

**Series 5000
Students**

SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE PLAN

The Ashford Board of Education (the “Board”) is committed to creating and maintaining a physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe educational environment free from bullying, teen dating violence, harassment and discrimination. In order to foster an atmosphere conducive to learning, the Board has developed the following Safe School Climate Plan, consistent with state law and Board policy. This Plan represents a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyberbullying and teen dating violence and sets forth the Board’s expectations for creating a positive school climate and thus preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying and teen dating violence.

Bullying behavior and teen dating violence are strictly prohibited, 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 addressing bullying behavior and teen dating violence, however, involves a multi-faceted approach, which includes education and the promotion of a positive school climate in which bullying will not be tolerated by students or school staff.

I. Prohibition Against Bullying, Teen Dating Violence and Retaliation

- A. The Board expressly prohibits any form of bullying behavior and teen dating violence on school grounds; at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds; at a school bus stop; on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education; or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the Board.
- B. The Board also prohibits any form of bullying behavior outside of the school setting if such bullying (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.
- C. The Board further prohibits any form of teen dating violence outside of the school setting if such violence substantially disrupts the educational process.
- D. In addition to prohibiting student acts that constitute bullying, the Board also prohibits discrimination and/or retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying.

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- E. Students who engage in bullying behavior or teen dating violence in violation of Board policy and the 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 consistent with state and federal law.

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, a 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 and 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.

III. Other 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. **“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.
- C. **“Emotional intelligence”** means the ability to (1) perceive, recognize and understand emotions in oneself or others, (2) use emotions to facilitate 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.
- 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. **“Mobile electronic device”** means any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more

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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.

- F. **“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 Board.
- G. **“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.
- H. **“Prevention and intervention strategy”** may include, but is not limited to,
- (1) implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for safe school climate or for the prevention of bullying identified by the Department of Education,
 - (2) school rules prohibiting bullying, teen dating violence, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts,
 - (3) adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying is likely to occur,
 - (4) inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying and teen dating violence 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) school-wide training related to safe school climate,
 - (7) student peer training, education and support,
 - (8) promotion of parent involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions, and

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- (9) culturally competent school-based curriculum focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation.
- I. **“School climate”** means the quality and character of school life based on patterns of students’, parents’ and guardians’ and school employees’ experiences of school life, including but not limited to, norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures.
- J. **“School employee”** means
 - (1) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, school counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by the Board or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; or
 - (2) any other individual who, in the performance of the individual’s 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 Board.
- K. **“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 Board.
- L. **“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.
- M. **“Teen dating violence”** means any act of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including stalking, harassing and threatening, that occurs between two students who are currently in or who have recently been in a dating relationship.

IV. Leadership and Administrative Responsibilities

A. Safe School Climate Coordinator

The Superintendent shall appoint, from existing school district staff, a District Safe School Climate Coordinator (“Coordinator”). The Coordinator shall:

- (1) be responsible for implementing the district’s Safe School Climate Plan (“Plan”);
- (2) collaborate with Safe School Climate Specialists, the Board, and the Superintendent to prevent, identify and respond to bullying in district schools;

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- (3) provide data and information, in collaboration with the Superintendent, to the Department of Education regarding bullying; and
- (4) meet with Safe School Climate Specialists at least twice during the school year to discuss issues relating to bullying in the school district and to make recommendations concerning amendments to the district's Plan.

B. Safe School Climate Specialist

The Principal of each school (or principal's designee) shall serve as the Safe School Climate Specialist. The Safe School Climate Specialist shall investigate or supervise the investigation of reported acts of bullying, collect and maintain records of reports and investigations of bullying in the school and act as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying and responding to reports of bullying in the school.

V. Development and Review of Safe School Climate Plan

- A. The Principal of each school shall establish a committee or designate at least one existing committee ("Committee") in the school 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 high school who is selected by the students of such school in a manner determined by the school principal.

