

Chestnut Hill School
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
December 2010

The Chestnut Hill School embraces its mandate to ensure that students may learn and grow in a safe and secure environment. We recognize the importance of trust as an essential foundation of effective teaching. In addition, the positive connections that develop in a safe and secure environment help to promote self-confidence, citizenship, and achievement. Informed by these guiding principles, the Plan outlined in this document has been designed to meet the following specific goals:

- a. to prevent all instances of bullying and cyber-bullying
- b. to educate students and families regarding bullying and cyber-bullying
- c. to encourage students and families to have confidence in the school's procedures regarding bullying and cyber-bullying
- d. to implement appropriate disciplinary and educational measures whenever bullying and cyber-bullying may occur and are found to be warranted
- e. to protect the rights of all parties involved

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I. Introduction

The Chestnut Hill School takes seriously its responsibility to educate children, to equip them to live in a diverse world, and to protect them from potentially harmful acts of bullying either by classmates or others. Accordingly, we expect high standards of conduct both from our students and from all adults associated with our school community. In striving to provide the most optimal conditions for learning, it is our policy to maintain a safe and secure environment that is free of bullying and any other verbal or physical misconduct.

The Chestnut Hill School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan that is described in this document has been published in response to the recently enacted Massachusetts Anti-Bullying Law. Although our more narrow goal is to outline a comprehensive approach to the ever-growing danger of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation, we have worked hard to make sure that the policies and procedures outlined in this Plan are consistent with the policies and procedures that are also articulated in our Family Handbook and in our Employee Handbook.

This Plan was developed in the fall of 2010 by the Chestnut Hill School Support Team in consultation with a number of interested faculty and staff members. In reaching for the highest possible standards for bully-free learning, we recognize the importance of educating all community members about the Plan. The Head of School is responsible to implement and administer the Plan in full accordance with school policy. Questions and concerns may be referred either to the Head of School or to any member of the Support Team.

II. Policy on Bullying Prevention

The Chestnut Hill School will not tolerate any form of bullying or cyber-bullying, nor will we tolerate retaliation against any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying. Our policies are strict for the sole purpose of preventing inappropriate verbal and physical conduct before a student has been subject to bullying as it is defined under the law. For example, although the law defines bullying as “repeated use” of certain expressions, acts, and/or gestures, the School reserves the right to apply disciplinary measures and other corrective action in a case of a single expression, act or gesture, if the School determines that it is of sufficient severity to warrant disciplinary measures or other remedial action or that the repetition of that expression, act, or gesture might reasonably result in bullying as defined under the law.

- i. Definitions under the Law: The following definitions are drawn from the Massachusetts law against bullying.

Bullying. Bullying is defined as 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:

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

Cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying may occur through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, fax machines, and the internet. It includes, but is not limited to: e-mail, instant messages, text messages, and internet postings, whether on a webpage, a blog, or otherwise.

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

Perpetrator. A perpetrator is a student who engages in bullying or retaliation.

Victim. A victim is a student against whom bullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.

- ii. Education and Prevention

The Chestnut Hill School is committed to providing all students with a learning environment that is free from bullying and cyber-bullying. The Chestnut Hill School is a community that values, promotes and expects respect and kindness. The climate at CHS is one that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences.

Within this framework of respect and in conjunction with the three components of our mission, CHS is committed to the prevention of bullying in all forms and to the education

of faculty, staff, families and students. Our healthy school climate initiatives include the following:

General

- Promoting and modeling the use of respectful language
- Fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference
- Modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors
- Setting clear expectations for student behavior
- Using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement to behavior
- Teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others

Specific

- Annual staff training on all aspects of the bullying prevention plan
- CHS Family Handbook contains explicit policies and procedures around bullying
- Educating students through The Open Circle Curriculum; this includes empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying and enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communication
- Regular use of Community Meetings to engage students in dialogues about bullying and to reinforce behavioral expectations
- Commitment to ample adult supervision during all aspects of school life
- Commitment to providing families with education about the plan and about bullying prevention in general

III. Procedures for Intervention

i. Reports of Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, or Retaliation

Any student who is the target, or has witnessed an incident, or has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying prohibited by this policy is strongly encouraged to promptly report the matter orally or in writing to the Head of School or to any other faculty or staff member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. Also, any student who is subject to retaliation in violation of this policy or who knows of another student who has been subject to retaliation is urged to report it as soon as possible. Students who knowingly make false accusations of bullying or retaliation may be subject to disciplinary action.

