

**Cornerstone Academy**  
**5 Oak Avenue**  
**Northborough, Massachusetts**

**Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan**  
**M.G.L. c.71, §37O**

A safe learning environment is one in which every student is provided with the opportunity to develop emotionally, academically, and physically in a supportive atmosphere free of intimidation and abuse. Bullying of any type has no place in our schools. The Cornerstone Academy expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

The Cornerstone Academy is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate harmful and disruptive behaviors that can impede the educational process in our schools. While any student could be subject to bullying and harassment, the Cornerstone Academy recognizes that certain students, such as students with disabilities, students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and homeless students may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying. The Cornerstone Academy will take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and to provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to avoid and respond to bullying.

The Cornerstone Academy will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation in our school building, on school grounds, in school-related activities, or that occurs outside of school and creates a hostile school environment for the targeted student. We will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to restore a safe learning environment for students who are bullied and to prevent further bullying or harassment by students who are identified as perpetrators of bullying.

The Cornerstone Academy's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation that may compromise the safe learning environment for any student. Cornerstone Academy is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to address and prevent bullying and harassment within our school. In consultation with these constituencies, we have established this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation.

## Cornerstone Academy Anti-Bullying Policy

It is the policy of the Cornerstone Academy to maintain educational environments that are free from bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. It shall be a violation of this policy for any student at Cornerstone Academy to bully another student through conduct or communication of a bullying nature and/or to retaliate against any individual for reporting bullying or cooperating with an investigation thereof. Students who engage in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation will be subject to a range of disciplinary sanctions including, but not limited to, reprimand, detention, suspension, expulsion or other sanctions as determined by the school administration. Except where bullying has resulted in the student's permanent expulsion, students who engage in bullying shall also be required to participate in remedial activities designed to develop the skills and proficiencies necessary to avoid engaging in further bullying behavior(s).

For purposes of this policy, bullying is prohibited:

- 1) on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to 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 the Cornerstone Academy, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the Cornerstone Academy; and
- 2) at a location, activity, function or program that is not school related or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by the school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. This prohibition shall not be construed, however, as requiring the Cornerstone Academy to staff or supervise any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also strictly prohibited and may result in suspension or expulsion from school.

### Definitions

**Bullying:** The repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that: (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his/her property; (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. For the purposes of this policy, bullying shall include cyber-bullying.

**Cyber-bullying:** Bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, 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, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyber-bullying shall also include (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

**Hostile Environment:** A situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the target's education.

**Target / Victim:** A student who has been subject to bullying or retaliation by another student or group of students.

**Aggressor/ Perpetrator:** A student who engages, either individually, or as part of a group, in bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation.

**Local law enforcement agency:** local police department

**Director:** The administrative leader of Cornerstone Academy or her designee for the purposes of investigating and responding to reports of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation.

**Retaliation:** Intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

## **I. Complaint and Investigation Procedures**

### **A. Reporting bullying or retaliation**

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing. Reports made by students, parents, guardians, or other individuals who are not school or school staff members, may also be made anonymously, although no student shall be subject to discipline solely on the basis of an anonymous complaint. The Cornerstone Academy will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, our voicemail box, our mailing address, and the Director's email address. Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report.

The Cornerstone Academy will include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents. Incident Reporting Forms will also be available in the Main Office or Business Manager's Office.

#### 1. Reporting by Staff

A staff member will promptly report to the Director any instances of bullying or retaliation witnessed by the staff member or that is reported to the staff member by a student, parent, or other individual. The requirement to notify the Director shall not, however, limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

#### 2. Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others

The Cornerstone Academy expects students, parents, guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the Director. Any individual who wishes to file such a complaint may request, and shall be provided with, assistance from a school staff member to complete a written report. Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member, or with the Director. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. The filing of a false or fabricated complaint of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation is strictly prohibited and shall result in disciplinary action.

### B. Procedures for Responding to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation.

#### 1. Preliminary Determinations

Upon receiving a complaint, the Director will confer with the complainant to obtain an understanding and statement of the alleged facts. If, based on the facts alleged, the Director determines that the conduct complained of would not constitute bullying as defined by M.G.L. c.71, §37O, the Director shall document that determination on the Incident Reporting Form and shall take no further action with regard to the complaint. If the Director determines that such facts, if true, would constitute bullying, as defined above, the Director will promptly commence an investigation of the complaint.

