

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. To further foster safe, engaging learning environments in every District school, a District Safe School Climate Committee was established in June 2010.

The District Safe School Climate Committee began meeting in June of 2010, and, using in-house and community-based resources, they have surveyed students and parents about school safety; and have also conducted staff, student and parent workshops on bullying and mean behavior.

The District Safe School Climate Plan which follows, represents a comprehensive approach to address bullying, teen dating violence, and cyberbullying, as well as “mean behavior,” and sets forth the Board’s expectations for creating a positive school climate and thus preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, harassment, or mean behavior.

Bethel Board of Education policy strictly prohibits all bullying, teen dating violence or harassment, and 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 address 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, and mean behavior 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 intermittent school climate surveys of students and staff to determine the prevalence of bullying, teen dating violence, and harassment in the district;

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) programs in every school within the district;

- Developmental School Counseling lessons in kindergarten through grade 12;
- Implementation of a social-emotional curriculum and programs in Pre-School through grade 12;
- Behavior Analyst and Behavior Consultant support services for students, teachers, and administrators in Pre-School through grade 12;
- 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

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- types and frequency of bullying or harassment behaviors;
- 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;
 - Responsible Use Policy with clear expectations for respectful, responsible behavior when using technology on and off the school campus;
 - Annual safe school climate training programs for all certified and non-certified staff members, including district teachers, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, and Para educators;
 - Safe School Climate Specialists at each school charged with investigating all bullying or teen dating violence, complaints and responding to all reports of bullying or teen dating violence, in the school;
 - Continuously updated training for all administrators on identifying, investigating, and working to prevent bullying or teen dating violence, in their schools and throughout the district;
 - Provision of adequate adult supervision and camera surveillance in outdoor areas, hallways, lunchrooms, and other specific areas where bullying or teen dating violence, is likely to occur;
 - District Safe School Climate Specialist responsible for implementing the District Safe School Climate Plan; collaborating with Safe School Climate Specialists, the Board, and the Superintendent to prevent bullying, teen dating violence or harassment; providing data and information to the State Department of Education regarding bullying or teen dating violence; coordinating training for staff, students and parents; and meeting with the school-based Safe School Climate Specialists to make recommendations for any amendments to the district's plan; and
 - Provision of youth suicide and developmentally appropriate strategies for effective interventions to prevent youth suicide.

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 a 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 against whom such bullying, teen dating violence or

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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 race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, socio-economic 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.

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 Specialist and the school-based Safe School Climate Specialists will monitor the disciplinary consequences for incidents of harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability 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 District Safe School Climate Specialist will work closely with administrators at the school sites to determine if the school's response to harassment was reasonable, timely, effective, and tailored to redress the specific problems experienced by the bullied or teen dating violence student in terms of his/her academic program and activities. A determination will also be made as to whether the school's response was reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to assure that the bullied, teen dating violence or harassed student is not restricted in his/her participation in school programs and activities as a result of the hostile environment.

The Board of Education directs the Safe School Climate Specialists to prohibit any retaliation against individuals who report or assist in the investigation of an act of bullying, and to develop case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying, teen dating violence and harassment. The Board also requires the Safe School Climate Specialists to notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency if it is believed that any acts of bullying or harassment constitute criminal conduct.

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The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDOE) requires the District to complete the school climate assessment approved by the SDOE pursuant to section 10-222h, as amended by PA 11-232. This includes the annual collection of school climate assessment data from each school in the district, and the submission of this assessment data to the CSDOE.

II. Definition of Bullying

- A. **"Bullying"** means the *repeated* use by one or more students of a written, verbal, 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 district that:
1. causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student's property;
 2. places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property;
 3. creates a hostile environment at school for such student;
 4. infringes on the rights of such student at school; or
 5. substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of the school.
- B. Bullying shall include, but not be limited to, written, verbal, 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 and expression, socio-economic 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.

