Bellingham Public Schools

DISTRICT BULLYING POLICY

The Bellingham Public Schools are committed to maintaining a school environment free of bullying. Bullying of students by other students will not be tolerated by the Bellingham Public Schools. This is enforced while students are on school grounds or property within the jurisdiction of the School District such as on school buses, or attending or engaging in school-related activities. It will also be enforced in situations where bullying occurs at non-school related locations or through non school technology if the bullying affects the school environment.

Each student of Bellingham Public Schools is personally responsible for ensuring that his/her conduct is not intimidating to any other student. Students exhibiting intimidating behavior are required to cooperate in any investigation of alleged bullying if requested to do so by the person conducting the investigation. Any individual who prevents or attempts to prevent an individual from making a complaint of bullying or fails to cooperate with, or interferes in any way with the investigation of such a complaint will be subject to disciplinary action.

Bullying Prohibited: It is a violation for anyone, including another student, to bully or intimidate a student through conduct or communication as defined below.

Definition of Bullying: Bullying is defined as the severe or repeated use of a written, verbal, or electronic communication, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, by one or more students directed at another student that has the effect of:

- causing physical or emotional harm to the other student or damage to his or her property;
- placing the other student in reasonable fear of harm to him or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- creating a hostile environment at school for the bullied student;
- infringing on the rights of the other student at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupting the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic means.

Bullying may include indirect, direct and repetitive:

- tripping
- hitting
- shoving
- spitting
- punching
- pinching
- blocking an entrance/exit or passageway
- excluding or leaving others out
- spreading hurtful or untrue stories
- abusive name-calling
- harassment

- threats or trying to scare someone

- threats to control another student or their friendship with someone else

- disrespect for a student's family members

- disrespect for the property of others

What constitutes bullying is determined by the perspective of a reasonable person being made fearful. Therefore, students should consider how their behavior might reasonably be viewed by other individuals. It is also important for students to make it clear to others when a particular behavior or communication is unwelcome, intimidating, hostile or offensive.

What Bullying is Not:
It is equally important for all members of the school community to understand that conflict is not automatically synonymous with bullying. Arguing, bantering back-and-forth, ignoring, roughhousing and fighting, while potentially serious forms of conflict, are not necessarily instances of bullying. Bullying is characterized by intention, repetition and a power imbalance. Not every conflict meets these criteria.

Reporting Bullying:
Students who witness bullying are strongly encouraged to report incidents to a teacher, administrator, or guidance counselor. An administrator will investigate all reports and make a determination regarding steps to be taken. Students involved in bullying may be asked to participate in mediation and/or to meet regularly with a guidance counselor or administrator. Many consequences for bullying may include disciplinary action and/or referral to the Bellingham Police Department. Knowingly or intentionally making false accusations about bullying will result in disciplinary action.

Bullying and Retaliation Prohibited:
Bullying in any form or for any reason is absolutely forbidden. In addition, retaliation against a student who has brought a bullying complaint to the attention of the School District or who has cooperated in an investigation of a complaint under this policy is also prohibited and will not be tolerated by the Bellingham Public Schools.

Students whose behavior is found to be in violation will be subject to disciplinary action which may include detention, suspension and police notification.

All students are responsible for adhering to the current rules and regulations set forth by the state of Massachusetts.

Adoption

This Bullying Policy was adopted by the Bellingham School Committee at a public meeting, following normal public notice on May 25, 2010.