

The Tobin School

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

1/10/2011

I. Introduction

At The Tobin School we expect that all members of our school community will treat each other with civility and respect. It is the policy of the School to provide and maintain a learning environment that is free of bullying and any other verbal or physical misconduct that disrupts the learning environment or makes it unsafe.

The Tobin School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, set forth below, is published in response to the recently enacted Massachusetts law against bullying and is an integral part of our efforts to promote learning and to prevent behavior that can impede the learning process. Our Plan spells out The Tobin School's comprehensive approach to address bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation.

This Plan is consistent with broader protections at The Tobin School against discrimination, harassment, bullying, and retaliation that appear in our Parent Handbook.

It is important that this Plan be well understood by all members of the Tobin School community. The Head of School is responsible for the implementation and administration of this Plan. Questions and concerns related to this Plan may be referred to Lori Davis, Head of School, or Mary Beth Claus Tobin, Founder and Executive Director.

II. Policy against Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, and Retaliation

The School will not tolerate any form of bullying or cyber-bullying, nor will we tolerate retaliation against any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited on school grounds and at school-sponsored events, activities, functions, and programs. Bullying and cyber-bullying are also prohibited on school buses leased or used by the school, and through technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the school.

In addition, bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited 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 a targeted student; infringes on the rights of a targeted student at school; or materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the School.

Definitions under the Law. The following definitions are drawn from the Massachusetts law against bullying.

Bullying. Bullying is defined as 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 target that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to the targeted student or damage to the targeted student's property;
- Places the targeted student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the targeted student;
- Infringes on the rights of the targeted student at school; or
- Materially or substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

Cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, fax machines, and the internet. It includes, but is not limited to: email, instant messages, text messages, and internet postings, whether on a webpage, in a blog, or otherwise.

Hostile Environment. A hostile environment is 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 a student's education.

Retaliation. Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Legal Definitions and School Policy. It is important to bear in mind that stricter standards of behavior may apply under The Tobin School's policies in order that we may prevent inappropriate verbal or physical conduct before a student has been subject to bullying as it is defined under the law. For example, although the law defines bullying as "repeated use" of certain expressions, acts, and/or gestures, the School reserves the right to apply disciplinary measures and other corrective action in a case of a single expression, act or gesture, if the School determines that it is of sufficient severity to warrant disciplinary measures or other remedial

action or that the repetition of that expression, act, or gesture might reasonably result in bullying as defined under the law.

III. Prevention of Bullying and Cyber-bullying

All our students, from our youngest preschoolers to those in our older elementary grades, learn that as members of our community they have a right to be treated with civility and respect. A significant part of this work is supported through the Tobin School's strong emphasis on social emotional learning, etiquette, character education and community services.

At Tobin, we believe that social-emotional learning is as important as any other subject in a child's education. Without the ability to work well with others, solve people problems, self-advocate, be a flexible thinker, and understand the impact one's own behavior has upon others, a person has significantly less chance of success in life and career beyond school.

We work hard to incorporate these important principals into everything we do at Tobin. Our teachers focus on these important skills through day-to-day modeling and role playing. We use every available opportunity to reinforce and teach these valuable skills and give children the opportunity to practice these life skills in a safe, supportive setting.

Think Social! By Michelle Garcia Winner

Beginning in 2009, The Tobin School took on the innovative Think Social curriculum by Michelle Garcia Winner as a whole school language. This positive program brings the basic rules of social emotional learning out in the open and provides fun and clearly understood language and activities to support all children in these skill areas.