B. The Committee shall:

- (1) receive copies of completed reports following bullying investigations;
- (2) identify and address patterns of bullying among students in the school;
- (3) implement the provisions of the school security and safety plan, regarding the collection, evaluation and reporting of information relating to instances of disturbing or threatening behavior that may not meet the definition of bullying,

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- (4) review and amend school policies relating to bullying;
 - (5) review and make recommendations to the Coordinator regarding the Safe School Climate Plan based on issues and experiences specific to the school;
 - (6) educate students, school employees and parents/guardians on issues relating to bullying;
 - (7) collaborate with the Coordinator in the collection of data regarding bullying; and
 - (8) perform any other duties as determined by the Principal 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.
- D. The Board shall approve the Safe School Climate Plan developed pursuant to Board policy and submit such plan to the Department of Education. Not later than thirty (30) calendar days after approval by the Board, the Board shall make such plan available on the Board's and each individual school in the school district's web site and ensure that the Safe School Climate Plan is included in the school district's publication of the rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools and in all student handbooks.

VI. Procedures for Reporting and Investigating Complaints of Bullying

- A. Students and parents (or guardians of students) may file written reports of bullying. Written reports of bullying shall 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, and the names of potential witnesses. Such reports may be filed with any building administrator and/or the Safe School Climate Specialist (*i.e.*, building principal or designee), and all reports shall be forwarded to the Safe School Climate Specialist for review and actions consistent with this Plan.
- B. Students may make anonymous reports of bullying to any school employee. Students may also request anonymity when making a report, even if the student's identity is known to the school employee. In cases where a student requests anonymity, the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall meet with the student (if the student's identity is known) to review the request for anonymity and discuss the impact that maintaining the anonymity of the complainant may

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have on the investigation and on any possible remedial action. All anonymous reports shall be reviewed and reasonable action will be taken to address the situation, to the extent such action may be taken that does not disclose the source of the report, and is consistent with the due process rights of the student(s) alleged to have committed acts of bullying. No disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

- C. School employees who witness acts of bullying or receive reports of bullying shall orally notify the Safe School Climate Specialist, or another school administrator if the Safe School Climate Specialist is unavailable, not later than one (1) school day after such school employee witnesses or receives a report of bullying. The school employee shall then file a written report not later than two (2) school days after making such oral report.
- 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 bullying, 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 will result in disciplinary action.

VII. Responding to Verified Acts of Bullying

- A. Following investigation, if acts of bullying 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 (48) hours** after the investigation is completed. This notification shall include a description of the school's response to the acts of bullying; 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

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the Board by the Connecticut Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative and published on the Internet website of the Board. In providing such notification, however, Ashford Public Schools will take care to respect the statutory privacy rights of other students, including the perpetrator of such bullying. The specific disciplinary consequences imposed on the perpetrator, or personally identifiable information about a student other than the parent/guardian's own child, may 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 to ensure the safety of the student/victim and policies and procedures in place 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 to a meeting, separate and distinct from the previously described meeting, to discuss specific interventions undertaken by the school to prevent further acts of bullying. The invitations may be made simultaneous with the notification described above in Section VII.A.
- 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 support plan will include safety measures 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 designee) reasonably believes that any act of bullying constitutes a criminal offense, he/she 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 or designee, may consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the Principal or designee deems appropriate.
- F. If a bullying complaint raises a concern about discrimination or harassment on the basis of a legally protected classification (such as race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability or gender identity or expression), the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee shall also coordinate any bullying investigation with other appropriate personnel within the district as appropriate

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(e.g. Title IX Coordinator, Section 504 Coordinator, etc.), so as 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 Section X 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.

IX. Documentation and Maintenance of Log

- A. Each school 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 Principal of 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. 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. Given that any determination of bullying involves repeated acts, 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

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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 Principal of each school shall report the number of verified acts of bullying in the school annually to the 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 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 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 may also consider appropriate alternatives to traditional disciplinary sanctions, including age-appropriate consequences and other restorative 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 sets forth possible interventions, which may also be utilized to enforce the Board’s prohibition against bullying and teen dating violence:

- (1) 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.

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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.

(2) Disciplinary interventions

When acts of bullying are verified or teen dating violence occurs, and a disciplinary response is warranted, students are 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 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 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.