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. **"Mobile electronic communication"** 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

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device, a personal digital assistant, an electronic tablet, a smartphone, 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;

- C. **"Electronic communication"** means any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic, or photo optical system;
- D. **"Hostile environment"** means a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate;
- E. **"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 the Bethel Board of Education;
- F. **"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.*
- G. **"Volunteer"** means any person who volunteers time at any activity or program associated with the Bethel Board of Education.
- H. **"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.
- (1) Building the quality of student-staff relationships during school and at school events is a priority. Some of Bethel's administrators, in collaboration with community leaders, are developing "bully-safe havens" within the Bethel downtown community at specific business locations where many students spend leisure time.

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- (2) Bethel will annually survey school climate from the point of view of parents, and intermittently from the points of view of staff and students. The District Safe School Climate Coordinator will work with each school's School Climate Committee and the District School Climate Committee to analyze and address the findings from the surveys.
 - (3) Parents, guardians, and students will be notified annually through the Student Handbook and through the district and school websites that they may make anonymous reports of bullying to the schools' Safe School Climate Specialists. Parents, guardians, and students may also report bullying by speaking to any staff member or filing a written report of bullying at the school.
 - (4) All staff members who witness acts of bullying or receive oral or written reports of bullying from parents, guardians, or students must make a *timely* (not later than one school day) oral report to the school's Safe School Climate Specialist or another school administrator AND file a written report not later than two school days after witnessing the bullying or receiving a report of bullying from a student, parent, or guardian.
- I. **"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.
 - J. **"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. Leadership and Administrative Responsibilities**A. District Safe School Climate Coordinator**

The Superintendent or his/her designee is the District Safe School Coordinator. The Coordinator shall:

1. be responsible for implementing the District Safe School Climate Plan ("Plan");
2. collaborate with Safe School Climate Specialists, the Board, and the Superintendent to identify, prevent, and respond to bullying incidents and their disciplinary consequences within district schools;

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3. provide data and information, in collaboration with the Superintendent, to the State Department of Education regarding bullying;
4. meet with Safe School Climate Specialists on a regular basis to examine bullying and harassment reports; make recommendations concerning amendments to the district's Plan; and examine the appropriateness of all disciplinary consequences in the context of the "Dear Colleague" test (i.e., consequences must be reasonable, timely, effective, and tailored to redress the specific problems experienced by the bullied or harassed student(s) in terms of academic program and activities); and
5. coordinate and assist with the professional development of all district employees regarding the identification and prevention of bullying and harassment.

B. The Building-Based Safe School Climate Specialists

Each school has a designated Safe School Climate Specialist.

The Safe School Climate Specialists shall investigate or supervise the investigation of reported acts of bullying, teen dating violence or harassment by another administrator and act as the primary school official responsible for preventing bullying and harassment, responding to reports of suspected bullying or harassment in the school, and initiating appropriate and timely disciplinary consequences and safety plans/interventions for students involved in bullying or harassment.

V. Development and Review of Safe School Climate Plan

- A. The principal of each school shall establish a Safe School Climate Committee or designate the *PBIS* existing committee in the school to be responsible for developing and fostering a Safe School Climate and addressing issues relating to bullying in the school. .
- B. The Safe School Committees shall:
 - 1) receive copies of completed reports following **all** bullying, teen dating violence and/or harassment investigations;
 - 2) identify and address patterns of bullying, teen dating violence or harassment among students in the school;

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- 3) review and amend school regulations and procedures relating to bullying, teen dating violence and harassment;
 - 4) 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;
 - 5) continuously educate students, school employees, and parents/guardians on issues relating to bullying, teen dating violence and harassment;
 - 6) collaborate with the District Safe School Climate Specialist in the collection and analysis of data regarding bullying, teen dating violence and harassment; and
 - 7) 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. 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 web site and in all student handbooks.

