

FOUR RIVERS BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

The Massachusetts legislature has passed a new law calling on all schools to try to prevent bullying, as reflected in the definitions, the policy, and the prevention plan below. If there are any changes or clarifications to this new law that affect our policy, you will be notified through an Addendum in writing delivered in October.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is the policy of Four Rivers Public Charter School to provide a learning and working environment for students, employees and visitors free from bullying.

We all - students, teachers, administrators, and parents - share the *responsibility* of maintaining a safe school community. We all deserve to work in an environment in which we can feel safe and free from distraction in the pursuit of learning and teaching. This means treating each other with *respect* and *compassion* and sometimes making amends when we make mistakes. It also means that we sometimes need to have the *courage* to speak up when others are doing things that affect our community negatively.

In a community, every individual matters and needs to feel he or she has a place and can thrive. The one guiding rule – You are free to act as you wish, as long as your behavior does not cause any problems for someone else – was created to recognize that while we all bring unique traits, abilities and talents to Four Rivers, we all share the *responsibility* for making our school a safe and productive place.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. “Bullying” is the repeated use by one or more students or employees of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim’s property;
- (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to him or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
- (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process, orderly operation of a school or the working environment at a school.

B. “Cyber-bully” 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. Cyber-bullying shall also include:

- (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identify of another person; or
- (ii) 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 definition of bullying;
- (iii) the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or 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 definition of bullying.

Cyber-bullying scenarios

- A. Student uses school owned computer
 - i. Discipline can be imposed in accordance with published handbook policy.
 - ii. A student has reduced expectations of privacy when using school property.

- B. Student uses his/her own electronic device (i.e. cell phone or laptop) but sends message while on school property or at a school sponsored event:
 - i. Discipline can be imposed in accordance with published handbook policy.
 - ii.  L. c. 71 § 370(b) prohibits bullying “on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds.”
- C. Student uses his/her own device while not at school or a school sponsored event
 - i. Discipline can be imposed if the action “creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or orderly operations of a school.” c. 71 § 370(b)
- C. Hostile environment: 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 the student’s education.
- D. Perpetrator: A student who engages in bullying or retaliation.
- E. Target: A student against whom bullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.
- F. 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.

III. POLICY

- A. Bullying is hereby prohibited by Four Rivers Public Charter School:
 - 1. on school grounds, 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 the school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the school; and,
 - 2. at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related, or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned leased or used by the school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process, the orderly operation of the school or the working environment.
- B. Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is hereby prohibited.
- C. False accusations of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action.
- D. This policy does not require Four Rivers Public Charter School to staff any non-school related activities, functions or programs.

IV. BULLYING PREVENTION PLAN

A. REPORTING

- 1. Any staff including but not limited to an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extra curricular activity or paraprofessional **shall immediately** report any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member has witnessed or become aware of to the Dean of Students.
- 2. Any student, parent, guardian or other interested person may report any bullying or suspected bullying to the Dean of Students as soon as reasonably possible. If possible, reports should be in writing but there is no requirement that they be written. Reports may also be submitted to an advisor or a teacher, the school nurse, or the Principal.

3. If an instance of bullying is reported to a staff member other than the Principal or Dean of Students, the staff member **shall immediately** inform the Dean of Students.
4. The Dean of Students, who is in charge of receiving complaints, should keep accurate documentation of all complaints received.
5. The Dean of Students should document the following:
 - a. the name of the complainant;
 - b. the status of the complainant (i.e. student, staff, third party);
 - c. the name of the alleged bully;
 - d. the date the complaint was received;
 - e. how the complaint was received (i.e., written, oral);
 - f. the nature of the complaint (i.e. facts of the complaint); and
 - g. the names of witnesses.
6. Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made anonymously; provided, however, that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.
7. Please note that a  individual who knowingly makes a false report will be subject to disciplinary action.

B. INVESTIGATION

- a. The Dean of Students should conduct an investigation within 24 to 48 hours of the complaint, if possible.
 - b. The Dean of Students should ask all appropriate questions of the complainant in order to get the full story.
 - a. who, what, when, where, how;
 - b. is there any physical evidence (documents, texts, voicemail);
 - c. effect of bullying - what will restore the complainant's sense of safety; and
 - d. assess the complainant's need for protection and if needed determine what form the protection should take.
 - c. The Dean of Students shall notify the parents or guardians of the alleged bully and the victim.
 - d. The Dean of Students should caution all witnesses and the alleged bully that retaliation is also a violation of school policy.
 - e. The Dean of Students should interview the alleged bully and fairly warn him/her that the conduct will, if appropriate, be reported to local law enforcement.
6. The Dean of Students should interview witnesses.
7. The Dean of Students should establish the following:
 - a. if the alleged bullying occurred;
 - b. when the alleged bullying occurred;
 - b. how frequently the alleged bullying occurred; and
 - c. specific facts about the type and severity of the alleged bullying;
 - d. if the bullying has affected the complainant;
 - e. what action will restore the complainant's sense of safety;
 - f. is the complainant in need of protection and if so what type;
 - g. what professional services are appropriate to recommend or require; and,
 - h. is notification to local law enforcement required.