(3) 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;

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- (b) Increased supervision and monitoring of student to observe and intervene in bullying situations or instances of teen dating violence;
 - (c) Encouragement of 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.
- (4) General prevention and intervention strategies

In addition to the prompt investigation of complaints of bullying and direct intervention when acts of bullying are verified, other district actions may ameliorate potential problems with bullying in school or at school-sponsored activities. Additional district actions may also ameliorate potential problems with teen dating violence. While no specific action is required, and school needs for specific prevention and intervention strategies may vary from time to time, the following list of potential prevention and intervention strategies shall serve as a resource for administrators, teachers and other professional employees in each school. Such prevention and intervention strategies may include, but are not limited to:

- (a) School rules prohibiting bullying, teen dating violence, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts;
- (b) Adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying or teen dating violence are likely to occur;
- (c) 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;

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- (d) Individual interventions with the perpetrator, parents and school employees, and interventions with the bullied student, parents and school employees;
- (e) School-wide training related to safe school climate, which training may include Title IX sex discrimination/sexual harassment prevention training, Section 504/ADA training, cultural diversity/multicultural education or other training in federal and state civil rights legislation or other topics relevant to safe school climate;
- (f) Student peer training, education and support;
- (g) Promotion of parent involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions;
- (h) Implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for a safe school climate or for the prevention of bullying and teen dating violence, including any such program identified by the Department of Education;
- (i) Respectful responses to bullying and teen dating violence concerns raised by students, parents or staff;
- (j) Planned professional development programs addressing prevention and intervention strategies, which training may include school violence prevention, conflict resolution and prevention of bullying and teen dating violence, with a focus on evidence based practices concerning same;
- (k) Use of peers to help ameliorate the plight of victims and include them in group activities;
- (l) Avoidance of sex-role stereotyping;
- (m) Continuing awareness and involvement on the part of school employees and parents with regards to prevention and intervention strategies;
- (n) Modeling by teachers of positive, respectful, and supportive behavior toward students;

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- (o) Creating a school atmosphere of team spirit and collaboration that promotes appropriate social behavior by students in support of others;
 - (p) Employing classroom strategies that instruct students how to work together in a collaborative and supportive atmosphere; and
 - (q) Culturally competent school-based curriculum focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation.
- D. 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.”
- E. Funding for the school-based bullying intervention and school climate improvement strategy may originate from public, private, federal or philanthropic sources.

XI. Improving School Climate (ATTACHED TO THIS POLICY)

Individual schools should use this section to outline affirmative steps to improve the quality of school climate as defined within a particular school and/or district. These strategies should align with school improvement plans and school climate assessments, and be based on current data available on the quality of school climate within the school and/or district including, but not limited to, the type, nature, frequency etc. of behavior that may constitute or lead to bullying, teen dating violence, harassment or similar behavior. This section is intended to be broader in scope and should be targeted towards fostering positive school climate rather than exclusively preventing, investigating and otherwise responding to specific incidences of bullying and teen dating violence.

XII. Annual Notice and Training

- A. Students, and parents or guardians of students shall be notified annually of the process by which students may make reports of bullying.
- B. The Board shall provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying.
- C. At the beginning of each school year, each school shall provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district’s safe school climate plan and require that all school employees annually complete training on the identification, prevention and response to bullying as required by law.

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- D. As required by state law, the Board, after consultation with the Department of Education and the Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative, shall also provide on its website training materials to school administrators regarding the prevention of and intervention in discrimination against and targeted harassment of students based on such students' (1) actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, 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 (2) association with individuals or groups who have or are perceived to have one or more of such characteristics.
- E. Any person appointed by the district to serve as district safe school climate coordinator shall complete mental health and first aid training offered by the Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

XIII. School Climate Assessments

Biennially, the Board shall require each school in the district to complete an assessment using the school climate assessment instruments, including surveys, approved and disseminated by the Connecticut State Department of Education. The Board shall collect the school climate assessments for each school in the district and submit such assessments to the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Legal References:

Public Act 19-166

Public Act 21-95

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222d

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)

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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)

7/31/2021

Approved by the Ashford Board of Education:

September 16, 2021

ASHFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS Safe School Climate Plan

Introduction

There is a growing appreciation in Connecticut that school climate is an integral component of the learning environment and essential for school improvement. Connecticut has defined school climate as “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.” The National School Climate Standards provide a vision and framework for a positive and sustainable school climate. Through the implementation of appropriate prevention and intervention strategies ASHFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS will sustain school environments where all members are welcomed, supported and feel safe in school; socially, emotionally and physically and intellectually. In response to the need to establish these positive school climates, ASHFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS has developed the following Safe School Climate Plan.

Definition: “Bullying” means (A) the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyber-bullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district, or (B) a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district, that: (i) Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student’s property, (ii) places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for such student, (iv) infringes on the rights of such student at school, or (v) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Bullying shall include, but not be limited to, a written, oral or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, 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.

