

District Safe School Climate Plan

The Bethel Board of Education is committed to creating and maintaining a physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe educational environment free from bullying, teen dating violence, harassment, and discrimination. This commitment further extends to hate crimes or bias incidents in schools.

The District Safe School Climate Plan which follows, represents a comprehensive approach to address bullying, teen dating violence, cyberbullying, mean behavior, hate crimes, and racial bias and sets forth the Board's expectations for creating a positive school climate and thus preventing, intervening, and responding to such incidents.

The Bethel Board of Education policy strictly prohibits all bullying, mean behavior, teen dating violence, harassment, hate crimes and bias incidents. Students who are determined to have engaged in such behavior are subject to disciplinary action, which may include suspension or expulsion from school.

The district's commitment to addressing bullying behavior, teen dating violence, and harassment involves a multi-faceted approach that includes student, parent, and staff education and promotes safe school climates in which bullying, teen dating violence, harassment, mean behavior, hate crimes and bias incidents will never be tolerated. Bethel's **multi-faceted prevention and intervention approach** includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Specific policies and regulations delineating the Board of Education's expectations for student and staff behavior regarding bullying, harassment, teen dating violence, and, clear consequences for violations;
- Annual feedback from parent surveys and school climate surveys of students and staff to determine the prevalence of bullying, mean behavior, teen dating violence, hate crimes, bias incidents and harassment in the district.

Positive behavior intervention programs in every school within the district include but are not limited to:

- School and program rules prohibiting bullying, teen dating violence, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts;
- Adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying or teen dating violence are likely to occur;
- Inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying and teen dating violence education and prevention curricula in kindergarten through high school, which may include instruction regarding building safe and positive school communities including developing healthy relationships and preventing dating violence as deemed appropriate for older students;
- Individualized, developmentally-appropriate Student Safety Support Plans at each school for the bullied, teen dating violence, or harassed child as well as Behavior Support and Interventions for the perpetrators of recurrent bullying, teen dating violence, and/or harassment;
- Planned professional learning programs for staff, addressing prevention and intervention strategies, which training may include school violence prevention, Section 504/ADA, Title IX, cultural diversity/multicultural education, conflict resolution, Restorative Practices or other training in federal and state civil rights legislation or other topics relevant to safe school climate and prevention of bullying and teen dating violence, with a focus on evidence based practices;
- Use of peers to help ameliorate the plight of victims and include them in group activities, student peer training, education and support;

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- Promotion of parent involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions;
- Implementation of various committees that create positive behavioral interventions in an effort to keep students actively engaged in school and build a positive school community.
- Respectful responses to bullying and teen dating violence concerns raised by students, parents or staff;
- Avoidance of gender role stereotyping;
- Modeling by teachers and hired professionals of positive, respectful, and supportive behavior toward students;
- Creating a school atmosphere of team spirit and collaboration that promotes appropriate social behavior by students in support of others;
- Culturally competent school-based curriculum focusing on skills that foster high emotional intelligence, including self-awareness and emotional self-regulation.
- Developmental School Counseling/lessons from Emotional Intelligence program in Kindergarten through grade 12;
- Implementation of Restorative Practices program;
- Therapeutic and behavioral support by certified school mental health staff, and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs);
- Student Advisory Programs at Bethel Middle School and Bethel High School;
- Data collection and analysis at each school site and district-wide for the study of the types and frequency of bullying or harassment behaviors;
- Responsible Use Policy with clear expectations for respectful, responsible behavior when using technology on and off the school campus;
- Referral process available for School-Based Health Centers;
- Provision of youth suicide prevention programs and developmentally appropriate strategies for effective interventions to prevent youth suicide.

In addition to prevention and intervention strategies, administrators, teachers, and other professional employees may find opportunities to educate students about bullying and help eliminate bullying behavior through class discussions, counseling, and reinforcement of socially appropriate behavior. Administrators, teachers, and other professional employees should intervene promptly whenever they observe mean-spirited student conduct, even if such conduct does not meet the formal definition of “bullying.”

