

# **Safe School Climate Plan – Creating and Sustaining Supportive and Engaging Schools – Version 2.0**

Fairfield Public Schools  
Initial Approval: January 10, 2012  
Version 2.0 Amended: April 7, 2015

Approved by Board of Education Date: April 7, 2015  
Submitted to Connecticut State Department of Education Date: April 22, 2015  
Posted on District and School Websites Date: April 22, 2015

## Table of Contents

Mission and Beliefs of the Fairfield Public Schools

District School Climate Plan

Appendices

1. National School Climate Standards
2. Assessing School Climate using Multiple Measures
3. School Climate Improvement Process
4. Fairfield Public Schools – Incident Report
5. Fairfield Public Schools – Bullying Determination Form
6. Fairfield Public Schools - School Safety and Intervention Plan – Target
7. Fairfield Public Schools - School Safety and Intervention Plan – Perpetrator
8. Frequently Asked Questions
9. Suggested Timeline for Implementation
10. Resources
  - Staff
  - Parents
  - Students

# **Fairfield Public Schools**

## **Mission:**

The mission of the Fairfield Public Schools is to inspire students to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be life-long learners, responsible citizens, and successful participants in an ever changing global society by providing, in partnership with families and community, a comprehensive, rigorous educational program.

## **Beliefs:**

- We believe all individuals can learn.
- We believe high expectations drive high achievement.
- We believe family and community, in partnership, play an essential role in the development and education of a child.
- We believe kindness, respect, and compassion enhance life and improve performance.
- We believe that growth occurs when independent thinking, creativity, and appropriate risk taking are encouraged.
- We believe valuing and nurturing diversity promotes learning.
- We believe everyone has the ability and responsibility to make a positive difference.
- We believe that positive self-image is built through high expectations, honesty and accomplishment.
- We believe that knowledge and skills acquired should be relevant and adaptable for lifelong learning.
- We believe all students should have equitable access to educational opportunities.
- We believe in promoting a healthy life.
- We believe that collaboration and commitment promote the common good.

## District School Climate Plan

On November 22, 2011 the Fairfield Board of Education adopted Policy #5330 which prohibits bullying in any form. The Fairfield Board of Education subsequently amended the policy on (INSERT DATE). Policy 5330 states, “The Board of Education (Board) promotes a secure and happy school climate, conducive to teaching and learning that is free from threat, harassment, any type of bullying behavior and teen dating violence. Therefore it shall be the policy of the Board that bullying and/or teen dating violence committed against a student by another student is prohibited.

The Board believes that a school environment in which students feel safe, supported, engaged and helpfully challenged is optimal for learning and healthy development. The Board seeks an environment in which students and adults feel socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically safe; an environment that is free of harassment, intimidation, teen dating violence and bullying.” The plan outlined below is meant to support the creation and sustainability of such an environment, and will serve as the Administrative Regulations to BOE Policy # 5330.

### Definitions

“Bullying” means the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district or a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district that:

- A. causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student’s property,
- B. places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property,
- C. creates a hostile environment at school for such student,
- D. infringes on the rights of such student at school, or
- E. substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Bullying shall include, but not be limited to, a written, oral, or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical (including but not limited to health concerns, diabetes, food allergies, etc.), developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics. (The student against whom the activity is directed must be attending school in the same district as the students engaged in the activity.)

“Teen Dating Violence” means any act of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including stalking, harassing, and threatening, that occurs between two students who are currently in or who have recently been in a dating relationship

“Cyberbullying” means any act of bullying through the use of the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, cellular mobile telephone or other mobile electronic devices or any electronic communications.

“Mobile electronic device” means any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more individuals, including, but not limited to, a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, a laptop computer, equipment that is capable of playing a video game or a digital video disk, or equipment on which digital images are taken or transmitted.

“Electronic communication” means 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.

“Hostile environment” means a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate;

“Outside of the school setting” means at a location, activity or program that is not school related, or through the use of an electronic device or a mobile electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education.

“School employee” means (a) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by a local or regional board of education or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; or (b) any other individual who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides services to or on behalf of students enrolled in a public elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with the local or regional board of education.

“School climate” means the quality and character of school life with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults. (and reflects norms, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures.)

Examples of bullying include, but are not limited to:

1. physical violence and attacks
2. verbal taunts, name-calling, disparaging language including ethnically-based or gender-based verbal disparaging language, or disparaging language directed at one’s family

3. sexual harassment including unwanted sexual attention or insulting or degrading sexual remarks or conduct
4. threats and intimidation
5. extortion or stealing of money and/or possessions
6. exclusion from peer groups within the school
7. The misuse of electronic communications for the purpose of bullying, harassing, or sexually harassing other students within school or out of school (“cyberbullying”)
8. teen dating violence
98. targeting of a student based on the student’s actual or perceived “differentiating” characteristics such as race; color; religion; ancestry; national origin; gender; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; socioeconomic or academic status; physical appearance; or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability.

Such conduct is disruptive of the educational process and, therefore, bullying and teen dating violence are not acceptable behavior in this district and are prohibited.

Students who engage in any act of bullying and/or teen dating violence, on 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 Board of Education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the Board of Education, and outside of the school setting if such bullying:

1. creates a hostile environment at school for the target.
2. infringes on the rights of the target at school, or
3. substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school,

And are subject to appropriate and escalating disciplinary action up to and including suspension and, expulsion from school, and/or referral to law enforcement officials.

A comprehensive program, to improve the school climate, involving everyone in the schools and the community, to address bullying and teen dating violence at all school levels is essential to reducing incidences of bullying and teen dating violence. Such a program must involve interventions at all levels, school wide, classroom and individual.

## **District School Climate Coordinator**

Beginning in the 2011-2012 School Year the Superintendent of Schools will designate, from existing staff, a District School Climate Coordinator.

The District School Climate Coordinator shall:

- Facilitate the District School Climate Team;
- Ensure the implementation of the District School Climate Plan;
- Provide leadership to the School Climate Specialists;

- Plan and implement, along with administrators and School Climate Specialists, annual training for School Climate Team members;
- Create, along with School Climate Team members, annual training modules for school employees;
- Insure that all school employees receive annual training;
- Provide timely and accurate data to the Superintendent, district, and CSDE as requested and as required by state statute;
- Facilitate annual revisions to the District School Climate Plan based on feedback from School Climate Teams ;
- Review all reports of suspected bullying and investigation reports.

## **District School Climate Team**

Beginning in January of 2012 the District School Climate Coordinator shall establish a District School Climate Team. Membership shall include:

- All School Climate Specialists (In the case of Co-School Climate Specialists, one representative from each school shall serve on the district team)
- Community members
- Parents
- Students

This Team shall:

- Meet quarterly (at minimum);
- Review and amend, as necessary, the District School Climate Plan;
- Review all school climate improvement plans;
- Review all district data and measurements of school climate;
- Make recommendations to the Superintendent regarding necessary changes to Board of Education Policy;
- Perform any other duties as determined by the School Climate Coordinator that are related to improving school climate (including, but not limited to the prevention, intervention, and response to school bullying for the district);
- Gather and disseminate to school climate committees best practice information on the prevention, intervention, and response to bullying and youth suicide.

## **School Climate Specialist**

Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year each school principal will serve as, or designate, from existing staff, a School Climate Specialist (Co-School Climate Specialists are allowable).

The School Climate Specialist, in collaboration with the school principal shall:

- Provide leadership to the school community in the prevention, intervention, and response to reports of bullying, discrimination, teen dating violence, and otherwise mean-spirited behavior\*\*\* in the school;
- Ensure implementation of District School Climate Plan;

- Coordinate the provision of annual training to all staff on the prevention, intervention, and response to bullying, discrimination, teen dating violence and otherwise mean-spirited behavior in schools and on the prevention, intervention and response to youth suicide in collaboration with the School Climate Committee;
- Ensure that all students, parents, and school employees are notified annually, at the beginning of the school year of process by which they can make reports of bullying, including anonymous/discrete reports;
- Chair the School Climate Committee;
- Coordinate the school's efforts in gathering multiple measures of school climate data;
- Use the above mentioned data to lead the development of the School Climate Improvement Plan in alignment with the district plan;
- Serve as their schools' representative on the District School Climate Committee;
- Investigate or supervise the investigation of reported acts of bullying in accordance with the District School Climate Plan and Board of Education Policy;
- Ensure the implementation of intervention/response plans for all verified acts of bullying
- Collect and maintain records of reports and investigations of bullying in the school

\*\*\* There are two kinds of mean-spirited behavior

1. Unintentional mean-spirited behavior – where the perpetrator does not intend to hurt the target. This presents a “teachable moment” where informing the perpetrator that their behavior has caused hurt feelings and the perpetrator responds to change behavior.
2. Intentional mean-spirited behavior – where the perpetrator intentionally behaves in a way that is meant to humiliate, isolate, or diminish the target. If repeated this type of mean-spirited behavior may meet the statutory definition of bullying. Early and consistent intervention at this point on the part of all school community members (bystanders to allies) will significantly reduce incidents of bullying and improve school climate

## **School Climate Committee**

For each school year commencing July 1, 2012 each school principal shall establish a committee or designate at least one existing committee in the school to be responsible for developing and fostering a safe school climate. Team membership shall be designated by the school principal and shall include at least one parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the school. It is strongly encouraged that the school leadership considers a diverse membership of staff, students, parents, and community members.

The School Climate Committee shall:

- Receive copies of completed reports following investigations of bullying (parents, students, or community members will not receive copies of reports as sharing



these reports would violate student confidentiality rights under federal law - FERPA);

- Identify and address patterns of bullying among students in the school;
- Review and amend school policies/practices relating to bullying;
- Review and make recommendations to the District Safe School Climate Coordinator regarding the District Safe School Climate Plan based on issues and experiences specific to the school;
- Educate students, school employees and parents and guardians of students on issues relating to school climate and bullying;
- Collaborate with the School Climate Specialist in the collection of data regarding school climate and bullying in accordance with the District Safe School Climate Plan and state statute;
- Perform any other duties as determined by the school principal that are related to improving school climate and to the prevention, intervention, and response to school bullying, discrimination, or otherwise mean-spirited behavior for the school.

Note:

Any parent or guardian, student, or community member serving as a member of any such committee shall NOT participate in the activities described above that may compromise any students' and families' rights to privacy under the Federal Education Right to Privacy Act (FERPA).

## **Training and Professional Development**

### **All School Employees**

The Fairfield Public Schools shall require that all school employees receive annual training that will include information addressing the prevention of, identification of and response to bullying, teen dating violence, discrimination and otherwise mean-spirited behavior in schools and the prevention of and response to youth suicide. This training will be determined by the District School Climate Team and made available to all School Climate Teams. As a part of the school climate improvement process and based on data from assessment, additional training and professional development may be necessary at a school level or at a specific level (elementary, middle, or high school). These professional development plans will be articulated annually as part of each school's school climate improvement plan.

\*\*\* *CT General Statute 10-222d* defines "School employee" as:

- (A) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by a local or regional board of education or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; or
- (B) Any other individual who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides services to or on behalf of students

### **All School Climate Specialists**

All School Climate Specialists shall receive annual professional development that will assist in the continuous improvement of school climate. Training may include, but is not limited to:

- Conducting bullying/teen dating violence investigations
- Intervention and Response to bullying and/or teen dating violence for both target and perpetrator
- Restorative disciplinary procedures
- School-wide best practices in improving school climate
- School Improvement Committee facilitation

### **All School Climate Committee members**

All School Climate Committee members will receive annual training to assist with the school climate improvement planning process. This training may include, but is not limited to:

- School Climate Improvement Planning
- Intervention and Response to bullying and teen dating violence
- 

### **Assessment**

Beginning in 2012-13 School Year and subject to available funding, the Fairfield Public Schools will conduct bi-annual survey of students (minimally in grades 3-12), parents (PreK-12), and school employees (as defined above). This survey will cover the 5 dimensions of school climate:

- Norms,
- Relationships (student to student, adult to student, adult to adult)
- Teaching and Learning,
- Student, family, and staff voice and engagement,
- Physical environment

Any assessment survey instrument should meet the following criteria:

- Recognize student, parent/guardian, and school personnel “voice”,
- Be aligned between students, parents, and school employees
- Assess the major aspects of school climate

### **School Climate Improvement, Bullying, Teen Dating Violence Prevention**

As part of the school climate improvement process, each school’s School Climate Team shall annually review current practices meant to address creating and sustaining a positive school climate that is free from harassment, bullying, discrimination, teen dating violence and otherwise mean-spirited behavior. Beginning November 1, 2012 each school will submit as part of its School Improvement Plan, a School Climate Improvement Plan. This Plan shall include annual prevention activities that are aligned with school data and goals for climate improvement. This plan shall be submitted to the District School Climate Team for review in order to allow for alignment and best practice

sharing between and among schools. This plan shall be published on the district website and on each school website by January 15<sup>th</sup> of each year. Activities may include, but are not limited to:

- implementing an evidence-based program utilizing positive behavioral supports,
- implementing evidence-based practices that not only intervene with the perpetrator and the target, but also with bystanders,
- review, revise, and/or create and implement a culturally competent school-based curriculum focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness, and self-regulation.
- ensure annually that all students know how to report any incidents of mean-spirited behavior that might be bullying – including anonymous reports
- ensure that all new staff members receive annual training in their responsibility to report incidents and intervene with students

## Bullying Reports

**Students** may file:

- Oral Reports to school employees
- Written reports - Fairfield Public Schools – Incident Report Form (See Appendix #1)
- Anonymous reports
  - Each school shall inform students of the process for anonymous reporting annually at the beginning of each school year
  - District will implement an electronic means for anonymous/discrete reporting

NOTE: There are two kinds of anonymous reports – those when the student wishes to remain anonymous (discrete) and those that are truly anonymous.

\*\*\*CT General Statute 10-222d - The safe school climate specialist must review anonymous reports, but no disciplinary action may be taken solely on the basis of any anonymous report.

**Parents** may file:

- Written reports (parental reports must be signed)

**School employees** who witness acts of bullying, teen dating violence, harassment, or mean-spirited behavior or receive reports of bullying **MUST** report it to the school administration or school climate specialist.

School employees must:

- Orally notify the school climate specialist or school administrator (if the school climate specialist is unavailable) as soon as possible, but not later than one (1) school day after such school employee witnesses or receives a report of bullying (school climate specialist shall maintain a list of oral and written reports), and;

- File a written report as soon as possible, but not later than two (2) school days after making such an oral report.

## Investigations

ALL reports of suspected bullying, teen dating violence, or discrimination must be investigated. The school climate specialist must investigate or supervise the investigation of all incident reports including anonymous reports (no disciplinary action may be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report) and ensure that such investigations are completed thoroughly and promptly after receipt of any written report and that the parents or guardians of the student alleged to have committed an act or acts of bullying and/or teen dating violence and the parent or guardians of the student against whom such alleged act or acts were directed receive prompt notice that such investigation has commenced. Upon completion of the investigation the school climate specialist or the investigator shall complete the Bullying Determination Form (see Appendix #2).

## Verified Acts of Bullying

When an investigation concludes that there has been a verified act of bullying and/or teen dating violence the parents of both the target and the perpetrator will be notified not later than 48 hours after the conclusion of the investigation. The notice must:

- Describe the school's response and any consequences that may result from further acts of bullying;
- Invite the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying and/or teen dating violence to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed and the policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying and/or teen dating violence;

10. Requires each school to invite the parents or guardians of the student against whom such act was directed, to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed and policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying and/or teen dating violence

Note: Each meeting is to be separate. At no time are the parents of the target and perpetrator to meet together to discuss consequences.

\*\*\*Parents of the target often demand to know the disciplinary actions taken against the perpetrator. It would be a violation of the student's rights to confidentiality under the Federal Education Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA) for staff to discuss such actions. The focus of the meeting should remain on both the actions taken by the school to protect the student from further bullying AND an intervention plan designed to teach the skills and dispositions that will decrease the likelihood of further victimization.

## **Notification of Law Enforcement**

The Principal or his/her designee MUST notify the appropriate law enforcement agency when such principal or his/her designee believes that any behavior may constitute criminal activity. When a principal or his/her designee makes such a report the principal or his/her designee shall inform the District School Climate Coordinator within one (1) school day of making such a report.

## **School Safety and Intervention Plans**

For each verified act of bullying and/or teen dating violence a written plan must be developed for both the target and the perpetrator.

For the target this plan must:

- Include a school safety plan that describes what school staff will do to ensure safety in the school environment.
- Include an intervention strategy to teach the skills and dispositions necessary to decrease the likelihood of further victimization.
- Identify a case manager
- Be provided to the parent and shared with the student
- Be monitored by the School Climate Specialist or his/her designee (to be identified in the plan) to ensure implementation fidelity and adjusted as necessary to provide a safe environment

Note: At no time should the plan for the target further isolate the target. If changes to schools, schedule, programs, and activities need to be made to provide safety, they should not negatively impact the target in any way.

For the perpetrator this plan must:

- Include any disciplinary action to be taken,
- Next steps should bullying occur again (repeated acts of bullying may lead to suspension and/or expulsion in accordance with Board of Education Policy #5119)
- Clearly state that retaliation against the target, the reporter, or any individual participating in the investigation is prohibited;
- Identify a case manager
- Be provided to the parent and shared with the student
- Include an intervention strategy designed to teach the skills and dispositions necessary for participation in a safe school climate
- Include actions to be taken to restore the student into the community (Restorative Discipline)

## **Publication of School Climate Plan**

No later than thirty (30) calendar days after approval by the Board of Education the Safe School Climate Plan shall be made available on:

- The district website

- Each individual school website

At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year this plan will be published in:

- All district publications of rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools
- The Family Guide to the Fairfield Public Schools

At the beginning of each school year this plan will be provided to all school employees in either written or electronic form.

## Appendices

1. National School Climate Standards
2. Assessing School Climate using Multiple Measures
3. School Climate Improvement Process
4. Fairfield Public Schools – Incident Report
5. Fairfield Public Schools – Bullying Determination Form
6. Fairfield Public Schools - School Safety and Intervention Plan – Target
7. Fairfield Public Schools - School Safety and Intervention Plan – Perpetrator
8. Frequently Asked Questions
9. Suggested Timeline for Implementation
10. Resources
  - Staff
  - Parents
  - Students