Component	Actions	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline
Bullying Policy	<p>Continue to implement and enforce already approved Anti-Bullying Policy which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student codes of conduct that are defined and prohibit bullying in accordance with state law. • A prohibition against bullying on school grounds, at a 	Board of Education and Superintendent	Ongoing

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	<p>school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the local or regional board of education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A prohibition against bullying outside of the school setting if such bullying results in any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. • A prohibition against any form of discrimination and retaliation directed toward an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying is also strictly prohibited. 		
Reporting Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orally notify the Safe School Climate Specialist or school Administrator after being witness to acts of bullying or receiving reports of bullying • File a written report with the Safe School Climate Specialist after being witness to acts of bullying or receiving reports of bullying • Any student who believes s/he has been the victim of bullying/cyberbullying may report the matter to any school employee, either in writing or anonymously. • Parent(s)/guardian(s) may file written reports of Suspected bullying/cyberbullying. 	<p>All school employees</p> <p>All school employees</p> <p>All Students</p> <p>All Parents</p>	<p>Within one school day after witnessing or receiving report</p> <p>Within two school days of oral notification</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

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Notification Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district's Safe School Climate Plan. • Notify students and the parents or guardians of students of the process by which students may make reports of bullying. • Provide students with notice of the definition of bullying, cyberbullying and the potential consequences of engaging in such acts by the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying. • Publish Safe School Climate Plan on the school district's Internet web site and ensure that such plan is included in the school district's publication of the rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools and in all student handbooks. 	<p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator and Specialists</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator</p>	<p>annually</p> <p>annually</p> <p>annually</p> <p>By Feb 1, 2012 and annually</p>
Investigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and disseminate investigation procedures for use by safe school climate specialists. • Investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of bullying and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly after receipt of any written reports. • Review any anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report. • Determine whether the alleged conduct occurred & whether such conduct constitutes bullying as defined in the district policy. 	<p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator and Specialists</p> <p>Safe School Climate Specialists</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator and Specialists</p>	<p>Upon receipt of report Promptly</p> <p>Upon completion of investigation</p> <p>Upon completion of investigation</p>

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Response to Verified Acts of Bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take prompt corrective action that is reasonably calculated to stop the bullying and prevent any recurrence of such behavior, if it is determined that bullying has occurred. Notify the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed not later than forty-eight hours after the completion of the investigation. The notification to the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying shall include a description of the response of school employees to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying Invite the parent(s)/guardian(s) of students who engage in any verified acts of bullying after the completion of the investigation to a meeting at which the following will be shared: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A description of the verified act(s). A description of the school's interventions in response to the act(s). Any consequences that may result from the commission of any further acts of bullying. Invite the parent(s)/guardian(s) of any student against whom an act of bullying was verified after the completion of the investigation. Notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency when principal, or designee, believes that any acts of bullying constitute criminal conduct. 	<p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator and/or Safe School Climate Specialists</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator and/or Safe School Climate Specialists</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator and/or Safe School Climate Specialist</p>	<p>Upon determination that bullying has occurred</p> <p>48 hours after the completion of the investigation</p> <p>Upon determination that bullying has occurred</p> <p>Upon determination that bullying has occurred</p>
Safe School Climate Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appoint District Safe School Climate Coordinator Appoint Safe School Climate Specialist in each school Establish Safe School Climate Committee in 	<p>Superintendent</p> <p>Superintendent or designee</p> <p>Safe School Climate District</p>	<p>By July 1, 2012</p> <p>By July 1, 2012</p> <p>By July 1, 2012</p>

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	<p>accordance with the law, (including at least one parent/guardian of a student at the school)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish roles, responsibilities and procedures for Safe School Climate Committee including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and address patterns of bullying among students in the school; Review and make recommendations to amend school policies relating to bullying; Review and make recommendations to the district safe school climate coordinator regarding the district's safe school climate plan based on issues and experiences specific to the school; Educate students, school employees and parents and guardians of students on issues relating to bullying; Collaborate with the district safe school climate coordinator in the collection of data regarding bullying, in accordance with the law; Perform any other duties as determined by the school principal that are related to the prevention, identification and response to school bullying for the school. 	<p>Coordinator and Specialists</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator and Specialists</p>	<p>By July 1, 2012</p>
Prevention and Intervention Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify effective evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies approved by CSDE. Strategies may include, but are not limited to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will participate in an evidence-based approach, program or process approved by the State Department of Education that is designed to ensure a positive school climate & prevent bullying. Students will be made aware school rules prohibiting bullying, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate 	<p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator, Specialists and Safe School Climate Committee</p>	<p>By July 1, 2012</p>

