



Manchester Essex Regional School District
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Originally Developed Fall 2009
Revised 2024

Table of Contents

- I. **Commitment and Purpose** (P. 3)
 - a. Public Involvement (P. 3)
 - b. Assessing Needs and Resources (P. 3)
 - c. Commitments & Expectations (P. 4)
 - d. Planning and Oversight (P. 4-5)

- II. **Training and Professional Development** (P. 5)

- III. **Access to Resources and Services** (P. 6)
 - a. Identifying Resources (P. 6)
 - b. Counseling and Other Services (P. 6-7)
 - c. Students with Disabilities (P. 7)
 - d. Academic and Non-Academic Activities (P. 7-8)

- IV. **Reporting and Responding to Bullying and Retaliation** (P. 8)
 - a. Reporting (P. 8)
 - b. Complaint Investigation Procedures (P. 9)
 - c. Problem Resolution System (P. 10-11)

- V. **Definitions** (P. 12-14)

Manchester Essex Regional School District
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

I. Commitment and Purpose

a. Public Involvement

The MERSD (Manchester Essex Regional School District) established a School Climate Task Force in the fall of 2009 in advance of the passage of M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O. The Task Force was comprised of administrators, staff and parents representing the district preK-12. The Task Force was established to provide a multifaceted approach to deal consistently and effectively with behavioral issues, including bullying, and promote proactive, preventative steps toward building strong school communities that will diminish the likelihood that bullying and other inappropriate behaviors will occur. This plan is a product of the work created by the Task Force.

The plan has been updated to incorporate changes and updates to state law. The most recent plan update in 2024 was completed to address alignment to state policies and replaces any previous versions of the MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

b. Assessing Needs and Resources

The Task Force led a multifaceted needs-based assessment including: a review of behavior management (codes of conduct and procedures); an examination of curriculum and school initiatives that foster respect and caring; and surveyed students in grade four through twelve on perceptions of climate. The goal of the student survey was to find and ensure that students could identify an adult to which they could access for assistance. The result of this process was the establishment of a “Bill of Rights and Responsibilities” to guide the relationship between the schools and parent community, particularly through the often-thorny issues attached to children’s behavior.

More recently MERSD has been actively engaged in identifying and training staff in the RULER methodology designed to address the root cause behaviors that often lead to bullying behaviors. This work is consistent with CASEL’s (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) definition of social-emotional learning and supports the work we are doing with students to develop the following competencies:

- **Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- **Self-management:** The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- **Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- **Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- **Responsible decision making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the wellbeing.

c. Commitments and Expectations

MERSD expects all members of the school community to treat each other civilly and with respect for differences. MERSD is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment free from bullying and cyber-bullying. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive effort to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

MERSD acknowledges that certain students may be more vulnerable to become victims of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. MERSD 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 victim’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.

d. Planning and Oversight

Responsibilities

Tasks	School/District Leader Responsible
Receiving reports on bullying	Building Principal or their designee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essex Elementary: (978) 768-7324 Kim Provost, ProvostK@mersd.org • Memorial Elementary: (978) 526-1908 John

	<p>Willis, WillisJ@mersd.org</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manchester Essex Regional Middle: (978) 526-2022 Joanne Maino, MainoJ@mersd.org • Manchester Essex Regional High: (978) 526-4412 Julie Sgroi, SgroiJ@mersd.org
Collecting and analyzing building- and/or school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes	Building Principal
Creating a process for recording and tracking incident reports and for accessing information related to victims and perpetrators	Building Principal
Planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law	Leadership Team Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology (CIT)
Planning supports that respond to the needs of victims and perpetrators	Leadership Team Child Study Team Student Assistant Team
Choosing and implementing the curricula that the school or district will use	Leadership Team Director of CIT Curriculum Councils & Department Heads
Developing new or revising current policies and protocols under the Plan, including an Internet safety policy, and designating key staff to oversee implementation of them	Leadership Team Director of CIT School Committee
Amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct	Building Principals School Councils
Leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials	Leadership Team Director of CIT
Reviewing and updating the Plan each year, or more frequently	Leadership Team Director of CIT

II. Training and Professional Development

The goal of professional development is to establish a mutual understanding of the 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.

Annual training on the bullying prevention and intervention plan for all school staff will take place. Ongoing professional MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Revised 2024

development, as required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, will be informed by research and will include information on:

- (i) developmentally (or age) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- (ii) developmentally (or age) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- (iii) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, victim, and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) 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;
- (v) information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- (vi) internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

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.

In addition to continual development of skills and knowledge, MERSD as required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, 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 or district employee handbook and the code of conduct.

