

Newington Public Schools Safe School Climate Plan

Introduction and Purpose

The Newington Board of Education is dedicated to promoting and maintaining a positive learning environment where every student is welcomed and feels socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically safe in school and in school-related activities. Newington Public Schools will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our schools or in school-related activities. The District will support this commitment in all aspects of its activities, including in its curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent/guardian involvement.

Newington Public Schools Safe School Climate Plan is developed in accordance with the Newington Board of Education Policy and with legislative and process parameter set forth by the Connecticut State Department of Education under Public Act [11-232](#). This plan supports our ongoing commitment to create and maintain physically, emotionally and intellectually healthy learning environments and focuses on proactive approaches to address climate, general social and behavioral skills and all forms of bullying.

The Safe School Climate Plan promotes consistency of approaches, expectations, practices and tiered interventions to create a climate in which all types of mean/bullying behavior are regarded as unacceptable. The administration, faculty and staff of this District commit to continue to improve, enhance and update both the Plan and its implementation biennially in order to best serve the students, parents, guardians, and the community.

Newington Public Schools Board of Education [Policy 5131.911](#)

The Board of Education Policy 5131.911 addresses the existence of bullying, cyberbullying and teen dating violence in the district's schools and school-related activities. Bullying is defined by the law as (1) 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 (2) 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.

Roles and Responsibilities

District Safe School Climate Coordinator

As part of Policy 5131.911, the Superintendent of Schools designated the Director of School Counseling and Educational Assessment as the District School Climate Coordinator. The District Coordinator's responsibilities include:

- Facilitating the District School Climate Committee
- Ensuring the implementation and monitoring of the District Safe School Climate Plan
- Providing leadership to the School Climate Specialists
- Provide timely and accurate data to the Superintendent, district and CSDE as requested and required by state statute.
- Facilitate annual review of the District School Climate Plan based on feedback from School Climate Teams
- Review all reports of suspected bullying and investigation reports
- Collaborate with School Climate Team members to create training modules for staff.

Safe School Climate Specialist is the principal of each school or designee responsible for:

- Investigating or supervising the investigation of reported acts of bullying in the school in accordance with the district's Safe School Climate Plan and Board Policy.
- Collecting and maintaining records of reports and investigations of bullying in the school; and
- Acting as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying and responding to reports of bullying in the school.

School Employees are responsible for reporting acts of bullying to the safe school climate specialist when they either witness the bullying or receive a report from a student or parent. School staff who witness acts of bullying or receive reports of bullying must inform the school climate specialist and/or administrators, who are then charged with investigating bullying and taking appropriate action. The term employee includes:

1. Teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, school counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional/tutor, or coach employed by Newington Public Schools or contracted to work in Newington Public Schools.
2. Any other individual who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides service to or on behalf of students enrolled in Newington Public Schools.

Assessment

Biennially the district will conduct a safe school climate survey of students in grade 3, 7 and 11, and parents to identify systems and programs and approaches that are maintaining physically, emotionally and intellectually healthy learning environments in our schools as well as look at areas for growth. The Safe School Climate Plan will be monitored using the data from the school climate assessment instruments.

Prevention and Intervention

All students will be provided with a variety of prevention and intervention strategies which may include, but are not limited to:

1. Implementation of SRBI positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for safe school climate or for the prevention of bullying
2. School rules prohibiting bullying, harassment, and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts;
3. Adequate adult supervision of common areas such as outdoor areas, hallways, the cafeteria, and other specific areas where bullying is more likely to occur;
4. Inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying education and prevention curricula in kindergarten through high school;
5. Individual interventions with the bully, parents, and school employees, and interventions with the bullied child, parents, and school employees;
6. Culturally competent school-based curriculum focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation.

For purposes of this section, “interventions with the bullied child” includes referrals to a school counselor, psychologist or other appropriate social or mental health service, and periodic follow-up by the safe school climate specialist with the bullied child.

Remedial Actions

Verified acts of bullying or teen dating violence shall result in intervention by the Safe School Climate Specialist (Principal or his/her designee) that is intended to address the acts of the bully and the needs of the victim and to assure that the prohibition against bullying or teen dating violence behavior is enforced, with the goal that any such bullying or teen dating violence behavior will end as a result.