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	<p>consequences for those who engage in such acts;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying is likely to occur; ○ Inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying education and prevention curricula in kindergarten through eighth grade; ○ School-wide training related to safe school climate; ○ Promotion of parent involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions. 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the prevention and intervention strategies identified by the Safe School Climate Committee • Provide students with access to evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies 	<p>All School Employees</p> <p>All School Employees</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	
Assessment of School Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete an assessment using the school climate assessment instruments including surveys, approved and disseminated by the State Department of Education for each school • Submit assessment results for each school in the district to the State Department of Education • Review and analyze data obtained from climate surveys/ make necessary modifications to the district plan • Compare and contrast survey results with the National School Climate Standards and best practices 	<p>Safe School Climate Committee</p> <p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator</p> <p>Safe School Climate Committee</p> <p>Safe School Climate Committee</p>	<p>By July 1, 2012, and biennially thereafter,</p> <p>By July 1, 2012 and according to CSDE guidelines</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	
Documentation and Record Keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a procedure for each school to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Document and maintain records relating to reports and investigations of bullying in the 	<p>Safe School Climate District Coordinator & Specialists</p>	<p>By July 1, 2012</p>	

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	<p>school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in the school and make such list available for public inspection. This public list must not contain any personally identifiable information about any student or information that might reasonably lead to the identification of any student. • Report the number of verified acts of bullying in the district's schools to the Department of Education in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education 	Safe School Climate District Coordinator	Annually based on timeline established by CSDE
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide all certified school employees training on the prevention, identification and response to bullying. The training will be provided to teachers, administrators and pupil personnel who hold the initial educator, provisional educator or professional educator certificate via in-service training. • Provide all other school employees training provided by the State Department of Education. 	Safe School Climate District Coordinator and Specialists CSDE with Safe School Climate District Coordinator and Specialists	Annually Annually

Safe School Climate Rubric

NSC Standard	Pre-Awareness	Awareness	Emergent	Maintenance
Standard 1: Shared Mission Is it evident that all members of the school community are committed to physical, emotional and intellectual safety of the learners?	No effort has been made to engage students, staff and community stakeholders in recognizing the importance of a positive school climate to support student achievement	An attempt has been made to engage students, staff and/or community stakeholders in recognizing the importance of a positive school climate to support student achievement	Recognition, understanding and engagement in the principles, practices and strategies as well as the necessary formative data required to improve the learning environment in meaningful ways for stakeholders	All stakeholders are committed to and engaged in systemic improvement efforts that result in the physical, emotional and intellectual safety of all learners
Standard 1: Shared Vision Do participants share a vision of what a positive school climate looks, feels and sounds like?	No effort has been made to engage stakeholders in arriving at a common understanding of what a positive school climate looks, feels and sounds like	Attempts have been made to articulate a common vision of what a positive school climate implies, however most stakeholders are unaware and/or unaffected by these efforts	A common vision for improving school climate has been embraced and endorsed; a sense of shared ownership and pathways toward meaningful professional development have been articulated	Day to day decision making and practice is guided and supported by the shared vision; efforts to narrow any gaps between school culture "as is," and "as envisioned" are ongoing
Standard 1: Shared Values How must participants act toward one another in order to advance the vision?	No efforts have been made to identify and articulate the attitudes, behaviors and/or commitments necessary to advance the mission and vision for a positive school climate	Staff members have articulated beliefs, ground rules and norms for team functioning that mirror a positive school climate, however these statements do not yet inform day-to-day practice	Staff members have made a conscious effort to live by the beliefs, ground rules and norms mirroring a positive school climate in day-to-day practice; inconsistencies are confronted and managed appropriately	The beliefs, ground rules and norms are embedded in the school culture and are evident to all school stakeholders in overt and meaningful ways; they influence policies, procedures, daily practices and all decision making

Safe School Climate Rubric

Standard 1: Shared Goals What are the priorities?	No effort has been made to engage school stakeholders in identifying goals related to improving school climate; any existing goals rest solely with school administration	Efforts have begun to identify goals; goals are not sufficiently actionable and do not yet influence systemic decision making	Long and short term actionable school climate improvement goals have been identified and clearly communicated to all stakeholders; assessment instruments and strategies have been developed and implemented to monitor change over time	Day-to-day practice is guided by a systemic recognition and alignment of both short and long term goals; alignment with mission and vision is overt; successes are shared and celebrated; challenges are dealt with collaboratively
Standard 2: Shared School Policies	Policies do not exist to promote the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement	Efforts have begun to create policies to promote the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement	Policies are in place to promote the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement	Policies are firmly established to promote the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and are reviewed on a regular basis
Standard 2: Shared School Policies	Policies do not exist that create a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged	Efforts have begun to establish policies that create a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged	Policies are in place that create a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged	Policies are firmly established that create a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged, and are reviewed on a regular basis

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Standard 3: School Practices	No school community practices are identified, prioritized or supported to promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students	The school community recognizes that practices are needed to identify, prioritize and support the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students	The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students	Practices are firmly supported and universally followed that promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students
Standard 3: School Practices	No school community practices are identified, prioritized or supported to enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities	The school community recognizes that practices are needed to enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities	The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities	Practices are firmly supported and universally followed that enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities
Standard 3: School Practices	No school community practices are identified, prioritized or supported to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged	The school community recognizes that practices are needed to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged	The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged	Practices are firmly supported and universally followed that address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged
Standard 3: School Practices	No school community practices are identified, prioritized or supported to develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms	The school community recognizes that practices are needed to develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms	The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms	Practices are firmly supported and universally followed that develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms

Safe School Climate Rubric

Standard 4: Safe Environment	The school community does not create an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically	The school community recognizes the importance of creating an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically	The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically	Practices are firmly supported and universally followed that create an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically
Standard 5: Social Justice	There are no meaningful or engaging practices, activities and norms within the school community that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice	The school community recognizes the importance of developing meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice	The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice	Practices are firmly supported and universally followed that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice
Continuous Improvement Is there a clear understanding that school climate improvement is an ongoing organic process integral to wider school improvement?	Little, if any attention is devoted to creating systems for individuals or the school to track school climate improvement	A few staff members in the school are tracking general or personal indicators of school climate improvement; positive trends are emphasized and celebrated; negative trends are suppressed or dismissed	Individual staff members and teams gather information that enables them to identify, track and monitor school climate improvement efforts within classrooms and the wider school community	Formative and summative school climate improvement data is monitored for progress on par with all other school improvement data; the five stages of the school climate improvement process are implemented with fidelity

Safe School Climate Rubric

<p>Family/Community Partnerships Are all stakeholders' interests represented and reflected in school climate improvement efforts?</p>	<p>Little, if any efforts are made to communicate and cultivate partnerships with school community stakeholders; family members are either ignored or viewed as adversaries</p>	<p>Sporadic one-way efforts are made to keep families informed of events and situations at school in order to secure support for the schools' efforts; family members are welcome to volunteer and participate within school-determined parameters</p>	<p>Structures and processes for two-way communication with families are developed; the family's perspective is solicited on both school-wide issues and matters related to their own children; family-school partnerships exist to support the schools' interests; family voices are heard and recognition is emerging as to their critical stakeholder status</p>	<p>School-family-community partnerships are fully developed, collaborative and systemic; family members are full partners with the school in educational decision-making that affects their own children; community resources are used to strengthen the school and student learning; the education and well-being of all students is seen and practiced as a shared commitment and responsibility of all stakeholders</p>
<p>Impact on Results Is progress monitoring inherent in the school climate improvement process?</p>	<p>Articulation of what is meant by a positive school climate is not in place</p>	<p>A generalized sense of what is meant by a positive school climate is understood; efforts to improve climate are task and project oriented rather than guided by systemic mission, vision and identifiable outcomes;</p>	<p>Clear indicators have been identified and aligned with school climate improvement goals; data are collected and monitored; analyzed results are shared with staff and family-community stakeholders</p>	<p>School climate data is fully embraced and informs improved practice; professional development for continuous improvement is embedded in the culture of the school; all stakeholders assume ownership and responsibility for improving student connectedness and minimizing barriers to learning</p>