

# VENERINI ACADEMY

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## Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan



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## A. INTRODUCTION

The Diocese of Worcester (“Diocese”) and the Catholic Schools Office (“CSO”) believe that each Catholic school in the Diocese of Worcester must be aware that its purpose is rooted in the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church. Each Catholic school, in fulfilling its role within the educational mission of the Church, must share and live out, through Catholic Christian tradition, the message of Jesus Christ and be committed to providing an integrated Catholic educational environment that permeates all aspects of its daily life and operations.

Each child should be challenged to love God with all heart, strength, mind and body and to love neighbor as self and through this process reach his/her full potential, develop a love of learning in an environment that fosters respect and understanding of one another. *It is essential that a safe, positive and productive educational environment be established where students can achieve the highest academic standards and where no student shall be subjected to Bullying, Cyber-Bullying or Retaliation.* Bullying, Cyber-Bullying or Retaliation or other like disruptive or violent behaviors constitute conduct that disrupts both a student’s ability to learn and a school’s ability to educate its students in a safe and embracing environment. Pastors, principals, faculty, Staff and volunteers are expected to demand that all students behave appropriately and treat others with civility and respect. Bullying, Cyber-Bullying and Retaliation are not to be tolerated.

Based upon the model Bully Prevention and Intervention Plan required under M.G.L. c. 71, & 370 and drafted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in consultation with state agencies, school personnel, advocacy organizations, and other interested parties, the following Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan for Milford Catholic Elementary School is the proposed plan to effectively address bullying in our community while actively engaging our community as partners in effectively responding to bullying.

“Harassment”, including “Bullying”, and “Cyber-bullying”, means a repeated\* unwelcome written, electronic, verbal, or physical communication, act or gesture which: reasonably causes a student to feel coerced, intimidated, harassed, or threatened and may cause: a reasonable person to suffer physical or emotional harm, damage to a student’s property, or a disruptive or hostile school environment. The behavior must interfere with a student’s academic performance or ability to learn, to participate in or benefit from services, activities, or privileges. (\*Repeated is defined as three or more occasions.)

The new law requires all school districts, charter schools, non-public schools, approved private special education day or residential schools, and collaborative schools to develop and adopt bullying prevention and intervention plans. Plans must meet the requirements of the law and should follow local policies and procedures. This public process will strengthen the collaborative approach that is required to build successful prevention and intervention programs.

Dealing with bullying in schools is a delicate and challenging situation. Sometimes children will continue to bully, even after being warned or disciplined and getting children that are victims of bullying to report it, is an even greater challenge. School systems can prevent bullying by not only having a written policy but by actually consistently enforcing their policy. Preventing and dealing with bullying today is complex and requires a collaborative effort from various professionals to address it. Because of the complexities associated with bullying, we will always need more clarification on certain issues when developing a policy of this nature.

## **B. PRIORITY STATEMENT**

The school expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences. The school is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (“Plan”) is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The school is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. The school 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 during school-related activities. The school will promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target’s sense of safety.

## **C. ASSESSING NEEDS AND RESOURCES**

This Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (“Plan”) is the Diocese of Worcester’s blueprint for enhancing capacity to prevent and respond to issues of bullying within the context of other healthy school climate initiatives. As part of the planning process, *each* school leader, with input from families and staff, will assess the adequacy of current programs; review current policies and procedures; review available data on bullying and behavioral incidents; and assess available resources including curricula, training programs, and behavioral health services.

## **D. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **1. Written Notice to Staff**

*Each* school 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 handbook, and the code of conduct.

## **E. ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES**

Each school is required to provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention. Effective instruction may include classroom approaches, whole school initiatives, and focused strategies for bullying prevention and social skills development.

## **F. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION**

### **1. 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 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. The school or district will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including an Incident Reporting Form.

Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. The school 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; and (3) post it on the school's website.

At the beginning of school year, individual schools will provide their community, including 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, will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks.

**a) Reporting by Staff**

A staff member will report immediately to the principal when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report to the principal does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

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

The school 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. 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, the principal, or designee.