Included in the Think Social program we use here at Tobin:

- **Expected and Unexpected Behaviors** – teaching what is expected in school and group settings and what is unexpected (note that we do not refer to these acts as bad or wrong)
- **Whole Body Listening** – what does your body look like when you are really listening? Your eyes are on the speaker, your body is turned toward them, your body is still and open...
- **Thinking with Your Eyes** – thinking about what is happening around you, 'reading the room' to pick up clues of what you should be doing
- **Big Problem/Little Problem/The Problem Meter** – using a visual guide to help children look at a problem and to evaluate their own reaction to the issue
- **Thinking of You, Thinking of Me** – thinking about how others see you and your behavior and how your actions can be seen by others in ways you don't expect
- **Being a Social Detective** – thinking like a detective to figure out what is happening in a social situation
- **Superflex vs. Rock Brain** – flexible thinking is a valuable skill for everyone, we learn to identify heroic superflex thinking vs. the dreaded rock brain

- **Other Social Super Heroes** – Mean Jean, Space Invader, Time Stealer, Body Snatcher, Hurried Harry—using superheroes and villains to help identify challenging and positive behaviors makes them tangible for young children
- **Bubble Thoughts** – we all have lots of thoughts, some are not for sharing and some are, we talk about which thoughts are great to share and which should stay in a bubble

While we use the Think Social approach widely at Tobin, we also support these efforts with a variety of other materials, children’s books, and techniques to encourage children to problem solve, understand and express their feelings, and productively handle their own emotions. For example:

- At Tobin, teachers accompany their students during snack, lunch, and recess to actively work on supporting conversation, positive play skills, and peer problem solving.
- Teachers actively work on conversational turn taking, waiting a turn to talk, and self-advocating throughout their student’s days.
- Recess and PE support cooperative games which support working together as opposed to competition.
- When students struggle at school, our faculty work with our older students to complete a ‘problem paper’ allowing the child to not only process what actually happened and their role in the situation, but to look at better ways to handle difficult situations in the future.
- At Tobin we support all our students in learning to self regulate through the use of the “How Does Your Engine Run?” Program. This approach actively encourages students to think about their own feelings and physical reactions and what it feels like to be ‘just right’. We work with the students to self-identify techniques that they can use to help them get to this point of being ‘just right for learning’.
- We use the CHEER (Character Education for Early Results) Program for our early childhood classrooms which Tobin compiled and designed to specifically support these social emotional learning skills in our youngest students.
- Our school actively works to build a community feeling in our small school where ‘all the teachers know all the children, and all the children know all the other children and all the teachers’. A safe, supportive, comfortable environment is the best place to learn and grow.
- We encourage community service throughout the year in a number of ways, with all school events (our annual Read-a-Thon, Change for a Change campaign, food drives, etc.) , campus wide ventures (our annual Volunteer Fair), and class supported efforts (Running Strong for Native American Youth, etc.) These efforts are meant to be participatory and meaningful and to allow the children to see how their own actions can directly benefit others.
- At Tobin we don’t forget the basics of etiquette and respect—modeling respectful interactions, proper manners, requiring proper dress and behavior. Our students are often complimented when we visit other locations, go on field trips, or attend performances.

The Tobin School’s approach emphasizes respect for differences, and teachers are clear in their expectations for student behavior. When necessary, parents are notified and asked to assist in reinforcing these standards with their students at home. Our faculty and administrators work proactively to ensure that all students are well informed about what is

expected of them and to reinforce positive conduct. In class discussion and role play, modeling by faculty and staff, and weekly Social Thinking class sessions we focus on peer relationship and empower students to take action if they feel targeted or if they witness other students engaging in bullying or other unacceptable behavior. While we support children's appropriate attempts to solve peer problems on their own, our faculty and administrator are actively involved in each students' school day and are proactive in providing whatever support is needed to enhance peer relationships.

The administration and faculty recognize that it is essential that expectations for student conduct extend to all classrooms, hallways, kitchen, bathrooms, lunch and recess times, playgrounds, buses, and the like. The School strives to ensure that ample adult supervision is provided at all times during the school day.

IV. Reports of Bullying, Cyber-bullying, or Retaliation

Any student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying or has witnessed an incident of bullying or cyber-bullying or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying prohibited by this policy is strongly encouraged to report the matter orally or in writing to the Head of School or to any other faculty member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. Also, any student who is the subject of retaliation in violation of this policy or who knows of another student who has been subject to retaliation is urged to report it as soon as possible.

