

Somerset Public Schools

Somerset Berkley Regional School District

All Students Achieving Excellence

Dear Families:

The Somerset Public Schools and Somerset Berkley Regional School District are committed to creating safe and supportive learning environments for all students in which everyone feels valued and respected, allowing students to reach their fullest potential. Bullying is a serious issue that every school faces, is detrimental to the learning process, and is counter-productive to our efforts in ensuring physical and emotional safety for all students. Bullying is intentional, often involves an imbalance of power, and is repeated over time rather than occurring in an isolated incident. It has an obvious negative impact on all students, from targets to bystanders, as well as the alleged aggressors, and creates an unsafe climate of fear and disrespect. This will not be tolerated in either school district.

At the most recent school committee meetings for both districts, the School Committees approved an updated Bullying Prevention and Intervention policy. Notable changes in the policy include:

- Recognizing certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics;
- Providing information to families regarding the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system, regardless of the outcome of the bullying determination;
- Providing a more detailed approach for disciplinary action on the determination of bullying; and
- Several ways to anonymously report bullying or retaliation.

In order to better prevent bullying and respond to bullying situations when they occur, schools and families must work together as a team. Bullying does not just happen at recess, lunch, in the hallway, or in the classroom. Increasingly, it is taking place after school hours through social media, beginning in elementary school. Below is a list of resources that families can utilize to learn more about bullying and to refer to if you believe your child is a target of bullying, a witness of bullying, or is the one bullying others. These resources will also be found online in the near future as the Somerset Public Schools is preparing to launch a new website with more resources for families of either district to use covering a variety of topics.

What is Bullying?

As defined by Massachusetts General Law c. 71 § 370, bullying is the repeated use by one or more students or school staff members of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- (ii) places the target in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself, or of damage to his/her property;
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- (iv) infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyber-bullying means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication,

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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 photos, email, internet communications include all varieties of social media, and instant messages, among others. Cyber-bullying shall also include the creation of a web page, social media profile, or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or knowingly impersonates another person as author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

What is Somerset's and Somerset Berkley's policy on bullying?

The updated bullying policy is included in this communication as a separate document. It can also be found on both districts' websites by clicking either of these links:

- [Somerset Public Schools](#)
- [Somerset Berkley Regional School District](#)

What can I do as a parent/guardian if I suspect my child is involved in bullying (target, aggressor, or bystander)?

Communication is of critical importance. Please contact the appropriate building principal if you have any bullying concerns or information that you would like to share. This includes encouraging your child to inform teachers and administrators of potential bullying situations in and out of school. If building administrators are unaware of situations that resemble bullying, they will be unable to investigate and to take appropriate action. There are several ways one can report bullying:

- Call a principal/assistant principal or teacher.
- Make an anonymous report through a dedicated phone number
 - Call *67 508-235-0605 and provide the information requested in the voicemail message.
 - Dialing *67 is important because it provides the anonymity to the caller.
 - It is important to note that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student or staff member solely on the basis of an anonymous report.
- Make an anonymous report through an online bullying report form
 - A Use the link on the district websites to submit an anonymous report using an online form.

Knowledge is also critically important. Below is a list of online resources that parents, guardians, and students can review to learn more about identifying and responding to bullying.

[American Psychological Association](#): Advice on how parents, teachers and kids can take action to prevent and respond to bullying, including cyberbullying.

[A Thin Line](#): MTV's A Thin Line campaign was developed to empower you to identify, respond to, and stop the spread of digital abuse in your life and amongst your peers. The campaign is built on the understanding that there's a "thin line" between what may begin as a harmless joke and something that could end up having a serious impact on an individual. This is intended more for middle school and high school students.

[Cartoon Network's Stop Bullying: Speak Up](#): Resources for children, parents, and educators from the Cartoon Network on preventing bullying.

[Common Sense Media](#): Common Sense is the leading independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive in a world of media and technology. We empower parents, teachers, and policymakers by providing unbiased information, trusted advice, and innovative tools to help them harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in all kids' lives.

[ConnectSafely](#): A list of safety tips and advice for appropriate online and social networking use, ways to stop cyberbullying, and cyberbullying statistics.

[CyberBullyHelp](#): Resources for teachers, parents, and children from leading cyberbullying experts

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[Cyberbullying Research Center](#): The U.S.'s leading research center on causes, solutions and statistics on cyberbullying.

[Embrace Civility in the Digital Age](#): The mission of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age is to provide guidance to caring adults so they can better empower young people to embrace civility and foster positive relations. Advice ranges from basic tips for kids and parents to law review articles and professional advice for educators.

[Eyes on Bullying](#): The Eyes on Bullying Toolkit provides specific insights, strategies, activities, and resources to address bullying. It is designed especially for caregivers and parents of preschool and school-age children and youth to use in child care programs, afterschool and youth programs, and camps.

[It Gets Better Project](#): "The It Gets Better Project's mission is to communicate to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth around the world that it gets better, and to create and inspire the changes needed to make it better for them."

[Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center](#): Lots of excellent resources including free [downloadable parent guides](#) on bullying, cyberbullying, and social networking from Dr. Elizabeth Englander.

[National Association of School Psychologists](#): A terrific list of resources for families and educators on all aspects of bullying.

[National Bullying Prevention Center](#): "PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center actively leads social change, so that bullying is no longer considered an accepted childhood rite of passage. PACER provides innovative resources for students, parents, educators, and others, and recognizes bullying as a serious community issue that impacts education, physical and emotional health, and the safety and well-being of students."

[Olweus Bullying Prevention Program](#): One of the most respected set of resources for schools to help prevent bullying and violence against youth.

[StopBullying.gov](#): A wealth of resources from the US Department of Health and Human Services on bullying and cyberbullying.

[Tracy Ludwig](#): Tracy Ludwig has written several children's books including *My Secret Bully*; *Trouble Talk*; and *Confessions of a Former Bully*. She has provided resources for kids and families on her website.

Together, we all can work to ensure that all students are physically, socially, and emotionally safe, feel valued and respected, and learn in an environment that will encourage success and excellence.

Sincerely,
Jeff Schoonover
Superintendent

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The Somerset Public School District and the Somerset Berkley Regional School District are in compliance with the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Title IX Educational Amendments of 1972, Part 86 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The School Districts do not discriminate in admission to, access to, treatment in, or employment in its services, programs and activities, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, domicile, native language, sexual orientation, gender specification or disability.