Bullying behavior can take many forms and can vary dramatically in how serious it is, and what impact it has on the victim and other students. Accordingly, there is no one prescribed response to verified acts of bullying. While conduct that rises to the level of “bullying” as defined above will generally warrant disciplinary action against the perpetrator of such bullying, whether and to what extent to impose disciplinary action (detention, in-school suspension; suspension or expulsion) is a matter for the professional discretion of the Building Principal (or responsible program administrator or his/her designee.) No disciplinary action may be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous complaint.

Guide for Investigating Bullying Behavior

No two investigations will be exactly the same. Investigations should be tailored to the specific incident, considering the nature of the alleged conduct and the relative ages of the students involved. In all cases the safety of students and staff in the building must take precedence over following the order of the checklist. Under certain circumstances, it may be necessary to immediately contact the police and/or DCF. Any physical evidence should be collected or photographed as soon as possible, in accordance with the law, so as to avoid destruction.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF AN INVESTIGATION:

1. Be prompt, fair and thorough.
2. Be objective.
3. Give the affected parties an opportunity to be heard.

4. Do not prejudge the outcome, and do not rush to judgement.
5. Compile as much proof regarding the incidents in question as reasonably possible.
6. Document every significant step in the investigation
7. Save all of the evidence you obtain.
8. Be a critical thinker - does the information you gathered support a reliable conclusion?
9. Be patient.

BULLYING REPORTS

1. Students may make reports, including anonymous reports
2. Parents/guardians may make written reports - this includes email reports
3. School employees who witness acts of bullying or receive reports of bullying **MUST** orally notify the safe school climate specialist or another administrator if the safe school climate specialist is unavailable, not later than one day after witnessing or receiving the report of bullying.
4. The safe school climate specialist initiates an investigation.

INTERVIEW STEPS

1. Have the student tell you what happened-listen carefully. If appropriate, take notes regarding the student's statements and clearly explain to the student that he/she needs to provide any and all relevant information.
2. Have the student retell his/her account of the incident and stop the student and ask questions for clarification; take notes; record all information pertaining to the allegation(s).
3. Ask the student to write out a complaint and sign it; review it before accepting the statement to make sure the student recorded all information in writing relayed during the course of the interview.
4. If the student is unable to provide a written statement due to age of the student, disability, and/or other situation preventing a written statement, read your notes to the student and ask him/her to confirm the accuracy of the information recorded. Both the note taker and a witness should acknowledge this step at the end of the investigation notes.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: Targeted Student(s)

1. When did this incident happen?
2. Where did this incident happen?
3. Who was allegedly involved?
4. What happened? (Include as many details as possible - attach the student's written statement)
5. What actual words or phrases were used by the accused?
6. Were there any witnesses to the incident?
 - If yes, list the names of the witnesses on the reporting form.
7. What did you do or say to respond to the accused and/or others?
8. Did you talk to anyone about this incident before bringing it to the attention of the administrators?
 - If yes, list the individuals on the reporting form.
9. How did you feel by the other person's actions?
10. Did this behavior continue?
11. Have the police been contacted? (If applicable and age appropriate)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: Alleged Bully(ies)

Clearly explain to the student that he/she needs to provide any and all relevant information. Make sure the person charged understands the seriousness of the situation and that if the charges are valid, the necessary consequence(s) will be administered.

If appropriate, have the student provide a written statement or take notes regarding the student's statements. (see interview step #3)

During the interview ask questions for clarification; take notes; record all information pertaining to the allegation(s).

1. Present the complaint/accusation to the student and explain that you are conducting an investigation.
2. Have the student give his/her side of the story.
 - What happened?
 - What did you actually say or do?
3. Were there any witnesses to the incident?
 - If yes, list the names of the witnesses on the reporting form.
4. What actual words, phrases or action did you use?

INTERVIEWING the WITNESSES

To the extent appropriate, use the same questions for each witness.

Develop questions based on the situation.

- Do not share the details of the complaint beyond what is needed to enable you to ask the witness questions and for the witness to provide information.
- Stress the importance of honesty and cooperation.
- Let the witness know you prefer the individual not talk about the matter to others.
- Include a written statement or further documentation if needed.

Bullying Investigation Report Form

The school climate specialist is required to complete a [bullying investigation form](#) for each reported incident.

Sample Parent Letters

Parents of the alleged victim and parents of the alleged bully must be notified in writing of the results of the investigation. Letters [verifying bullying](#) of the victim and the [bully](#) as well as [unverified allegations](#) of the action to the victim and of the [alleged bully](#) are sent to the families of all involved students.