A parent of a student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying or of a student who has witnessed or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying is strongly urged to promptly notify the Head of School or a faculty member. A parent should also report any incident of retaliation in violation of this policy to the Head of School or faculty member.

Any member of the faculty or staff of the School who witnessed or otherwise becomes aware of bullying or cyber-bullying in violation of this policy or who becomes aware of retaliation against a student who reported information concerning a violation of this policy is required to report it immediately to the Head of school. There are to be no exceptions. A member of the faculty or staff may not make promises of confidentiality to a student or parent who informs him/her of an allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Faculty and staff may not make reports under this policy anonymously. The School also urges students and their parents not to make reports anonymously. Although there are circumstances in which an anonymous report can be better than none at all, it is far more difficult to determine the facts of what occurred if complaints are made anonymously. Students and parents are encouraged to bear in mind that the School takes its policy against retaliation seriously. Also, while the School cannot promise strict confidentiality, because information must be shared in order to conduct an effective investigation, the School releases

information concerning complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation only on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

V. Responding to a Report of Bullying, Cyber-bullying, or Retaliation

A. Preliminary Considerations.

When a complaint of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation is brought to the attention of the Head of School, an assessment is made as to whether any initial steps need to be taken to protect the well-being of students and to prevent disruption of their learning environment while the investigation is being conducted. As appropriate, strategies such as increased supervision may be implemented to prevent further bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation during the investigation.

B. Obligation to Notify Parents.

It is the policy of the School to notify the parents of any student who is an alleged target of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation and the parents of any student who may have been accused of engaging in such behavior promptly after a complaint is made.

C. Investigation.

The following is an outline of the procedure that is pursued once a complaint has been brought to the attention of the Head of School:

An impartial investigation of the complaint is conducted by the Head of School. That investigation may include (but will not necessarily be limited to) interviews with the person who made the complaint, with the student who was the target of the alleged bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, with the person or persons against whom the complaint was made, and with any students, faculty, staff or other persons who witnessed or who may have otherwise have relevant information about the alleged incident.

Depending on the circumstances, the Head of School conducting the investigation may consult with Mary Beth Claus Tobin, other faculty, and/or our School's Licensed Social Worker or other relevant professional.

D. Resolution, Notification, and Follow-up

Following interviews and any other investigation undertaken, as the School deems appropriate, the Head of School will determine whether and to what extent the allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation has been substantiated. If it is determined that the policy set forth in this Plan has been violated, the Head of School will determine what disciplinary action and/or other remedial action is appropriate and how it will be implemented.

The goal of an investigation and any disciplinary or other remedial process that is imposed following that investigation is to correct the situation to the extent it is reasonably possible and to take such steps as can be taken to prevent there being a repetition of the incident and to prevent the student or students targeted and others who participated in the investigation from being subject to retaliation.

In appropriate circumstances, such as when a crime may have been committed or a child may have been subject to abuse or neglect of the type this is reportable under Section 51A of the Massachusetts laws, law enforcement or another appropriate government agency may be notified.

Upon completion of the investigation, the Head of School will meet individually with the student or students who were the target of the alleged incident and the student or students against whom the complaint was made and their parents to report the results of the investigation and, where disciplinary or other corrective action is determined to be appropriate, to inform the parties of the steps that will be taken to correct the situation. The amount of information provided in these meetings may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student records.

Follow up contacts will be made with any student found to have been targeted in violation of this policy and his/her parents to inquire as to whether there have been any further incidents.

VI. Conclusion

This Plan is intended (1) to prevent bullying and cyber-bullying among our students, (2) to encourage students and their parents to have confidence in the School's procedures and to come forward promptly whenever a student is subject to conduct that is prohibited by this or any other School policy; and (3) to implement appropriate discipline and other corrective measures when they are found to be warranted.