**2. Responding to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation**

**a) Safety**

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

**b) Obligations to Notify Others**

**i. Notice to Parents or Guardians**

Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor of this, and of the procedures for

responding to it. There may be circumstances in which the principal contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation.

ii. Notice to Another School or District

If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the principal first informed of the incident will promptly notify, by telephone, the principal or designee of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action.

iii. 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. Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of twenty one 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.

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.

**3. 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 allegations(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 will remind the alleged aggressor, victim, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the principal or designee, or other staff members as determined by the principal or designee. 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. When necessary, the principal will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

**4. Determinations**

The principal 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); 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.

#### **5. Disciplinary Action**

If the principal decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the principal, 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.

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

The principal 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 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 will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

### **G. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

Effective plans will include strategies to engage and collaborate with students' families in order to increase the capacity of the school or district to prevent and respond to bullying. Resources for families and communication with them are essential aspects of effective collaboration. The law requires the district or school "Plan" to include provisions for informing parents or guardians about the bullying prevention and intervention curricula used by the school district or school including: (1) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curricula at home and support the school or district plan; (2) the dynamics of bullying; and (3) online safety and cyber-bullying. Parents and guardians must also be notified in writing each year about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

#### **1. Parent Education and Resources**

Each school will offer an education program for parents and guardians that is focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula used by the school or district.

## 2. Notification Requirements

All schools will notify parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying programs. This information may be found in each school's Handbook or Website the dynamics of bullying, including cyber-bullying and online safety.

## H. PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

The law requires each "Plan" to include a statement prohibiting bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The statement must be included in the "Plan" and included in the student code of conduct, the student handbook, and the staff handbook. The following statement is incorporated directly from M.G.L. c. 71, & 370(b), and describes the law's requirements for the prohibition of bullying. Acts of bullying, which include cyber-bullying, are prohibited:

- 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 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, & 370, nothing in this "Plan" requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

## I. DEFINITIONS

- **Aggressor** is a student who engages in bullying, cyber bullying, or retaliation.
- **Bullying**, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, 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:
  - 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.
- **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, § 370 for the legal definition of cyber bullying.

- **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 to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.
- **Target** is a student against whom bullying, cyber bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

\*Repeated is defined as three or more occasions.

**APPENDIX A BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION INCIDENT REPORTING FORM**

1. Name of person filing the report: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Note: Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report)

2. You are the: Target of the behavior  
Reporter (not the target)

3. You are a: Staff member (specify role) \_\_\_\_\_  
Administrator  
Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Your contact information and telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

4. If staff member, state your role at time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Information about the incident:

Name of Target: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Aggressor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s), Time, and Location of Incidents: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Incident (be as specific as possible): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Witnesses (list people who saw the incident or have information about it):

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Staff Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Staff Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Staff Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. Describe the details of the incident (including names of the people involved, what occurred, and what each person did and said – including specific words used). Please use additional space on the back if necessary.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**INTERVIEW INFORMATION FORM**

Date of Incident:

AGGRESSOR

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TARGET

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WITNESS

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Completed by \_\_\_\_\_  
Diocese of Worcester

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
School \_\_\_\_\_

FOR ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY

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8. Signature of person filing this report: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Form given to: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**INVESTIGATION** Date report forwarded to principal: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Investigator(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Position(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Interviews:

Interviewed aggressor Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewed target Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewed witnesses Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Any prior documented incidents by the aggressor?  Yes  No

If yes, have the incidents involved the target previously?  Yes  No

Any previous incidents with findings of bullying, retaliation?  Yes  No

Summary of Investigation (please use additional paper and attach to this document as needed):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**CONCLUSION**

1. Finding of bullying or retaliation:  Yes Bullying/Retaliation  
 No Incident documented as \_\_\_\_\_

2. Contacts:

Target's parents/guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Aggressor's parents/guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Law Enforcement Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Other (specify) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Action taken:

Loss of privileges

Suspension (in school/out of school)

Expulsion

Other (specify)

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Follow up with target scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_ Initial and date when completed \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up with aggressor scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_ Initial and date when completed \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Person filing report: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_