III. Access to Resources and Services

Creating a positive school climate requires that the underlying emotional needs of all students be addressed. These students include victims, perpetrators or bystanders of bullying or cyberbullying. Manchester Essex Regional Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan includes strategies for providing support and services necessary to meet these needs and enhance the districts capacity to effectively prevent, intervene, and respond to bullying.

a. Identifying Resources

The district will work to identify the school's capacity to provide counseling, case management and other services for these students (victims, perpetrators, bystanders) and their families. Schools will conduct an annual review of staffing and programs that support the creation of positive school environments, focusing on early interventions and intensive services, and develop recommendations and action steps to fill resource and service gaps.

At least once every four years beginning with the 2015/16 school year, the district will administer a student survey to assess the school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our schools. The VOCAL survey or YRBS survey may be utilized as the school climate data to be considered. Additionally, the school or district will annually report bullying incident data to the Department.

b. Counseling and Other Services

The process at MERSD for identifying counseling and other support services for the victims, the perpetrators and the families of all children involved in bullying, begins with the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT). Each school has a team consisting of educators, administrators, and counselors. Referrals initiated for all services, recommended both in and out of the school setting, are made by this team of school professionals. Re-evaluation of the referrals, the services rendered, and the results of those services are conducted routinely. In addition to the regularly scheduled Teacher Assistance Team meetings, the team will meet as needed to respond in any crisis. Compliance with federal and state laws as well as district policies are routinely evaluated to assess relevance to the Anti-Bully Prevention Plan and to make revisions where needed.

Supporting staff includes Adjustment Counselors, Guidance Counselors, School Psychologists, School Nurse, and Principal. Counseling staff help students open the doors of communication to decrease the feelings of isolation and encourage open communication between students and adults (both families and school staff). Students are encouraged throughout this process to use their teachers and counselor as resources in the event that they need help with problem solving, are struggling with a certain emotion or social issue, or if they just need to vent in a safe environment without the worry of their thoughts or feelings being repeated as is often the case when children confide in peers.

Collaboration with community service organizations is another routine practice as district-wide leadership and mental health teams meet quarterly as part of the Community Collaborative Initiative (CCI). Representatives from the District Attorney's Office, police, and state agencies collaborate with school personnel around the identification of at-risk youth including Medicaid eligible students. Together they address community concerns and initiate prevention and intervention training programs for students that include information opportunities for families, faculty, staff, and the community at large.

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

The principal will refer all incidents of bullying in which the victim is a student receiving special services to the liaison for that student who will convene a team meeting to ensure that current supports are being implemented and whether additional supports are needed.

d. Academic and Non-Academic Activities

Current programs that support a positive school environment and that address early intervention include whole-school and grade-level social emotional learning through Yale's RULER curriculum in addition to a comprehensive health MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Revised 2024

education.

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, including for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students
- 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 non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength

IV. Reporting and Responding to Bullying and Retaliation

a. Reporting

Any person who believes s/he has been the victim of bullying by a student or employee of the Manchester Essex Regional School District or any third person with knowledge or belief of conduct which may constitute bullying should report the alleged acts immediately to the appropriate school official. The reporting party or the complainant should use the report form available from each Principal or online at www.mersd.org. Oral reports will be considered complaints as well and will be documented by the individual who receives the complaint.

Nothing in this plan shall prevent any person from reporting alleged bullying to a different administrator than the administrator designated. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged perpetrator based on an anonymous report. Students, 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).

All staff are mandated to report any instance of bullying or retaliation s/he has witnessed or become aware of to the school principal or designee.

In each school building, the principal or designee is responsible for receiving oral or written bullying reports.

- Essex Elementary School: (978) 768-7324

- Memorial Elementary School: (978) 526-1908
- Manchester Essex Regional Middle School: (978) 526-2022
- Manchester Essex Regional High School: (978) 526-4412

At any time, you may direct inquiries to the Director of Curriculum and Instructional Technology, who serves as the Coordinator for Non-Discrimination Compliance or the Superintendent of Schools (978) 526-4919.

Notices 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 perpetrator, 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 and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the principal (or designee) shall contact the local law enforcement agency if there is a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator. 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.

b. Complaint Investigation Procedures

Safety: Even before fully investigating allegations of bullying or retaliation, school personnel will consider whether there is a need to take immediate steps to support the alleged victim and/or protect the alleged victim from further potential incidents of concern. In taking any such action, however, the rights of both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator must be considered. There may be circumstances in which the principal (or designee) contacts the guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations 603 CMR 49.00.

The principal (or designee) will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying or retaliation a student who has witnessed or reported bullying or retaliation or provides information during an investigation. 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.

Written Statement of the Complaint: The investigator will seek to determine the basis of the complaint, gathering information from the complainant, including such matters as: what specifically happened, who committed the alleged acts, who was present or may have information about the events, when the events occurred (date, time of day), and where the events occurred.