Safe School Climate - School Plans

Elementary Schools

Ruth Chaffee School, Mrs. Beverly Lawrence, Principal, School Climate Coordinator

Elizabeth Green School, Mr. James Marciano, Principal, School Climate Coordinator

John Paterson School, Mr. Mike Gaydos, Principal, School Climate Coordinator

Anna Reynolds School, Mr. Jason Smith, Principal, School Climate Coordinator

District-Wide Practices to Build Connections, Kindness and Caring for Others

Respect for others and respect for self is a daily lesson for every elementary student. Elementary teachers across the district implement district-adopted programs. Kindergartners through fourth-graders participate in a program called “Bucket-Filling,” which includes lessons focused on the theme that people carry invisible buckets containing their feelings. When someone’s bucket is full, that person feels good, but when the bucket is empty, he or she feels empty. The program encourages kids to become “bucketfillers” – those who fill other people’s buckets by doing kind things for them. We all carry an invisible bucket. This bucket contains our feelings. When our bucket is full, we feel great; when it’s empty, we feel empty. A bucketfiller is someone who says or does nice things for other people. By doing this, they are filling other people’s buckets and filling their own bucket at the same time. On the other hand, a bucketdipper says or does things to cause other people to feel bad. The whole bucketfilling concept is very simple but yet a very powerful approach to anti-bullying, which we call kindness, and further develops a culture of respect.

Elementary teachers implement a Morning Meeting based on the *Responsive Classroom* model to build a classroom community. The *Responsive Classroom* approach acknowledges children’s need to feel both pleasure and importance as members of a classroom community and builds upon parent’s initiatives to help children to care about others and themselves. Teachers use *Second Step* to teach specific lessons around empathy, emotional management, and problem solving. Students gain stronger social skills, and learn to take care of themselves, each other and their world. Social skills focus on cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy and self-control within the context of daily classroom life.

Developing a sense of belonging and promoting a whole-school community is established through the School Families program. This program focuses on trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. School families are composed of small groups of students from each grade K-4 who are assigned to one adult from Kindergarten through fourth grade. Lessons shared during “family meetings” develop connections, reinforce conduct expectations, and improve students’ social interactions. Curriculum materials and resources are provided to each school family leader to engage students in the shared activity.

When students struggle socially and emotionally, several school-based programs are in place to provide support. Each program is targeted improve the overall social and physical well being of the students. Are the specific programs or approaches that the school psychologists and/or social workers employ to support students’ social-emotional well being?

Middle Schools

Martin Kellogg Middle School

Mr. Jason Lambert, Principal

Mr. Kevin Doran, Assistant Principal, School Climate Coordinator

John Wallace Middle School

Mr. Dan Dias, Principal

Mr. Marco Tirillo, Assistant Principal, School Climate Coordinator

The middle schools implements a Safe School Climate Plan that is guided by the fundamental belief that each and every school community member should be treated with dignity, should have the opportunity to learn, work, interact, and socialize in physically, emotionally and intellectually safe respectful and positive school environments as well as the opportunity to experience high quality relationships.

The Safe School Climate Plan includes; Positive Behavior Interventions (PBIS), Advisory and programs specific to each school - PRIDE and PAWS. School Data Teams, which include the principal, assistant principal, coaches, and classroom teacher representatives, work collaboratively to analyze student behavior data and design programs. The School Climate Committee meets monthly to consider school-wide efforts to promote, enhance, and sustain a positive climate.

At Martin Kellogg Middle School, students are recognized for their positive behavior through a variety of programs. The PAW Incentive Program provides students with stickers when they meet school expectations in different settings. PAWS can be traded in at Marty's School Store for a wide range of items including stress balls, a visit to the Lion's Den, or lunch with Mr. Lambert. Students who are chosen by their teachers are also recognized by Mr. Lambert in our "Friday ROARS" program. Parents receive calls about their child's positive behavior and hard work that they have displayed at school. For exemplary displays of positive behavior, students are awarded large paws which are hung on the main display board outside the office for all students, staff, and visitors to see. These paws display the student's name so that they can be recognized for their work. Kellogg students are also engaged in our large-scaled recognition programs: Pillar Pride Meetings, Pep Rallies, and Pride Days. Pillar Pride Meetings are held every month with a specific theme that students and staff discuss in their homerooms. Discussion topics have included Celebrating Diversity, Self Motivation, Supporting our Community, and Celebrating Kellogg Pride. Pep Rallies and Pride Days are opportunities for our student body to come together and rally around a theme or activity. Music, a visit by Marty our mascot, fun games, and a good time are all key components. By building a sense of community around positive behavior and hard work, we look to show that Martin Kellogg Middle School is a great place to learn.

