Bedford High School
Beliefs and Expectations for Students Regarding
Bullying/Cyberbullying/Harassment
Including Processes and Procedures Related to the Investigation of Students' Rights
Violations

Bedford High School expects students to conduct themselves in a manner in keeping with their levels of development, maturity, and demonstrated capabilities with a proper regard for the rights and welfare of other students, school staff, volunteers, and contractors. Please refer to the Bedford Student Handbook for a more detailed listing of students' rights and expectations.

Definition of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying takes place when a stronger or more emotionally or socially powerful individual intentionally and repeatedly hurts, threatens, or torments a more vulnerable individual. Bullying:

· is deliberate.
· happens repeatedly.
· Bullying is a one-sided, unfair match.

Bullying, therefore, is different from a single incident of teasing. It is, in fact, an abuse of power. Bullying also differs from play, and from the normal conflicts of childhood. When two children of approximately equal strength or power are engaged in a fight, it is not bullying. Thus, although all acts of bullying are aggressive, not all aggressive acts are bullying. Bullying can occur face to face or it can happen behind one's back, especially through cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of any electronic devices. Bullying can be short-term or it can last a long time. Bullying can be done by an individual or by a group.

- If a student feels that they are being bullied, it is important to tell a trusted adult, a parent, teacher, counselor, principal, or nurse, who can help them.

Our Core Beliefs and Expectations:

We believe that standards for student behavior must be set cooperatively through interaction among the students, parents and guardians, staff, and community members, producing an atmosphere that encourages students to grow in self-discipline. The development of this atmosphere requires respect for self and others, as well as for district and community property on the part of students, staff, and community members.

We believe that the best discipline is self-imposed, and that it is the responsibility of staff to use disciplinary situations as opportunities for helping students learn to assume responsibility and the consequences of their behavior. Staff members who interact with

students shall apply best practices designed to *prevent* discipline problems and encourage students' abilities to develop self-discipline.

Since bystander support of harassment or bullying can support these behaviors, the district prohibits both active and passive support for acts of harassment or bullying. The staff should encourage students to support students who walk away from these acts when they see them, constructively attempt to stop them, or report them to the designated authority.

We expect students to conduct themselves in a manner in keeping with their levels of development, maturity, and demonstrated capabilities with a proper regard for the rights and welfare of other students, school staff, volunteers, and contractors.

Process for Responding to a Report of Peer Aggression

Pre-Investigation: Even before fully investigating allegations of bullying or retaliation, school personnel will consider whether there is a need to take immediate steps to support the alleged victim and/or protect the alleged victim from further potential incidents of concern. In taking any such action, however, the rights of both the alleged target and alleged aggressor must be considered.

1. STEP ONE: COMPLETE INCIDENT REPORT FORM

If An Adult Witnesses Incident
- All staff should have copies of the Incident Report Form readily available.
- Adult completes Incident Report and gives to staff designated to handle such reports (Assistant Principal or designee).
- Encourage staff and faculty to report incidents even if they are unsure if the student wants the incident reported.

If a Student Reports Incident to an Adult
Adults in the school have access to the forms; Parents will be able to access reporting forms from the school's main office, from their children's teachers, or from the BHS website.

All reports will be investigated by the Assistant Principal or designee.

At all times the **adult affirms the student's feelings**, i.e. "you were right to report this. I'm glad you told me."

Staff Response:
Determine if there are immediate safety issues that must be addressed.
Note student's level of distress and/or the presence of injuries, damaged/torn clothes, etc.

If immediate safety issues exist, staff member(s) will take student to the school nurse and/or report incident to the Principal/Assistant principal immediately. The teacher will follow up by completing an Incident Report.

If no immediate safety issues exist, staff member(s) will work with the student to complete an Incident Report.

2. STEP TWO: INTERVIEW TARGET OF PEER AGGRESSION
1. Interview the target rather than the aggressor first. This addresses the urgency of the targeted student's need to talk to someone as well as allows the staff member (investigator) to assess if immediate danger or safety issues exist and must be dealt with right away.

The investigator will seek to determine the basis of the complaint, gathering information from the complainant, including such matters as: <u>what</u> specifically happened, <u>who</u> committed the alleged acts, <u>who</u> was present or may have information about the events, <u>when</u> the events occurred (date, time of day), and <u>where</u> the events occurred.