C. DECISION

1. Based upon a thorough investigation, the Dean of Students shall make a decision that is appropriate for all parties concerning whether bullying occurred and if so what is the appropriate

remedy including discipline of the perpetrator, appropriate educational and counseling remedies and protection of the complainant.

2. Depending on the circumstances of the case, if it is determined that bullying has occurred the Dean of Students may discipline the offending party by ordering:
 - a. counseling;
 - b. schedule or class change;
 - c. stay away order;
 - d. an educational component;
 - e. a verbal warning;
 - f. a written warning;
 - g. suspension;
 - h. expulsion, or;
 - i. any other consequence deemed appropriate by the Dean of Students.
3. The Dean of Students shall notify local law enforcement if he/she believes that criminal charges may be pursued against the alleged perpetrator.
4. Any discipline should be viewed in the light of balancing accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior.
5. If the incident involves students from more than one school, the school first informed of the bullying or retaliation shall, consistent with state and federal law, promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school or schools. If an incident of bullying or retaliation occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21, the school shall inform local law enforcement when appropriate and consistent with this policy.
6. The Dean of Students should confer with the complainant and his/her parents to explain the action being taken including what if any actions are being taken to create a sense of safety for the complainant, and implementation of any protection plans and to make counseling referrals if appropriate.
7. The Dean of Students shall confer with the alleged perpetrator and his/her parents. The Dean of Students shall explain the discipline if any, make any counseling referral, explain plans for creating a sense of safety for the complainant, explain any protection plans and reiterate any retaliation by alleged perpetrator or family/friends may subject the offender to further discipline up to and including expulsion.
8. The Dean of Students should follow-up on this decision in order to ensure that his/her recommendation has been put into effect.

D. BULLYING PREVENTION PLAN – EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This bullying prevention plan shall be developed and updated biennially in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents and guardians. There shall be notice of the consultation and a public comment period.

1. **SPECIFIC BULLYING PREVENTION APPROACHES:** Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:
 - a. using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
 - b. 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;
 - c. helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
 - d. emphasizing cybersafety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;

- e. enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and
 - f. engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference.
 2. 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:
 - a. setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
 - b. creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, including for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students;
 - c. using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
 - d. using positive behavioral supports;
 - e. encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
 - f. modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
 - g. 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;
 - h. using the Internet safely; and
 - i. supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.
 3. There are several additional ways that the school works with students to prevent bullying:
 - a. CREW: Crews devote time each year to discussing the importance of the school-wide character virtues -- Respect, Responsibility, Courage, Compassion, Perseverance and Integrity -- in both personal development and in keeping our community safe and productive.
 - b. WELLNESS CLASS: Additionally, the Wellness curriculum contains units on Conflict Resolution in 7th grade, Bullying in 8th grade and covers bullying in its Decision-Making units in 9th and 10th grades. Through parent workshops sponsored by the Family Council, there is further discussion of the dynamics of bullying, online safety and cyber-bullying, and how parents and guardians can reinforce the curriculum at home; and
 - c. COMMUNITY BUILDING: The school also conducts school-wide events each year – Social Justice Day in November and a Film Festival highlighting one of our character virtues in February -- that allow students to work in both their Crews and cross-grade groups to address different aspects of maintaining a safe community.
 - d. TEACHING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR THROUGH SKILLS-BUILDING: Skill-building may include:
 - i. offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's anti-bullying curricula;
 - ii. providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with the School Psychologist or Wellness Advocate;
 - iii. implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals;
 - iv. meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home;
 - v. adopting behavior plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills; and
 - vi. making a referral for evaluation.
 4. There will be ongoing professional development to build skills of all staff members, including but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities and paraprofessionals to prevent, identify and respond to bullying.

- a. Professional development shall include:
 - b. developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents;
 - c. developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
 - d. information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, victim and witnesses to the bullying;
 - e. 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;
 - f. information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying; and
 - g. internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying.
5. There shall be age appropriate instruction on bullying prevention in each grade incorporated into the curriculum. This curriculum shall be evidence based.
- f. Parents and guardians shall be informed about the bullying prevention curriculum of the school, specifically:
- a. how parents and guardians can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school and school plan;
 - b. dynamics of bullying; and,
 - c. online safety and cyber-bullying.
- g. The school shall provide to students and parents or guardians, in age-appropriate terms and in the languages which are most prevalent among the students, parents, or guardians, annual written notice of the student related sections of the plan.
- h. 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 by the school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the Family Council.
- i. The school shall provide annual written notice of the plan to all staff.
- j. All staff shall be trained and provision for faculty and staff duties shall be included in the school employee handbook.
- k. The Plan shall be posted on the website for the school.
- l. The Dean of Students shall be responsible for the implementation and oversight of the plan.