September 23, 2015

To: School Committee
Re: Bullying Prevention and Intervention – Annual Report

The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy adopted in December 2010 indicates that *the superintendent or a designee shall report annually to the School Committee regarding the frequency of bullying behaviors during the prior school year and to update the Committee regarding steps being taken in the schools to minimize such behaviors while promoting the continuous improvement of learning environments.* This report satisfies this policy requirement.

Frequency of bullying behaviors
It is important to note that, in order for behavior to be deemed "bullying," it must involve *repeated* behaviors that cause physical and/or emotional harm. Therefore, only situations that meet this standard are reported as "bullying." There are, of course, many times where students do not treat each other according to our school communities' expectations, but these are usually not scenarios where the same aggressor repeatedly acts inappropriately towards the same target, thereby qualifying as "bullying."

There were no allegations of bullying at the preschool level. The following table provides statistics for grades K-12 for the 2014-2015 school year:

2014-2015	Allegations of Bullying	Qualifying as Bullying	Aggressors	Targets
Elementary Level	9	3	4	3
Middle Level	9	1	1	3
High School Level	8	1	2	1
Total	*26*	*5*	*7*	*7*

Statistics from the previous year were:

2013-2014	Allegations of Bullying	Qualifying as Bullying	Aggressors	Targets
Elementary Level	9	3	3	3
Middle Level	16	9	12	14
High School Level	3	1	2	1
Total	*28*	*13*	*17*	*18*

The total number of allegations was essentially the same as the previous year. The number of situations where bullying was alleged, was investigated, and then was determined to meet the definition of bullying dropped from 13 to 5, an 62% reduction. The total number of aggressors dropped from 17 to 7, an 59% reduction, while the total number of targets of confirmed bullying behaviors changed from 18 to 7, a 61% reduction. This is obviously a very significant improvement over the previous year.

The following table shows the type of incidents and locations that were documented as bullying (some incidents were included in more than one category).

2014-2015	Verbal	Physical	Cyber	At School	Outside School
Elementary Level	3	3	0	3	0
Middle Level	1	0	0	1	0
High School Level	1	0	0	1	1

Again, it is important to note that these statistics refer to situations <u>defined</u> as bullying. There were certainly many more instances of problematic behavior that were addressed, but that did not qualify under the definition of being repeated between the same aggressor(s) and target(s).

Actions that are taken by school administrators to resolve situations of bullying and problem behavior generally may include conferences with the children involved and their parents; loss of privileges; assigned seating in class or on the bus; and other typical disciplinary actions. For the most serious cases, changes of the aggressor's class assignment or schedule, in-school or out-of-school suspensions given to the aggressor(s), and "safety plans" created to ensure the actions were not repeated towards the target are additional steps that may be taken.

Ongoing work to minimize bullying
The very small number of situations that qualified as "bullying" can be viewed as very positive data regarding our schools' culture and climate and how students treat one another. That said, it will be important for our schools to continue to work to try to strengthen the culture in ways that make it more likely that students will make the school aware of where bullying might be occurring, but is not being reported, while also continuing to work on minimizing episodes of inappropriate behavior that may not technically be bullying, but that are still problematic.

It is very likely that the ongoing work our schools have been doing to focus on social competencies, to provide explicit anti-bullying instruction in health classes, and to use school-wide approaches during all school meetings or assemblies is paying off. Work still needs to be done to raise the consciousness of families regarding students' online behavior, which can spill over into the school setting (even when it doesn't technically qualify as bullying), which is why our district and school goals continue to focus on digital citizenship. Bullying intervention and prevention training for new staff has been provided during new teacher orientation, while yearly maintenance training also is provided for all staff. Our schools focus on the quality of our school cultures in order to maximize kind,

respectful behavior and minimize the number of situations where students treat each other inappropriately.

Ensuring that students are engaged in productive academic and co-curricular pursuits also counters the potential for inappropriate behavior, and while it is not possible to isolate variables, the additional resources we added last year to improve class sizes helped teachers make stronger connections with students given their smaller caseloads and may have played a role in reducing incidences of bullying. The resources we added to address mental and behavioral health needs by having full time school psychologists in each elementary school and a second clinical behavioral specialist position for the district, along with the new in-school support program at the high school, also provided additional capacity to prevent and/or address problematic behaviors.

I look forward to answering your questions and hearing your feedback on this topic.