011

- We will develop strategies as to how to best address bullying incidents in our school;
- Strategies may include issuing refined statements of school policy on bullying; development of an Incident Reporting Form; outlining steps to promote safety, and promotion of social skills; and deciding on what forms of training and professional development will be most helpful to our staff;
- At every step of the way we will engage parents, faculty, administration and students.