*** We never ask to see victim in the alleged aggressor's presence, and we emphasize that the victim will not be mentioned to the aggressor and will not be part of the discipline.
*** It is important to stress that **mediation should not be used with bullying situations**, i.e. conflicts characterized by an inequality of power where one child is being clearly victimized by another. Mediation is the ideal response to equal-power conflicts between children.
2. Support target by:
1) Affirming student's feelings, i.e. "You were right to report this. I'm glad you told me."
2) Asking the student what they have already attempted to do, to stop this situation.
3) Making it clear that the aggression was not their fault.
4) Thinking carefully before giving advice, as often times the targets have already tried and failed to stop this aggression using the strategies the school has suggested, i.e. walking away, telling the aggressor to stop, etc.
5) Reminding target to always report aggression.
6) Brainstorming solutions with them after identifying what has and has not worked in the past. Note: even solutions that seem obvious to adults may not be apparent to children, such as merely avoiding the bully.
7) Recruiting peers to befriend isolated targets.

3. STEP THREE: INTERVIEW STUDENT ACCUSED OF PHYSICAL AGGRESSION
1) **Identify the problem** and diffuse reporting responsibility, i.e. "I have been hearing that…" "I have an Incident Report that states…." Alternatively, own reporting responsibility or attribute it to another adult, i.e., "I am disturbed by what I have been seeing.." or "Ms. So-and-so saw you…"

2) **Focus more on the aggressor student's behavior than on a particular incident.**
For example, "I have a report here that you were calling kids names," rather than "I have a report that you called Susie Smith a bad name."

3) **Provide incentives for honesty.** For example, if the aggressor denies any wrongdoing, tell student that if they tell the truth about the incident you can mention their honesty when calling parents/guardians.

4) The procedure differs somewhat, depending on whether the student who is accused of being the aggressor admits wrongdoing or not.

IN THE CASE OF DENIAL OF WRONGDOING:

5) If there is **any corroborating evidence or witnesses**, tell the student that. We do not mention the victim or the witnesses by name (unless they are adults), if possible. Go to Number 7 below: "Assigning Consequences".

6) **If there is zero corroboration and the "aggressor" continues to deny everything**
– one student's word against another's:
   a) We will continue to keep a very close eye on the situation and so will the other adults in the school.
   b) The student may be required to have a weekly "check-in" with his/her counselor or Assistant Principal. Please know that the weekly check-in is not a punishment; rather, we stress that we want to be sure that the student is doing well and want to hear weekly how they are doing.

c) **NOTE**: **If the aggressor denies, regardless of whether there is corroboration, further investigation is required**.

Once the allegations of the complainant are established, the investigator will gather other evidence, which often involves interviews of the alleged aggressor and/or other witnesses. If appropriate, the investigator should remind the alleged aggressor and witnesses that retaliation against persons whom they believe might have reported the incidents or cooperated with the investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

The confidentiality of the complainant and the other witnesses will be maintained to the extent practicable given the school's obligation to investigate and address the matter.

IF THE AGGRESSOR ADMITS WRONGDOING:

7. Assign consequence to aggressor. If the student admits wrongdoing or an investigation leads staff to believe student was engaging in bullying behavior, student should look up consequence on the discipline rubric. An administrator will explain that consequences are not arbitrary and that any student who engages in this behavior will in fact experience the same consequence.

8. Contact parent. Student should then call parent, in presence of a school staff person, to tell parent what they did and what the consequence is. Staff should then complete and

send home the Parent Communication Letter.

9. Document incident and consequence.
Complete Follow Up Form (see below examples of Factors for Determining Consequences, Factors for Determining Remedial Measures and Examples of Consequences and Remedial Measures).

10. Designate a time, place, and person to help student complete the Think About It Form. The sooner this is done, the more effective it will be. This step of reflection is the first in many that the student can take to change his/her aggressive behavior**.** Students should either write out answers to open-ended questions or be able to dictate answers to an adult who writes them down for him/her. Students must make statements that accept the negative effects of his/her behavior on others, e.g., "I hurt X when I called him stupid." The following statements are **not acceptable**:
- I didn't do anything. (denial)
- I did something but it wasn't my fault. (externalizing)
- I know what I did didn't really hurt her because
she didn't have to go to the nurse. (minimizing)

11. Document action taken/plan developed, and share with
1. Principal/ assistant principal
2. Support staff, and
3. Teachers who have any contact with the target/bully.

12. Contact parent of both target and aggressor.

School staff will promptly provide written notice to the parents or guardians of a victim and a perpetrator about whether or not the complaint was substantiated and, if substantiated, what action is being taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation. Specific information about disciplinary action taken generally will not be released to the victim's parents or guardians—unless it involves a "stay away" or other directive that the victim must be aware of in order to report violations.