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

- A. Students and parents (or guardians of students) may file written reports of bullying or teen dating violence using the form provided by the schools and found in the main offices and the counseling offices in each school. Written reports of bullying 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 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 or teen dating violence to any school employee, but we strongly encourage students to go directly to a building administrator. A student may also request anonymity when making a

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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 acts of suspected bullying or receive reports of suspected bullying or teen dating violence shall orally notify the Safe School 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 or teen dating violence. The school employee shall then file a written report not later than two (2) school days after making such oral report using the school's bullying or teen dating violence report form.
- D. The Safe School Specialist shall be responsible for reviewing any anonymous reports of suspected bullying or teen dating violence, shall investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of suspected bullying or teen dating violence and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly after receipt of any written reports.
- E. In investigating reports of suspected bullying 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.

VII. Responding to Verified Acts of Bullying

- A. Following investigation, if acts of bullying 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 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. 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. The Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall develop a Student Safety Support Plan for any student against whom acts of bullying and/or teen dating violence were directed. Such a support and intervention plan will include safety measures designed to protect against further acts of bullying or teen dating violence. The plan may include counseling, discipline, and other appropriate remedial actions as determined by the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee.

District Safe School Climate Plan**C. Notice to Law Enforcement:**

If the principal of a school (or his/her designee) reasonably believes that any verified act of bullying teen dating violence constitutes a criminal offense, he/she will notify appropriate law enforcement.

- D. If a bullying 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 school Safe School Climate Specialist if discrimination or harassment of legally protected classes is suspected.

VIII. Documentation and Maintenance of Log

- A. Each school shall maintain *all* written complaints 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.
- B. The Safe School Climate Specialist in each school shall maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in the school and this list shall be available for public inspection upon request (see attached form). C
- C. The Safe School Climate Specialist in each school shall report the number of verified acts of bullying in the school annually to the State Department of Education in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education.

IX. Other Prevention and Intervention Strategies

- A. Bullying behavior or teen dating violence behavior 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 students. Accordingly, there is no one prescribed response to verified acts of bullying or teen dating violence, and for that reason, the Bethel Public Schools developed a comprehensive response to bullying, harassment, teen dating violence or "mean behavior."
- B. An individualized Student Safety Support Plan shall be developed to address repeated incidents of bullying, teen dating violence or harassment against a single individual. Such Student Safety Support Plan will include safety measures designed to protect against further acts of bullying. A specific and individualized

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intervention plan will also be developed to address recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual or any one incident of harassment, if appropriate. This plan may include interventions such as counseling, discipline, and other appropriate remedial or restorative actions as determined by the building administrator.

C. The following describes possible interventions which may also be utilized to enforce the Board's prohibition against bullying and harassment:

i. Non-disciplinary interventions

When verified acts of bullying or teen dating violence 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 or teen dating violence. 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. Loss of privilege from extracurricular and/or athletic activities may also be considered, as appropriate, as either a safety or a remedial measure.

ii. Disciplinary interventions

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

In-school suspension and suspension may be imposed only after informing the accused perpetrator of the reasons for the proposed suspension and giving him/her an opportunity to explain the situation, in accordance with the Board's Student Discipline policies.

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

District Safe School Climate Planiii. Interventions for bullied students

The building administration shall intervene in order to address incidents of bullying against a single individual. Intervention strategies for a bullied student may include the following:

- a. Counseling;
- b. Increased supervision and monitoring of student to observe and intervene in bullying or teen dating violence situations or incidents of harassment;
- c. Encouragement of student to seek help when victimized or witnessing victimization;
- d. An individualized Student Safety Support Plan, and
- e. Restitution for property loss or damage incurred at the perpetrator's expense.

- D. In addition to prevention and intervention strategies, administrators, teachers and other employees may find opportunities to educate students about bullying 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" or teen dating violence.

X. 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 or teen dating violence.
- 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

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required by law.

XI. 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, approved and disseminated by the State Department of Education. The Board shall collect the school climate assessments for each school in the district and submit such assessments to the Department.

Legal References:

P.A. 11-232 An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222d

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

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

P.A. 13-3 An Act Concerning Gun Violence Protection and Safety.

P.A. 14-172 An Act Concerning Improving Employment Opportunities through Education and Ensuring Safe School Climate.

P.A. 14-234 An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

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BETHEL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Bethel, CT