I. Prohibition against Bullying, Harassment, and Retaliation for Reporting

The Bethel Board of Education expressly prohibits any form of bullying, teen dating violence, or harassment behavior on school grounds; at school-sponsored or school-related activities, functions, or programs 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; through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased, or used by Board of Education; or through the use of any privately owned electronic device.

The Board also prohibits any form of bullying, teen dating violence, or harassment behavior outside of the school setting if such behavior (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying, teen dating violence or harassment was directed, (ii) infringes on the rights of the student

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against whom such bullying, teen dating violence or harassment was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

The Board includes in its bullying, teen dating violence, and harassment prohibitions any written, oral, or electronic communication or physical act or gesture-based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, such as any federally defined “protective class”, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics.

In addition to prohibiting student acts which constitute bullying, teen dating violence, or harassment, the Board also prohibits discrimination and/or retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying, teen dating violence, or harassment.

Students who engage in bullying behavior, teen dating violence, or in harassment in violation of Board Policy #5131.911 and the District Safe School Climate Plan shall be subject to school discipline, up to and including expulsion, in accordance with the Board's policies on student discipline, suspension and expulsion, and shall be consistent with state and federal law.

The District Safe School Climate Coordinators and the school-based Safe School Climate Specialists will monitor the disciplinary consequences for incidents of harassment based on a federally defined “protective class” to determine if the bullying incident is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment that must be redressed; to determine if such harassment has been adequately addressed with specific disciplinary consequences; and to ensure that federal civil rights and anti-discrimination statutes have not been violated.

The duties of the Safe School Climate Coordinator include:

1. be responsible for implementing the District’s Safe School Climate Plan;
2. collaborate with the Safe School Climate Specialists, the Board and the Superintendent to prevent, identify and respond to bullying in District Schools and Programs;
3. provide data and information, in collaboration with the Superintendent, to the Department regarding; and
4. meet with the Safe School Climate Specialist at least twice during the school year to discuss issues related to bullying in the District and to make recommendations concerning amendments to the plan.

The Board also requires the Safe School Climate Coordinator, or school administrator, to notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency if it is believed that any acts of bullying or harassment constitute criminal conduct.

The duties of the Safe School Climate Specialist include:

1. investigate or supervise the investigation of reported acts of bullying;
2. collect and maintain records of the reports and investigations;
3. being the primary school official responsible for prevention, identifying and responding to reports of bullying.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) requires the District to complete the school climate assessment/survey approved by the CSDE pursuant to section 10-222h, as amended by PA

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11-232. This includes the annual collection of school climate assessment/survey data from each school in the district, and the submission of this assessment data to the CSDE.

II. Definition of Bullying

- A. **“Bullying”** means: an act that is direct or indirect and severe, persistent or pervasive, which:
1. causes physical or emotional harm to an individual;
 2. places an individual in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm or
 3. infringes on the rights or opportunities of an individual at school.
- B. Bullying shall include, but need not be limited to, written, oral, or electronic communication or physical act or gesture-based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, in any federally defined “protective class” or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics.

III. Other Important Definitions

- A. **“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.
- B. **“Discrimination”** means unlawful discrimination that occurs when a student is denied participation in, or the benefits of, a program or activity of the Board because of such student’s actual or perceived race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, alienage, ancestry, disability, pregnancy, gender identity or expression, veteran status, status as a victim of domestic violence or any other basis prohibited by state or federal law (“Protected Class”).
- C. **“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, photoelectric or photo-optical system.
- D. **“Emotional intelligence”** means the ability to (1) perceive, recognize and understand emotions in oneself or others, (2) use emotional regulation to promote and support successful cognitive activities, including, but not limited to, reasoning, problem-solving and interpersonal communications, (3) understand and identify emotions, and (4) manage emotions in oneself and others.
- E. **“Harassment”** is a form of Protected Class discrimination that is prohibited by law and by this policy. Harassment constitutes unlawful discrimination when it creates a hostile environment, which occurs when the harassment is sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent so as to interfere with or limit a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school. Harassment does not have to include intent to harm, be directed at a specific target, or involve repeated incidents. Harassment may be an act of bullying.
- F. **“Hostile environment”** means a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate;
- G. **“Outside of the school setting”** means at a location, activity, or program that is not

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school-related, or through the use of an electronic device or a mobile electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by the Bethel Board of Education;

- H. **“Positive School climate”** means a school climate in which (1) the norms, values, expectations and beliefs that support feelings of social, emotional and physical safety are promoted, (2) students, parents, and guardians of students and school employees feel engaged and respected and work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision, (3) educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning, and (4) each person feels comfortable contributing to the operation of the school and care of the physical environment of the school.
- I. **“School employee”** means
 - (1) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, school nurse, physician, school paraprofessional, school bus driver, school cafeteria worker, school custodian, or coach employed by the Board of Education or working in a public elementary, middle, or high school; or
 - (2) *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 elementary, middle, or high schools, pursuant to a contract with the Bethel Board of Education.*
- J. **“Volunteer”** means any person who volunteers time at any activity or program associated with the Bethel Board of Education.
- L. **“School-Sponsored Activity”** shall mean any activity conducted on or off school property (including school buses and other school-related vehicles) that is sponsored, recognized, or authorized by the Bethel Board of Education. This includes all school-sponsored field trips.
- M. **“Social and emotional learning”** means the process through which children and adults achieve emotional intelligence through the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
- O. **“Teen Dating Violence”** means any act of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including stalking, harassment, and threatening that occurs between two students who are currently in or have been in a dating relationship.

IV. Development and Review of Safe School Climate Plan

- A. The principal of each school shall establish a Safe School Climate Committee to be responsible for developing and fostering a Safe School Climate and addressing issues relating to bullying in the school. Such Committee shall include:
 - 1) at least one parent/guardian of a student enrolled in the school, as appointed by the school principal;
 - 2) school personnel, including, but not limited to, at least one teacher selected by the exclusive bargaining representative for certified employees;
 - 3) medical and mental health personnel assigned to such school; and
 - 4) in the case of a committee for a high school, at least one student enrolled at such a high school.
- B. The Safe School Committees shall:

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- 1) identify and address patterns of bullying, teen dating violence, or harassment among students in the school or program;
 - 2) review and amend school regulations and procedures relating to bullying, teen dating violence, and harassment;
 - 3) review and make recommendations to the Safe School Climate Coordinator regarding the District Safe School Climate Plan based on data, issues, and experiences specific to the school and program;
 - 4) educate students, school employees, and parents/guardians on issues relating to bullying, teen dating violence, and harassment;
 - 5) collaborate with the District Safe School Climate Specialist in the collection and analysis of data regarding bullying, teen dating violence, and harassment; and
 - 6) perform any other duties as determined by the principal and the District Safe School Climate Specialist that are related to the prevention, identification, and response to school bullying.
- C. Any parent/guardian or student serving as a member of the Committee shall not participate in any activities which may compromise the confidentiality of any student, including, but not limited to, receiving copies of investigation reports, or identifying or addressing patterns of bullying among students in the school and program.
- D. The Board of Education shall approve the District Safe School Climate Plan developed pursuant to Board policy and submit such plan to the State Department of Education. The Board shall make the plan available on the District's as well as each individual school's website and in all student handbooks.

VI. Procedures for Reporting and Investigating Complaints of Bullying, Harassment, and Teen Dating Violence

- A. Students and parents (or guardians of students) may file written reports of bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence using the form provided by the schools and found in the main offices, the counseling offices in each school, or on the school website. Written reports of bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence must be reasonably specific as to the basis for the report, including the time and place of the alleged conduct, the number of incidents, the target of the suspected bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence, and the names of potential witnesses. Such reports may be filed with any building administrator and/or the Safe School Climate Specialist in the building, and all reports shall be forwarded to the District and school-based Safe School Climate Specialists for review and actions consistent with this plan.
- B. Students may make anonymous reports of bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence to any school employee, but we strongly encourage students to go directly to a building administrator and/or Safe School Climate Specialist in the building. A student may also request anonymity when making a report, even if the student's identity is known to the school employee. All anonymous complaints shall be reviewed and reasonable action will be taken to address the situation. No disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous complaint.
- C. School employees who witness an act of suspected bullying or receive a report of suspected bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence shall orally notify the Safe School

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Climate Specialist or another school administrator, not later than one (1) school day after such school employee witnesses or receives a report of suspected bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence. The school employee shall then file a written report no later than two (2) school days after making such an oral report using the school's bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence report form.

- D. The Safe School Climate Specialist shall be responsible for reviewing any anonymous reports of bullying and shall investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of bullying and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly after receipt of any written reports. The Safe School Climate Specialist shall also be responsible for promptly notifying the parents or guardians of the student alleged to have committed an act or acts of bullying, and the parents or guardians of the student against whom such alleged act or acts were directed, that an investigation has commenced. In order to allow the District to adequately investigate complaints filed by a student or parent/guardian, the parent of the student suspected of being bullied should be asked to provide consent to permit the release of that student's name in connection with the investigation process, unless the student and/or parent has requested anonymity.
- E. In investigating reports of suspected bullying, harassment, and/or teen dating violence, the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegations and the ages of the students involved. The Safe School Climate Specialist will interview witnesses, as necessary, reminding the alleged perpetrator and other parties that retaliation is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action.

VII. Responding to Verified Acts of Bullying

- A. Following the investigation, if acts of bullying, harassment, and/or teen dating violence are verified, the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall notify the parents or guardians of the students against whom such acts were directed as well as the parents or guardians of the students who commit such acts of bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence of the finding not later than forty-eight hours after the investigation is completed. This notification shall include a description of the school's response to the verified acts of bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence; the results of such investigation; and verbally or by electronic mail, if such parents' or guardians' electronic mail addresses are known, that such parents or guardians may refer to the plain language explanation of the rights and remedies available under Conn. Gen. Stat. Sections 10-4a and 10-4b once such explanation has been provided to the Board by the District Safe School Climate Committee and published on the Internet website of the Board. The specific disciplinary consequences imposed on the perpetrator, or personally identifiable information about a student other than the parent/guardian's own child, will not be disclosed except as provided by law.
- B. In any instance in which bullying is verified, the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall invite the parents or guardians of the student against whom such act was directed to a meeting to communicate the measures being taken by the school or program to promote the safety of the student/victim and policies and procedures in place designed to prevent further acts of bullying. The Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall also invite the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying

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to a meeting, separate and distinct from the previously described meeting, to discuss specific interventions undertaken by the school designed to prevent further acts of bullying.

- C. If bullying is verified, the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall develop a student safety support plan for any student against whom an act of bullying was directed. Such a support plan will include safety measures designed to protect against further acts of bullying.
- D. A specific written intervention plan shall be developed to address repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual. The written intervention plan may include counseling, discipline and other appropriate remedial actions as determined by the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee and may also incorporate a student safety support plan, as appropriate.
- E. Notice to Law Enforcement: If the principal of a school or responsible administrator (or designee) reasonably believes that any act of bullying constitutes a criminal offense, the principal or responsible administrator shall notify appropriate law enforcement. Notice shall be consistent with the Board's obligations under state and federal law and Board policy regarding the disclosure of personally identifiable student information. In making this determination, the principal, responsible administrator or designee, may consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the principal, responsible administrator or designee deems appropriate.
- F. If a bullying complaint raises a concern about "protected class" discrimination or harassment, the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall also coordinate any bullying investigation with other appropriate personnel within the District as appropriate (e.g. Title IX Coordinator, Section 504 Coordinator, etc.), in a manner designed to ensure that any such bullying investigation complies with the requirements of such policies regarding nondiscrimination.