If appropriate, within a reasonable time period following closure of the complaint, the administrative staff or a designee will contact the victim to determine whether there has been any recurrence of the prohibited conduct.

The district will retain a report of the complaint, containing the name of the complainant, the date of the complaint, investigator, school, a brief statement of the nature of the complaint, the outcome of the investigation, and the action taken.

- Monitor safety of target and increase supervision of accused.

Factors for Determining Consequences
• Age, development, and maturity levels of the parties involved
• Degree of harm
• Surrounding circumstances
• Nature and severity of the behavior(s)
• Incidences of past or continuing pattern(s) of behavior
• Relationship between the parties involved
• Context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred

Factors for Determining Remedial Measures
Personal
• Life skill competencies
• Experiential deficiencies
• Social relationships
• Strengths
• Talents
• Traits
• Interests
• Hobbies
• Extra-curricular activities
• Classroom participation
• Academic performance

Environmental
• School culture
• School climate
• Student-staff relationships and staff behavior toward the student
• General staff management of classrooms or other educational environments
• Staff ability to prevent and de-escalate difficult or inflammatory
situations
• Social-emotional and behavioral supports
• Social relationships
• Community activities
• Neighborhood culture
• Family situation

Consequences for a student who commits an act of harassment or bullying shall be unique to the individual incident and will vary in method and severity according to the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of problem behaviors and performance, and must be consistent with the approved Bedford High School Student Handbook code of student conduct. Remedial measures shall be designed to:
- *correct the problem behavior*;
- *prevent another occurrence* of the behavior;

- and *protect the victim* of the act.

Consequences and appropriate remedial actions for a student who commits one or more acts of harassment or bullying may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion or a combination of such consequences.

Effective discipline should employ a schoolwide approach to adopt a rubric of bullying offenses and the associated consequences. The consequences and remedial measures may include, but are not limited to, the examples listed below:

Examples of Consequences

• Temporary removal from the classroom
• Loss of privileges or future privileges (i.e. field trips, special events)
• Classroom or administrative detention
• Institution of a Behavioral Plan
• In-school suspension
• Out-of-school suspension
• Institution of a Therapeutic plan
• Expulsion or termination

Examples of Remedial Measures

Personal
• Framing the aggressive behavior as a failed attempt to solve a real problem or reach a goal. The adult assists the misbehaving student to find a better way to solve the problem or meet the goal.
• Restitution and restoration
• Transformative conferencing/restorative justice
• Peer support group
• Corrective instruction or other relevant learning or service experience
• Supportive discipline to increase accountability for the bullying offense
• Supportive interventions, including participation of an Intervention and Referral Services team, peer mediation, etc.
• Behavioral assessment or evaluation, including, but not limited to, a referral to a child study team, as appropriate
• Behavioral management plan, with benchmarks that are closely monitored
• Student counseling
• Parent conferences
• Student treatment
• Student therapy

Environmental (Classroom, School Building)
• Set a time, place, and person to help the aggressor reflect on the offending behavior, maintaining an emotionally-neutral and strength-based approach

• School and community surveys or other strategies for determining the conditions contributing to harassment, intimidation, or bullying
• School culture change
• School climate improvement
• Continued development of our Accept the Challenge anti-bullying/harassment initiative
• Modifications of schedules
• Adjustments in student routes or patterns traveling to and from classes
• Modifications in student routes or patterns traveling to and from school
• Targeted use of monitors (e.g., hallway, cafeteria, bus)
• General professional development programs for staff
• Mandated reporting by school staff
• Parent conferences
• Referral to family counseling or individual counseling
• Involvement of parent-teacher organizations
• Involvement of community-based organizations
• Development of a general bullying response plan
• Peer support groups
• Law enforcement involvement as part of Memorandum of Understanding (e.g., school resource officer, juvenile officer)

Responsibilities of School Staff

All school employees are required to report alleged violations of this policy to the principal or the principal's designee
.
All other members of the school community, including students, parents, volunteers, and visitors, are encouraged to report any act that may be a violation of this policy. Reports may be made anonymously, but formal disciplinary action *may not* be based solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

The BHS Administration will be responsible for determining whether an alleged act constitutes a violation of this policy. In so doing, the Principal and/or the Principal's designee shall conduct a prompt, thorough, and complete investigation of each alleged incident. The investigation is to be completed within three school days after a report or complaint is made.

We prohibit reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of harassment or bullying. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who engages in reprisal or retaliation shall be determined by the administrator, after consideration of the nature, severity, and circumstances of the act.

We prohibit any person from falsely accusing another as a means of harassment or bullying. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a *person* found to have falsely accused another as a means of harassment or bullying may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion.