

# Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School

## Bullying and Intervention Plan

### Table of Contents

Statement from the Old Colony School Administration & School Committee	2
Definitions	3
I. Leadership	4
II. Training & Professional Development	5
III. Access to Resources & Services	6
IV. Academic & Non-Academic Activities	7
V. Policies & Procedures for Reporting & Responding to Bullying & Retaliation	9
VI. Prohibition Against Bullying and Retaliation	12
VII. Problem Resolution System	13

## Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

*The Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School (OC) is committed to providing our students with equal educational opportunities and a safe learning environment 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 expect that all members of the OC community will treat each other in a civil manner and with a respect for differences.*

*We recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics.*

*Old Colony will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will promptly investigate 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.*

## Definitions

*Several of the following definitions are copied directly from M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, as noted below. Schools or districts may add specific language to these definitions to clarify them, but may not alter their meaning or scope. Plans may also include additional definitions that are aligned with local policies and procedures.*

Aggressor is a student or a member of a school staff who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation towards a student.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students or a member of a school staff of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

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

Bystander means others who are within the visual and/or verbal range of an act of bullying. They can encourage or discourage bullying.

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.

School Staff includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

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

## **I. Leadership**

### **A. Public involvement in developing the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (hereby called The Plan)**

As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, this Plan was developed in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents, and guardians. Notice and a public comment period were provided before The Plan was adopted by the School Committee.

### **B. Assessing needs and resources**

This Plan is intended to serve as a blueprint for enhancing the District's capacity to prevent and respond to instances of bullying within the context of other healthy school climate initiatives. As part of the planning process, the District, with input from families and staff, will continuously assess the adequacy of our existing programs, review our current policies and procedures, analyze the available data on bullying and behavioral incidents, and assess the available resources including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services.

At least once every four years, the district will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary-developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our school. Additionally, the school or district will annually report bullying incident data to the Department.

### **C. Planning and oversight**

#### Responsibilities of Principal or designee

1. receiving reports on bullying
2. collecting and analyzing building- and/or school-wide data on bullying to assess the present problem and to measure improved outcomes
3. planning supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors
4. choosing and implementing the curricula that the school will use
5. amending student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct to, among other things, make clear that bullying of students by school staff or other students will not be tolerated
6. leading the parent or family engagement efforts and drafting parent information materials
7. creating a process for recording and tracking incident reports, and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors
8. planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law
9. developing new or revising current policies and protocols under The Plan, including an Internet safety policy, and designating key staff to be in charge of implementation of them
10. reviewing and updating The Plan each year, or more frequently

## **II. Training and Professional Development**

### **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 school wide and district wide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:

- developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- 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;
- information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- 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 include:**

- 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;
- maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students; and
- engaging staff and those responsible for the implementation and oversight of The Plan to distinguish between acceptable managerial behaviors designed to correct misconduct, instill accountability in the school setting, etc and bullying behaviors

### **C. Written notice to staff**

The school or district will provide all staff with an annual written notice of The Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties and bullying of students by school staff, in the school or district employee handbook and the code of conduct.

## **III. Access to Resources and Services**

Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School is committed to supporting the emotional needs of students and staff. This Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan includes resources and services designed to meet these needs and enhance the district's capacity to effectively prevent, intervene, and respond to bullying. Available services reflect an understanding of the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets and student aggressors. District resources and services include protocols for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for student targets, aggressors, and family members of those students.

### **A. Identifying Resources**

As part of the yearly assessment of needs and the financial resources needed, the principal - with the assistance of assistant principal(s) and school counselors - will assess the capacity of the school to provide services for targets, aggressors, and their families.

### **B. Counseling and Other Services**

Old Colony has a **Student Support Team** comprised of:

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Special Services Director
- School Guidance Counselors
- Nurse
- and other support personnel

Additional personnel who routinely support students in need include:

- Special Education Teachers and support personnel
- School Resource Officer in collaboration with the police department
- Health/Wellness Teachers and Coaches

School counselors meet with parents and teachers as needed to collaboratively address students' academic, emotional and behavioral concerns. The district provides linguistically appropriate resources to identified families. The staff maintains up-to-date information on community-based mental health referrals, outside agencies and services for Medicaid eligible students. School counselors, school psychologists and intensive special needs educators work collaboratively to develop behavior plans and provide social skills groups for students. They also work to support parents, conduct parent workshops and inform parents of outside resources to enhance parenting skills and provide for the needs of children.