A parent or guardian of a student who is the target, or who has witnessed, or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying is strongly urged to promptly notify the Head of School or the designated school official. Furthermore, any parent or guardian who has him or herself witnessed bullying or cyber-bullying or has relevant information concerning such an incident is strongly urged to come forward to the Head of School or designated school official. A parent or guardian should also report any incident of retaliation in violation of this policy to the Head of School or designated school official.

Any member of the faculty or staff of the Chestnut Hill School who witnesses or otherwise becomes aware of bullying or cyber-bullying in violation of this policy or who becomes aware of retaliation against a student who reported information concerning a violation of this policy is required to report it immediately to the Head of School or the designated school official. There are no exceptions to this requirement. A member of the faculty or staff may not make promises of confidentiality to a student or parent/guardian who informs him/her of an allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Faculty and staff may not make reports under this policy anonymously. The School also urges students and their parents/guardians not to make reports anonymously. Although there are circumstances in which any anonymous report can be better than none at all, it is far more difficult to determine the facts of what occurred if complaints are made anonymously. When considering an anonymous report, students and parents/guardians are encouraged to bear in mind that the School takes seriously its policy against retaliation. In addition, while the School cannot promise strict confidentiality because information must be shared in order to conduct an effective investigation, the School releases information concerning complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation only on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

ii. Initial Response

When a complaint of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation is brought to the attention of the Head of School or designated school official, an assessment is made as to whether any initial steps need to be taken to protect the well-being of students and/or to maintain an appropriate learning environment while the investigation is being conducted. As warranted, strategies such as increased supervision may be implemented to prevent further bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation during an investigation.

Once a complaint has been made, it is the policy of the School to promptly notify the parents or guardians of any student who is an alleged victim of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation and the parents or guardians of any student who is an alleged perpetrator of such behavior.

iii. Investigation

The following is an outline of the procedure that is pursued once a complaint has been brought to the attention of the Head of School or designated school official.

An impartial investigation of the complaint is conducted by the the Head of School or designated school official. That investigation may include (but will not necessarily be limited to) interviews with the person who made the complaint, with the student who was the target of the alleged bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, with the person or persons against whom the complaint was made, and

with any students, faculty, staff or other persons who witnessed or who may otherwise have relevant information about the alleged incident.

Depending on the circumstances, the Head of School or designated school official conducting the investigation may also choose to consult with other teachers, parents/guardians, the School Psychologist, or other individuals with relevant information.

iv. Resolution

Following interviews and any other investigation undertaken, as the School deems appropriate, the Head of School or designated school official will determine to what extent the allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been substantiated. If it is determined that the policy set forth in this Plan has been violated, the Head of School or designated school official will determine what disciplinary action and/or what other remedial action is appropriate and how it will be implemented.

The goals of investigation and any disciplinary or other remedial process that is imposed as a result of that investigation are:

- 1) to correct the situation to the extent it is reasonably possible and
- 2) to take appropriate steps to prevent a repetition of the incident and
- 3) to prevent the student or students targeted and others who participated in the investigation from being subject to retaliation.

In appropriate circumstances, such as when a crime may have been committed or a child may have been subject to abuse or neglect of the type that is reportable under Section 51A of the Massachusetts general laws, law enforcement or another appropriate government agency may be notified.

Upon completion of the investigation, the Head of School or the designated school official who conducted the investigation will meet individually with the student or students who were the target of the alleged incident and the student or students against whom the complaint was made and their parents or guardians to report the results of the investigation. The parties will also be informed of the steps that will be taken to correct the situation when disciplinary or other corrective action has been determined to be appropriate. The information shared in these meetings may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student records.

Any student found to have been targeted in violation of this policy and his/her parents will be contacted after an appropriate time has elapsed to follow-up on the resolution and to inquire as to whether there have been any further incidents. Resources are available to all students during and after a investigation. These resources are available both to alleged perpetrators and to alleged targets. These include teachers, administrators, and the School Psychologist.