It is helpful to have these facts in writing. If age appropriate, the complainant may be asked to put the complaint in writing and to sign and date it. If the complainant cannot or chooses not to write a complaint, the investigator will record the allegations, read them to the complainant to confirm accuracy, and ask the complainant to sign the document. If the complainant cannot or chooses not to sign, the investigator may sign and date the document her/himself. The investigation will be completed as soon as practicable, and the building principal or designee will file a written report and record the incident. The report will include a determination of whether the allegations have been substantiated as factual and whether they appear to be violations of this policy.

The Investigation: The investigation may consist of personal interviews with the complainant(s), the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed, and others that may have knowledge of the alleged incident(s) or circumstances giving rise to the complaint. The investigation may also consist of any other methods and documents deemed pertinent by the investigator. In determining whether "alleged conduct" constitutes a violation of the bullying policy, the investigator shall consider the surrounding circumstances: the nature of the behavior, past incidences or continuing patterns of behavior, the relationship between the parties involved and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred.

Whether a particular action or incident constitutes a violation of this policy requires a determination based on all facts and surrounding circumstances. In instances of confirmed bullying, guardians of all individuals involved will be notified.

Closing the Complaint: At the close of an investigation, School staff will promptly provide notice to the parent/guardian of the victim and perpetrator about whether the complaint was substantiated and, if substantiated, what action is being taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation. Specific information about disciplinary action taken will not be released to the victim's guardians—unless it involves a "stay away" or other directive that the victim must be aware of to report violations. The principal or designee shall inform the parent or guardian of the victim 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.

The district will retain a report of the complaint, containing the name of the complainant, the date of the complaint, investigator, school, a brief statement of the complaint's nature, the outcome of the investigation, and the action taken.

c. Problem Resolution System

Manchester Essex Regional Schools have a range of individualized strategies and interventions that may be used in response to remediate a student's social skills or to prevent further incidences of bullying and/or retaliation.

1. Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skill Building

Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the district use a range of

MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Revised 2024

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 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 non-academic positive behavioral supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals
- meeting with 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

2. Taking Disciplinary Action

If the principal (or designee) decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be based on the facts found during the investigation, 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 MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, the school’s code of conduct as outlined in the student handbook and applicable state and federal law. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), and state laws govern discipline procedures for students with disabilities. 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 Victim and Others

The principal (or designee) will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the victims and others' sense of safety. If appropriate, within a reasonable time period following the complaint's closure, the administrative staff or designee will contact the victim to determine if the prohibited conduct has recurred.

REPRISAL: The school will discipline or take appropriate action against any student, teacher, administrator, or school employee who retaliates against any person who reports an alleged violation of this policy or any person who testifies, assists, or participates in an investigation, or who testifies, assists, or participates in a proceeding or hearing relating to such harassment. Retaliation includes any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment.

4. Collaboration with Families:

The MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan includes strategies to engage and collaborate with students' families to increase the capacity of our schools and district to prevent and respond to bullying. Communication with families is necessary for effective collaboration.

The district will collaborate with School Councils and parent organizations to offer resources, information, and programs to guardians on the family components of the anti-bullying and/or social skills curricula used by the district along with online safety and cyberbullying. The district will post the MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and related information on its website.

5. Prohibition Against Bullying and Retaliation:

The Manchester Essex Regional Schools absolutely prohibits bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation as defined above. Students who engage in bullying or retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action, however, disciplinary action taken must balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. The range of disciplinary action includes one or more of the following: verbal, written, reprimands, detentions, short-term or long-term suspensions subject to applicable procedural requirements. Nothing in this plan is intended to prevent the school administration and/or school committee from taking disciplinary action against a student for conduct that does not meet the definition of bullying or cyber-bullying, as defined above, but nevertheless is inappropriate for the school environment.

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

V. DEFINITIONS

Perpetrator is a student or a member of the school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71, s. 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students or 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 victim that:

- causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property
- places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his 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, as defined in M.G.L. c.71, s. 37O, is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but 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. Cyber-bullying also includes:

- the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person
- 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 above in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying
- 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 above in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying may include conduct such as sending derogatory, harassing, or threatening email messages, instant messages, or text messages; creating websites that ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate others; and posting on websites or disseminating embarrassing or inappropriate pictures or images of others

Hostile Environment, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, s. 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 person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Victim is a student against whom bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Corrective Action Upon completion of an investigation and substantiation of the complaint, the school will take
MERSD Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Revised 2024

appropriate corrective action. Such action may include an apology, direction to stop the offensive behavior, counseling, warning, detention, suspension, expulsion.

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, gender identity, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in this Plan prevents the school or district from remediating 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 this 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 the Plan covers the behavior.