**A. Students with Disabilities**

As required by M.G.L. c. 71B, par.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 the social emotional skill development implications for the IEP.

**B. Referral to Outside Services**

School adjustment counselors use established protocols when making referrals to outside agencies. These individuals maintain a list of outside agencies and services available for students and families. Parents/Guardians should contact these personnel at their child's school to obtain assistance and/or a referral to an outside agency. Referrals comply with relevant laws and policies. Current local referral protocols are evaluated to assess their relevance to The Plan, and revised as needed.

**IV. Academic and Non-Academic Activities**

The Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School community is committed to creating and maintaining a positive and proactive school environment, which promotes our core value of community, integrity, professionalism and respect. Effective instruction includes 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 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 cybersafety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- an emphasis on three guiding questions to evaluate decisions:
  1. Is it kind?
  2. Is it honest?
  3. Will it improve the situation?
- 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. Relevant components of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be shared with students annually.

The OCRVTHS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be shared and explained with students through school assemblies and/or small group meetings.

#### **A. 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 of all races and religions, students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, and homeless students using developmentally appropriate language;
- communicating with parents and guardians regarding the school's goals and expectations for students and students' safety;
- 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 three guiding questions (identified in Section IVA);
- using the internet safely; and
- supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly, in their areas of strength.

## **V. Policies and Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Bullying and Retaliation**

### **A. Reporting Bullying or Retaliation**

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 using the following online form: [Incident Report](#). Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. The incident report form is also available in the main office.

#### **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. 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; but in all instances reports must be made to the Principal or designee

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

The school or 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.

#### **Reporting to Administrator of Another School District or School**

If an incident of bullying or retaliation involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private day or residential school or collaborative school and Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School is the first to be informed of the bullying or retaliation, then the Superintendent of Old Colony or designee must, consistent with state and federal law, promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school district or school so that both may take appropriate action. In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with The Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate.

## **B. 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. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; 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; and altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target.

The principal or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary. 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. The principal/designee will inform the perpetrator and parents/guardians and anyone else involved in the investigation that any form of retaliation perpetrated against any of the above mentioned parties or persons will be dealt with through the school discipline code as harassment and the local police department will be informed.

### **C. Investigation**

The principal or designee will promptly investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved. During the investigation the principal or designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. Interviews may be conducted by the principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the principal or designee as appropriate. To the extent practicable, and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the principal or designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation. Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with school or district policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, the principal or designee will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

### **D. 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.

The principal or designee will:

- 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and
- 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the principal or designee may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s), school psychologist/social worker/high school guidance counselor and the target's or aggressor's parents or 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. The principal or designee will 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. All notice to parents must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the principal or designee cannot report specific information to the target's parent or guardian about the disciplinary action taken, unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

## **A. Responses to Bullying**

### **1. Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-building**

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, par. 370(d)(v). Skill-building approaches that the principal or designee may consider include:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's/district's anti-bullying curriculum;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with appropriate school personnel;
- implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand prosocial 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.

### **2. Taking disciplinary Action**

If the principal or designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the principal or designee, 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 Plan and with the school's or district's code of conduct.

Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which should be read in cooperation with state laws regarding student discipline.

If the principal or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, the student may be subject to disciplinary action.

### **3. Promoting Safety for the Target and Others**

The principal or designee will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of others as well. One strategy that the principal or designee may use is to increase adult supervision at transition times and in locations where bullying is known to have occurred or is likely to occur.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the principal or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the principal or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

## **VI. Prohibition Against Bullying And Retaliation<sup>1</sup>**

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited:

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

As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Mass General Law - ***M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O(b)***

## VII. Problem Resolution System<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>2</sup> *Mass General Law: Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014 amended Section 37O of chapter 71 of the General Laws to include (g) (v) regarding parent notification of parent resolution*