

## **BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION POLICY**

### **District Overview**

The Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District recognizes that safe learning environments are necessary for students to learn and achieve high academic standards. The District strives to provide and maintain safe learning and working environments for all students and all employees. It is the conviction of educators that all students have the right to participate confidently and fully in learning activities, both in and out of school, and contribute meaningfully to society by learning in a community culture where individual and developmental differences are acknowledged, appreciated, and respected.

We are 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.

We understand that members of certain student groups, such as students with disabilities, students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and homeless students may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing. The school 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, cyberbullying, or retaliation in our school buildings, on school grounds, or during school-related activities. We 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. 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.

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying, and we are committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. The principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan.

## **Program Components**

1. Prevention Team: Responsible for the systematic tracking, monitoring and evaluation of the school based bullying prevention program with special emphasis on analyzing incidents for systemic intervention.
  - Team Members will consist of members of the SST (Student Study Team), School Nurse, Dean's office, Guidance staff, School Psychologist, Support Services staff, and any others identified by the Principal.
  - Designated SST meetings for bullying prevention will occur twice a year.
  - SST will meet weekly to provide follow up.
2. Policy and procedures will be distributed to all students, parents, faculty, and staff (student handbook, annual written notice, website, employee handbook, etc.).
3. The Superintendent and School Committee will be provided with assurance of the compliance with this Policy, and the prevention team will submit a copy of the bullying prevention and intervention procedures adopted.
4. Monitor and review the effectiveness of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Procedures annually.
5. By June of each year, a brief annual summary will be submitted to the Superintendent regarding the implementation of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy with recommendations for enhancements and/or improvements.
6. The Superintendent or designated representative has operational responsibility for the implementation of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy.

## **Prohibition against Bullying and Retaliation**

Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District and Shawsheen Valley Technical High School prohibit the act of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation related to bullying:

- 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 the school district; or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by the 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, witnesses bullying, or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, 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:

- 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.

May also include:

- Perpetuating bullying by inciting, soliciting, or coercing an individual or group to demean, dehumanize, embarrass, or cause emotional, psychological, or physical harm to another student, school employee, or school volunteer.

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. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O for the legal definition of cyberbullying.

## **Procedures and Guidelines for Reporting and Responding**

*These policies and procedures will ensure that members of the school community—student, parents, and staff—know what will happen when incidents of bullying occur.*

### **Annual Notice**

At the beginning of each school year, Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District will provide administrators, staff, students, and parents or guardians, with written notice of its policies for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the name and contact information of the principal or designee, will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks, on the school or district website, and in information about the plan that is made available to parents or guardians. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, and 603 CMR 49.00.

### **Reporting Bullying or Retaliation**

A culture of openness is considered the most effective means for countering this behavior. It is the responsibility of each member of the school community—students, staff and parents to report instances of bullying or suspicions of bullying, with the understanding that such reports will be listened to and taken seriously.

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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. A school or district staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously.

**Anonymous Reports may be made to:**

Dean of Students  
Shawsheen Valley Technical High School  
100 Cook Street,  
Billerica MA 01821  
(978) 671-3638

**Form Requirements**

Though the use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report, Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District will:

- 1) include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning-of-the-year packets for students and parents or guardians;
- 2) make it available in the school's main office, the Guidance office, the school nurse's office;
- 3) post it on the school's website.

The Incident Reporting Form will be made available in the most prevalent language(s) of origin of students and parents or guardians.

**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. This includes custodians, cafeteria workers, and coaches. 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 school or district policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

**Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others**

Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District expects students, parents or 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 or 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.

## **Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation**

### **Safety**

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal or designee 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.

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.

Responses to promote safety 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;
- altering the aggressor’s schedule and access to the target;
- steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

### **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 or guardians of the target and the aggressor. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation.
- b. 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 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 he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor.
- c. Notice to relevant staff/services In compliance with policies and procedures of the district, if the principal or his/her designee finds it appropriate, staff or referral agencies will be informed.

### **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 allegation(s)

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and the ages of the students involved. The administration will make a determination as to the nature of the incident (bullying v. peer conflict). Once determined, an investigation and outreach to the target and family will occur concurrently with a commitment to addressing the needs of the target, identifying and educating bystanders, and providing consequences for aggressors.

During the investigation the principal or designee will:

- Interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary;
- Remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action;
- Maintain confidentiality during the investigative process to the extent practicable;
- Maintain a written record of the investigation;
- If necessary, consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

Intent of Investigation:

- Determine the nature, frequency, and severity of the presenting situation;
- Identify aggressor(s), target(s), and bystanders;
- Provide a safety and comfort plan for the target(s);
- Identify whether or not the bullying has occurred on or off campus;
- Collect and document data.

**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. Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action.

The principal or designee will:

- Determine what remedial action is required, if any, and
- Determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.
- Promptly notify the parents or 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 in compliance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations.
- May **NOT** report disciplinary action taken to the target's parent or guardian in compliance with student record confidentiality UNLESS it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must have knowledge about in order to report violations.
- May consult with teachers and counselors.

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

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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.

### **Response/Consequences**

Consequences for bullying should be immediately and consistently applied and must be delivered in a non-hostile manner. Consequences should be disagreeable or uncomfortable but should not involve revenge or hostile punishment.