Newington High School

Terra Tigno, Principal

Mr. Jamie Harris, Assistant Principal, School Climate Coordinator

Newington High School is committed to providing its students with a positive school climate that celebrates the strengths and diversity of its students and staff. Newington High School is a place where respect, tolerance, responsibility, and pride are embedded into our school community. We are a *Family of Learners*, where we encourage our students to challenge themselves academically and take advantage of the various activities and athletic programs that are available at NHS. Newington High School makes every effort to instill in our students the qualities of our Civic and Social Expectations. The expectations are as follows:

Students and graduates of Newington High School will:

1. Demonstrate responsible behavior and citizenship
2. Work effectively in independent and collaborative settings
3. Respect human and cultural diversity
4. Take responsibility for their own lifelong learning and personal health and well being

Accordingly, Newington High School adheres strictly to all laws and responsibilities related to stopping bullying at Connecticut schools. In accordance with and in addition to that law:

- Newington High School maintains a Climate Team consisting of one building administrator, our director of school counseling, a special education teacher, general education teacher and a community/parent representative. During committee meetings, the team discusses perceptions of school climate and related data, such as discipline and bullying numbers. This information is also shared at Parent Advisory Council meetings, at which parents engage in discussions on all aspects of school climate and other issues.
- Student information sessions (assemblies) are held annually on the laws and consequences associated with bullying, the conditions which lead to bullying, how to recognize bullying and how every person can meet his or her responsibility for stopping bullying.
- Teachers receive training to ensure understanding of the law and its proper implementation in accordance with Newington Board of Education policy.
- The wellness class is a requirement for all students. The curriculum deals extensively with issues related to self-image, healthy choices, and developing respect through understanding psychological and physiological differences inherent in the make-up of peers and other human beings.
- The Student Success Plans and the developmental guidance curriculum impact all students. This curriculum includes academic, personal/social and career focus lessons.

Other actions by school personnel which contribute to a positive school climate include:

- KINDNHS - Spreading kindness is an ongoing theme at NHS. Each week staff and students are asked to complete a KINDNHS challenge. For example, students were asked to participate in the 3-2-1 challenge. Students met 3 new people (or individuals you barely know), find out 2 fun facts about them and submit their name 1 time in the KINDNHS box in the café. Winners were pulled from the bucket throughout the course of the school year.
- Spirit Week – a friendly, creative competition among graduating classes culminating in a school spirit pep rally and our Homecoming Dance.

- Regular showcase displays of student work, including artwork, pre-engineering and calculus projects, and handcrafted creations from our metals and woods students.
- Quarterly posting of honor roll lists.
- Implementation of Positive Student Behavior Management.
- Displays of photos and video of recent student performances on our three large screen monitors in our foyer and cafeteria.
- Administration, counselors, and student led summer orientations for incoming freshman.
- Administrative policies of greeting arriving students every morning, both outside and in our front lobby.
- Annual Truth About Hate for grade 10 students, is based on the Anti -Defamation League's program. This program is a model for building a respectful school climate and community.
- An annual College Fair which brings representatives from over one hundred colleges to our school. This bazaar-like arrangement sees hundreds of our students and their parents visiting and gathering information on a variety of schools and other career options.
- Assemblies which bring in veterans panel, poets, drug and alcohol, substance awareness professionals, and others.
- Assemblies which feature performances by our highly enrolled choral and instrumental groups.

Newington High School also sponsors and provides advisors for many student organizations, clubs and activities which contribute to creating a positive school climate. These include:

- Our chapter of the National Honor Society, which is very active in ways which contribute to a positive school climate. These include holiday food and toy drives, and academic tutoring, etc.
- Our Student Council holds student recreational activities such as dances and collaborates with community organizations such as the American Red Cross to organize blood drives.

Definitions

“Bullying” means the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, or a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at or referring to 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 substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Bullying includes, 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, 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.)*

“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.

“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 have recently been in a dating relationship.

“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, photoelectronic 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. *(It is based on people’s experiences of school and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures.)*