Upon commencing an investigation, the Director will make a preliminary determination as to the need for immediate interventions to protect the safety of the alleged target. Such interventions may include, but are not limited to, creating a personal safety plan for the target; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target; and altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target. The Director may take additional steps deemed necessary by the school administration to protect the safety of the target and any witnesses while the investigation is ongoing.

2. Notice to Law Enforcement.

At any point after receiving a report of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation, the Director will notify the local law enforcement agency if the Director has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor. Notice to law enforcement agencies will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and other applicable state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to student records and privacy. In making this determination, the Director may consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the Director or designee deems appropriate.

3. Notice to Another School or School District.

If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the Director or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the Director or designee of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, and 603 CMR 49.00.

C. Investigation Procedures

1. Investigation

Upon receipt of a report or complaint that would, if true, constitute bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation, the Director will promptly commence an investigation. In investigating any such complaint, the Director or designee will interview students, staff, and any witnesses to the alleged conduct. To the extent practicable and consistent with the Director's obligation to promptly and thoroughly investigate and address the matter, the Director or designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process and shall not disclose unnecessary or confidential information to interview subjects. During any such interviews, the Director will inform the target, aggressor and all witnesses that retaliatory treatment of any individual for reporting or cooperate with an investigation of bullying will result in disciplinary action that may include suspension or expulsion from school.

2. Determinations

Within five (5) school days of the Director's receipt of the complaint of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation, the Director will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the Director will determine what remedial action may be required, if any, and determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary. The Director's findings and determinations shall be documented in writing on the Incident Reporting Form.

If the Director or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student may be subject to disciplinary action.

### 3. Notice of Investigative Findings

Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Director or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding to it and the parents or guardians of the target shall also be notified of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation. While prior notice of an investigation shall not be required, the Director shall not be precluded from notifying the parents of a target or aggressor prior to completion of the Director's investigation.

In notifying the parents of a target or aggressor of an investigation or the Director's findings thereon, the Director shall maintain the privacy and confidentiality of any individual or child who is not the child of the parents to whom the notice is provided. The Director shall ensure that any notice to the parents complies with applicable state regulations including, but not limited to, 603 CMR 49.00, and shall not report specific information to the target's parent(s) about the disciplinary action taken against an aggressor unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations

## D. Responses to Bullying.

### 1. Education and Skill Building

In determining the appropriate response to an incident of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation, the Director shall consider a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O(d)(v). Skill-building approaches that the Director or designee may consider include, but are not limited to:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's anti-bullying curricula;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students;
- implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals;
- meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home.

2. Disciplinary Action

If the Director determines that disciplinary action is warranted, the disciplinary sanction will be determined on the basis of facts found by the Director, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior.

Students found to have engaged in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation may be subject to a range of disciplinary consequences including, but not limited to, reprimand, detention, suspension, expulsion or other sanctions as determined by the Director. Any such disciplinary sanctions shall be imposed in accordance with the due process requirements of applicable laws, regulations, and school policies.

3. Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Director shall, in conjunction with relevant school personnel, consider what adjustments or interventions, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of any witnesses. Any such adjustments or interventions to be provided for the target shall be documented in writing in an Individual Safety Plan.

4. Monitoring of Interventions

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the Director or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the Director or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

II. Professional Development

A. Annual staff training and ongoing Professional Development

Annual training for all school staff on the Plan will include staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the Director or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades throughout the school. Staff members hired after the start of the school year are required to participate in school-based training during the school year in which they are hired, unless they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last two years.

The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying.

Professional development will also address ways to prevent and respond to bullying or retaliation for students with disabilities. This will include a particular focus on the needs of students with autism or students whose disability affects social skills development.

### **III. Anti-Bullying Curriculum**

The Cornerstone Academy shall implement age and grade appropriate anti-bullying curricula in for all grades and incorporate that curricula into the core curricula. Outside resources may be utilized by the school to meet these criteria.

Initiatives will also teach students about the student-related sections of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

### **IV. Collaboration with Families**

Parent Education and Resources. The Cornerstone Academy may offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of the anti-bullying curricula and any social competency curricula used by the school. The programs will be offered in collaboration with the PTG or similar organizations.

Each year the school will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. The school will send parents written notice each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school's Internet safety policy. All notices and information made available to parents or guardians will be in hard copy and electronic formats. The school will post the Plan.

### **V. Publication of Policies, Procedures and Information on Bullying**

The Cornerstone Policy and Procedures Manual will now refer to the Cornerstone Academy's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and policy on bullying.

The Cornerstone Academy will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties, in the school employee handbook.