VIII. Teen Dating Violence

- A. The school strictly prohibits, and takes very seriously any instances of, teen dating violence, as defined above. The school recognizes that teen dating violence may take many different forms and may also be considered bullying and/or sexual harassment.
- B. Students and parents (or guardians of students) may bring verbal or written complaints regarding teen dating violence to any building administrator. The building administrator shall review and address the complaint, which may include referral of the complaint to the Safe School Climate Specialist and/or Title IX Coordinator.
- C. Prevention and intervention strategies concerning teen dating violence shall be implemented in accordance with the section below. Discipline, up to and including expulsion, may be imposed against the perpetrator of teen dating violence, whether such conduct occurs on or off campus, in accordance with Board policy and consistent with federal and state law.
- D. Notice to Law Enforcement and/or DCF (if applicable): If the principal of a school (or designee) reasonably believes that any verified act of bullying, harassment, and/or teen

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dating violence constitutes a criminal offense, he/she will notify appropriate law enforcement and/or DCF (if applicable)

- E. If a bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence complaint raises concern about discrimination or harassment on the basis of legally protected classifications, the Safe School Climate Specialist shall coordinate any investigation with other appropriate personnel within the district. The Title IX Coordinator and the Section 504 Coordinator must be notified by the Safe School Climate Specialist if discrimination or harassment of legally protected classes is suspected.

IX. Documentation and Maintenance of Log

- A. Each school and program shall maintain written reports of bullying, along with supporting documentation received and/or created as a result of bullying investigations, consistent with the Board's obligations under state and federal law. Any educational record containing personally identifiable student information pertaining to an individual student shall be maintained in a confidential manner, and shall not be disclosed to third parties without prior written consent of a parent, guardian, or eligible student, except as permitted under Board policy and state and federal law.
- B. The Safe School Climate Specialist in each school and program shall maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying, harassment, and/or teen dating violence in the school and this list shall be available for public inspection upon request. Consistent with district obligations under state and federal law regarding student privacy, the log shall not contain any personally identifiable student information or any information that alone or in combination would allow a reasonable person in the school community to identify the students involved. Accordingly, the log should be limited to basic information such as the number of verified acts, name of school and/or grade level, and relevant date. Each Investigation that results in a verified act of bullying for that school year shall be tallied as one verified act of bullying unless the specific actions that are the subject of each report involve separate and distinct acts of bullying. The list shall be limited to the number of verified acts of bullying in each school and shall not set out the particulars of each verified act, including, but not limited to, any personally identifiable student information, which is confidential information by law.
- C. The Safe School Climate Specialist in each school shall report the number of verified acts of bullying and harassment in the school annually to the State Department of Education in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education.

X. Other Prevention and Intervention Strategies

- A. Bullying behavior and teen dating violence can take many forms and can vary dramatically in the nature of the offense and the impact the behavior may have on the victim and other affected students. Accordingly, there is no one prescribed response to verified acts of bullying or to teen dating violence. While conduct that rises to the level of "bullying" or "teen dating violence," as defined above, will generally warrant

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traditional disciplinary action against the perpetrator of such bullying or teen dating violence, whether and to what extent to impose disciplinary action (e.g., detention, in-school suspension, suspension or expulsion) is a matter for the professional discretion of the building principal (or responsible program administrator or designee). No disciplinary action may be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous complaint of bullying. As discussed below, schools and programs may also consider appropriate alternatives to traditional disciplinary sanctions, including age-appropriate consequences and other restorative, educational or remedial interventions.

- B. A specific written intervention plan shall be developed to address repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual. This plan may include safety provisions, as described above, for students against whom acts of bullying have been verified and may include other interventions such as counseling, discipline, and other appropriate remedial or restorative actions as determined by the responsible administrator.
- C. The following describes possible interventions which may also be utilized to enforce the Board's prohibition against bullying, harassment, and teen dating violence:

- i. Non-disciplinary interventions

When verified acts of bullying are identified early and/or when such verified acts of bullying do not reasonably require a disciplinary response, students may be counseled as to the definition of bullying, its prohibition, and their duty to avoid any conduct that could be considered bullying. Students may also be subject to other forms of restorative discipline or remedial actions, appropriate to the age of the students and nature of the behavior.

If a complaint arises out of conflict between students or groups of students, peer or other forms of mediation may be considered. Special care, however, is warranted in referring such cases to peer mediation. A power imbalance may make the process intimidating for the victim and therefore inappropriate. In such cases, the victim should be given additional support. Alternatively, peer mediation may be deemed inappropriate to address the concern.

When an act or acts of teen dating violence are identified, the students involved may be counseled as to the seriousness of the conduct, the prohibition of teen dating violence, and their duty to avoid any such conduct. Students may also be subject to other forms of restorative discipline or remedial actions, appropriate to the age of the students and nature of the behavior.

- ii. Disciplinary interventions

When acts of bullying are verified or teen dating violence occurs, and a disciplinary response is warranted, students may be subject to the full range of disciplinary consequences. Anonymous complaints of bullying, however, shall not be the basis for disciplinary action.

In-school suspension and out-of-school suspension may be imposed only after

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informing the accused perpetrator of the reasons for the proposed suspension and giving the student an opportunity to explain the situation, in accordance with the Board's Student Discipline policy.

Expulsion may be imposed only after a hearing before the Board of Education, a committee of the Board, or an impartial hearing officer designated by the Board of Education in accordance with the Board's Student Discipline policy. This consequence shall normally be reserved for serious incidents of bullying and teen dating violence, and/or when past interventions have not been successful in eliminating bullying behavior.

iii. Interventions For Bullied Students And Victims of Teen Dating Violence

The building principal (or other responsible program administrator) or designee shall intervene in order to address incidents of bullying or teen dating violence against a single individual. Intervention strategies for a bullied student or victim of teen dating violence may include the following:

- a) Referral to a school counselor, psychologist, or other appropriate social or mental health service;
- b) Increased supervision and monitoring of student to observe and intervene in bullying situations or instances of teen dating violence;
- c) Encouragement of the student to seek help when victimized or witnessing victimization;
- d) Peer mediation or other forms of mediation, where appropriate;
- e) Student Safety Support plan;
- f) Restitution and/or restorative interventions; and
- g) Periodic follow-up by the Safe School Climate Specialist and/or Title IX Coordinator with the bullied student or victim of teen dating violence.

In addition to prevention and intervention strategies, administrators, teachers, and other employees may find opportunities to educate students about bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence and help eliminate bullying behavior through class discussions, counseling, special assemblies, and by the continuous reinforcement of socially appropriate behavior. Administrators, teachers, and other professional employees should intervene promptly whenever they observe mean-spirited student conduct, even if such conduct does not meet the formal definition of bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence.

XI. Improving School Climate

Annual Notice and Training

- A. Students and parents or guardians of students shall be notified annually at the start of the school year via the student handbooks and by school and district website postings of the process by which students may make reports of bullying, harassment, or teen dating violence.

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- B. At the beginning of each school year, each school shall provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school District Safe School Climate Plan and require that all school employees annually complete training on the identification, prevention, and response to bullying and harassment as required by law.

XII. School Climate Assessments

The Board shall require each school in the district to complete a biennial assessment by May of the school year using the school climate assessment instruments, including surveys. Those assessments will be used to formulate school goals. .

Hate Crimes and Bias Incidents in Schools

The Bethel School District is committed to providing a safe learning and working environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying. District policy requires all schools and personnel to promote mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance among students and staff. Hate-motivated incidents and crimes or actions motivated by bias/prejudice/bigotry jeopardize both the safety and well-being of all students and staff. The District will not tolerate hate-motivated incidents/crimes based on actual or perceived characteristics of actual or perceived sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race or ethnicity, ethnic group identification, ancestry, nationality, national origin, religion, color, mental or physical disability, age, or on the basis of a person's association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics, in any program or activity it conducts or to which it provides significant assistance or retaliation in any form for reporting such incidents or crimes.

Definitions

1. A **“hate crime”** is a crime motivated by hatred, bias, or prejudice, or where the victim is targeted or selected for the crime at least in part because of his/her actual or perceived race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression age, disability or sex. A hate crime may involve a physical attack, threat of bodily harm, physical intimidation, or damage to another's property.
2. A **“hate-motivated crime”** is a “hate-motivated incident that has been determined by law enforcement to be criminal conduct that was primarily motivated by bias or prejudice against a targeted group. This includes any criminal action that manifests evidence of hostility towards the target because of his or her actual or perceived characteristics set forth above. Such action includes, but is not limited to, threatening telephone calls, hate mail, physical assault, vandalism, cross burning, destruction of religious symbols, and fire bombings. This also includes threats and hate messages sent by electronic communication.
3. A **“hate-motivated incident”** is a noncriminal act or attempted act that constitutes an expression of hostility, bias, or bigotry against a person, property, or institution because of the target's actual or perceived protected characteristics as set forth above. This may include using insults, taunts and slurs, distributing or posting hate group literature or posters, defacing, removing, or destroying posted materials or announcements, posting or circulating demeaning jokes or leaflets,

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or sending insulting or threatening messages by phone, e-mail, websites or any other electronic or written communication.

4. A **“bias incident”** or **“bias-related act”** is any suspected or confirmed offense or unlawful act which is directed at or occurs to a person, private property, or public property on the basis of race, color, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. An act is bias-based and thus constitutes a bias incident if the motive for the commission of the act or unlawful act is racial, religious, ethnic, or pertains to sexual orientation, including gender identity or expression. A bias-related act need not involve conduct that constitutes a criminal offense. All hate crimes are also bias-related acts, but not all bias-related acts will constitute a hate crime.
5. **“Retaliation”** is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment by a student-directed against any student, staff, or other individual for reporting or filing a complaint, for aiding or encouraging the filing of a report or complaint, for cooperating in an investigation under this policy, or for taking action consistent with this policy. Interference with, intimidation of, and/or retaliation against any individual, including a student, parent, or guardian, for filing a complaint, filing a grievance, or opposition discrimination is strictly prohibited and shall be treated as an actionable, wrongful act in and of itself.
6. **“Disability”** includes mental and/or physical impairments.
7. **“Electronic”** communications, acts, postings refers to conduct perpetrated through, but not limited to the following: internet, social networking sites, spyware or global positioning system tracking technology, telephone or cellular telephone, instant or text messages, email, blogs, websites, forums, and mailing lists.
8. **“Gender”** means sex, and includes a person’s gender identity and gender expression.
9. **“Gender expression”** means a person’s gender-related appearance and behavior whether or not stereotypically associated with the person’s assigned sex at birth.
10. **“Harassment”** occurs when a target is subjected to unwelcome conduct related to a protected category and can result in a hostile environment when the harassment is subjectively offensive to the target and would be offensive to a reasonable person of the same age and characteristics under the same circumstances and is sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent so as to interfere with or limit an individual’s ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by the District.
11. **“In whole or in part because of”** means that the bias motivation must be a cause of the offense, whether or not other causes also exist. There is no requirement that bias be a main factor, or that the crime would not have been committed but for the actual or perceived protected characteristic.
12. **“Nationality”** includes citizenship, country of origin, and national origin.
13. **“Race or ethnicity”** includes ancestry, color, and ethnic background.
14. **“Religion”** includes all aspects of religious belief, observance, and practice, including agnosticism and atheism.
15. **“Sexual orientation”** means a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted.
16. **“Target”** means an individual alleged to have experienced acts in violation of this policy, sometimes referred to as “victim.”

Hate Prevention Program

District Safe School Climate Plan

The Board believes that a comprehensive hate prevention program involving all staff and students will permit the expression of diverse viewpoints and help to prevent hate crimes and bias-related incidents in district schools and in the community.

1. Training shall be provided to staff in order to increase their awareness of the various manifestations of hate and bias-related incidents. The training will include anti-bias and conflict resolution methods; procedures for identifying and reporting incidents of racial, religious, and sexual harassment, discrimination, and hate crime; strategies for preventing such incidents from occurring; and resources available to assist in dealing with these incidents.
2. All students shall receive hate prevention education through age-appropriate classroom activities, assemblies, and school-related activities. The Board believes that prejudice and discrimination are learned attitudes and behaviors. Teaching children that even subtle forms of hate such as ethnic slurs or epithets, negative or offensive name-calling, stereotyping, and exclusion are hurtful and inherently wrong can help to prevent more extreme, violent manifestations of hate. Structured classroom activities and programs will help children to develop empathy while practicing the critical thinking and conflict resolution skills needed to recognize and respond to various manifestations of hate and bias-related behavior.
3. The District will develop partnerships with families, community organizations, and law enforcement agencies. These partnerships help identify resources available to school personnel to address hate incidents, raise community awareness of the issue, ensure appropriate responses to hate incidents, and ensure that youth receive a consistent message that hate-motivated and/or bias-related behavior will not be tolerated.
4. This policy shall be distributed annually to all students, their families, and to all District personnel. The purpose of this policy is to promote a school climate in which racial, religious, ethnic, gender, and other differences, as well as freedom of thought and expression, are respected and appreciated. The policy should have the input of parents, students, teachers, community members, and school administrators. It should respect diverse viewpoints, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression.
5. A range of corrective actions for those who violate school hate-prevention policies shall be used. The District will take a firm position against all injurious manifestations of hate, from ethnic slurs, racial epithets, and taunts, to graffiti, vandalism, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and violence. A wide range of non-disciplinary corrective actions to respond to incidents, including counseling, parent conferences, community service, awareness training, or completion of a research paper on an issue related to hate, as well as disciplinary actions such as in-school suspension, out of school suspension, or expulsion shall be utilized. If appropriate to respond to more serious incidents and, in cases involving criminal activity or threat of criminal activity, the police should be notified.
6. Data is to be collected to focus district-wide hate prevention efforts. Collection of data on the occurrence of school-based hate or bias-related incidents or crimes will assist administrators and teachers to identify patterns and to more effectively implement hate prevention policies and programs.

Required Actions

District Safe School Climate Plan

Whenever any school employee in the course of his/her employment has reason to believe that:

1. a hate crime has been committed or is about to be committed on school property, or has been or is about to be committed by any student, whether on or off school property, and whether or not such offense was or is about to be committed during operating school hours, or
2. that a student enrolled in the school has been or is about to become the victim of a hate crime, whether committed on school property or during school hours, the school employee shall immediately notify the building principal and Superintendent, who in turn shall notify the Bethel Police Department. The Principal shall notify the Bethel Police Department immediately if there is reason to believe the act of violence has been or is about to be committed against a student or there is reason to believe that a life has been or will be threatened.

Whenever any school employee in the course of employment has reason to believe that a bias incident has been committed or is about to be committed on school property, or has been or is about to be committed by any student, whether on or off school property and whether or not such bias incident was or is to be committed during school hours, the school employee should immediately notify the building principal and Superintendent, who in turn should promptly notify the Bethel Police Department. Any student charged with a hate crime or bias incident will be disciplined in accordance with the student conduct code or policies pertaining to discipline and student conduct.

In deciding whether to refer the matter of a bias incident to the Bethel Police Department the building principal and the Superintendent, should consider the nature and seriousness of the conduct and the risk that the conduct posed to the health, safety, and well-being of any student, school employee or member of the general public. The building principal and Superintendent should consider the possibility that the suspected incident could escalate or result in some form of retaliation which might occur within or outside school property.

It is understood a referral to the Police Department is only a request to conduct an investigation and nothing more than the transmission of information which might be pertinent to any such law enforcement investigation. A referral is not an accusation or formal charge.

Unless the Police Department requests otherwise, the school district will continue to investigate a suspected hate crime or bias incident occurring on school property and may take such actions as necessary and appropriate to redress and remediate any such acts.

School officials will secure and preserve any such graffiti or other evidence of a suspected hate crime or bias incident pending the arrival of the Police Department. The school officials, when feasible, will cover or conceal such evidence until the arrival of the Police Department.

Legal References:

Public Act 19-166

Public Act 21-95

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222d

District Safe School Climate Plan

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222g

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222h

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222j

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222k

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222l

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222q

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222r

Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 10-233a through 10-233f

Connecticut State Department of Education Circular Letter C-8, Series 2008-2009 (March 16, 2009)

Connecticut State Department of Education Circular Letter C-3, Series 2011-2012 (September 12, 2011)

Connecticut State Department of Education Circular Letter C-2, Series 2014-2015 (July 14, 2014)

Connecticut State Department of Education Circular Letter C-1, Series 2018-2019 (July 12, 2018)

Connecticut State Department of Education Circular Letter C-1, Series 2019-2020 (July 16, 2019)

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BETHEL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Bethel, CT