#### **Consequences should take into consideration:**

- Nature, severity, and number of occurrence(s) of the behavioral impact on the target
- Degree of physical, psychological, and social harm on the target
- Student's age, development and degree of maturity
- Surrounding circumstances and context in which the incident(s) occurred
- Prior disciplinary history and continuing patterns of behavior
- Relationship between and among the parties involved
- Context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred

**Consequences:** Upon the principal or designee determining 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). The district response may take on two forms: instruction in appropriate behavior and skill building and/or disciplinary.

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

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's anti-bullying curricula;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students in consultation with guidance 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; and
- making a referral for evaluation.
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**Disciplinary Action** (with considerations mentioned above and Shawsheen's code of conduct policy)

- Verbal reprimand
- Temporary removal from the classroom
- Loss of privileges, including before and after school activities
- Notice to parent

- Supervised lunch, classroom transition, etc.
- Detention
- Suspension
- Reassignment of seats in lunch, bus, class, etc.
- Reassignment of classes
- Referral to an outside agency
- Reassignment to another school or another mode of transportation
- Expulsion
- Report to law enforcement

Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation may be subject to disciplinary action:

- Verbal reprimand
- Temporary removal from the classroom
- Loss of privileges, including before and after school activities
- Notice to parent
- Detention
- Suspension
- Referral too an outside agency
- Expulsion
- Report to law enforcement

Students with Disabilities: Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District will adhere to federal and state laws governing disciplinary action and students with disabilities including but not limited to those outlined by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)*.

### **Collaboration and Interaction with Families**

#### **Information**

Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District will engage and collaborate with families of the students to increase the capacity of the school to respond and prevent bullying activities. This includes information regarding the bullying prevention plan, intervention program and

- how parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan;
- the dynamics of bullying; and
- online safety and cyberbullying.

Parents and guardians will be notified in writing each year about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. We will translate into languages most accessible to the parents and guardians.

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## **Parent Education and Resources**

Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District 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 that includes how parents can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school plan, the dynamics of bullying, and online safety and cyberbullying. Shawsheen will post the comprehensive plan on its website (shawsheentech.org).

## **Resources and Service**

- A. Identifying resources. Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocation Technical School District will conduct a review of current staffing and programs that support the creation of positive school environments by focusing on early interventions and intensive services. These resources will be incorporated into the notifications for services and integrated into health, safety, and counseling curricula.
- B. Counseling and other services. Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District works closely with the District Attorney's office and other regional organizations providing safety and student support programs and services. We will continue to employ a social worker as part of the full-time staff to assist the Dean's office in outreach and support for students. Student referrals for community support will occur through the Student Study Team, and by individual members of the student support staff including but not limited to the school psychologist, guidance, nurse, dean and administrative staff. The members of the SST will develop safety plans for students who have been targets of bullying or retaliation, providing social skills programs to prevent bullying, and offering education and/or intervention services for students exhibiting bullying behaviors.
- 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 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. There is a referral protocol for referring students and families to outside services. Clear protocols will help students and families access appropriate and timely services. Referrals must comply with relevant laws and policies.

## **Bullying Prevention Instruction**

*Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District will provide age-appropriate evidence-based instruction on bullying prevention in each grade that is incorporated into the school's curricula. Effective instruction will include classroom approaches, whole school initiatives, and focused strategies for bullying prevention and social skills development.*

- A. 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 cyberbullying, 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.

Initiatives will also teach students about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

- 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, including students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students without regard to legal status;
  - 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; and
  - supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

### **Building Supervision**

Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District will provide supervision of non-classroom areas such as corridors, lunch rooms and other spaces. This supervision formally occurs through the employment of hall monitors before school and assigned staff to all lunch activities. Additionally, staff will observe open spaces during class changes and after school. The Dean's office will monitor the open spaces throughout the day.

This monitoring will:

- A. Determine “hot spots” that bullying may be more likely to occur;
- B. Consider ways of keeping certain groups of students apart during transitions, or building positive collaborations between older and younger students.
- C. Identify staffing or monitoring of these spaces.

### **Professional Development**

The District will provide a combined bullying prevention and intervention training each year for all employees to help them identify and respond to bullying, teasing and harassment. Continual on-going coaching for administrators will be provided to enhance the skill set of teachers and staff. In addition, schools are encouraged to offer education to parents about bullying prevention. This requires a common language to be presented.

- A. Annual staff training on the Plan. Annual training for all school staff on the Plan 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 or 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 two years.
- B. Ongoing professional development. The goal of 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, § 37O, the content of schoolwide and districtwide professional development 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 an aggressor, target, 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.

Additional areas identified by the school or district for professional development includes:

- 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;
- 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; and
- maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.

C. Written notice to staff. Shawsheen 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.

### **Definitions**

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

Perpetrator, a student 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 who engages in bullying 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:

- 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.

May also include:

- Perpetuating bullying by inciting, soliciting or coercing an individual or group to demean, dehumanize, embarrass or cause emotional, psychological or physical harm to another student, school employee, or school volunteer.

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. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O for the legal definition of cyberbullying.

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, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

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

### **Relationship to Other Laws**

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School 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, gender, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in the Plan prevents the 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 Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of the 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.