

# Learning, Teaching and Leading in a Healthy School Community

The systemic efforts of the New Milford Public Schools is to maintain safe, supportive, and engaging school learning environments for all children.



# Building a Positive School Climate

Information for parents regarding New Milford  
Public School's response to Connecticut  
General Statute Section 10-222d – An Act  
Concerning the Strengthening of School  
Bullying Laws



# The Law

**The new legislation, which took effect on July 1, 2011, effectively shifts the focus of the “bullying law” from simply implementing consequences for mean behavior to proactively building a positive school climate. In addition, it expands the definition of “bullying,” as well as the scope of the school's response to it.**



# Definition

**The new legislation defines bullying as:**

“The repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic communication, such as cyber-bullying, or a physical act or gesture directed at another student attending school in that same school district that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student's property;
- Places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his property;
- Creates a hostile environment (a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the condition of the school climate) at school for such student;
- Infringes on the rights of such student at school;
- Substantially disrupts the education process or orderly operation of a school.”

# Expanded School Role

Schools may now respond to many forms of mean behavior or bullying, including off-campus behavior and cyber-bullying if such behavior:

- creates a hostile school environment for the victim;
- infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
- substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

# The New Law Specifies Requirements All Schools and Our Employees Must Follow, Including:

- Defined timelines for responding to a complaint of bullying;
- Identifying personnel to address the issue, including a “Safe School Climate Specialist”;
- Forming a committee, including parent participation, to develop and foster a safe school climate;
- Allowing for anonymous reporting of bullying;
- Developing a Safe School Climate Plan



# New Milford Public Schools Welcomes This New Focus

- It aligns with our concentrated efforts and systemic work to date to build safe and welcoming learning environments for all our children.
- In this presentation, we highlight our efforts to date – which reflect our shared philosophy that children learn best when they feel safe, welcomed, and heard.



# Efforts to Date in Our Schools





## Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate

- Character Education Program to promote a school culture where everyone is caring, accepting, responsible, empathetic, and has self control
- School-wide Behavioral Expectations using Common Language
- Classroom Guidance Lessons that focus on the New Milford Public School District's ten Common Character Education traits
- Character Education Posters Throughout the School
- Daily Positive Morning Messages / Announcements
- Mentoring Program
- Student Council and /or Student Leadership Roles
- School-wide Community Service Projects
- Buddy Classes to foster a connection between older and younger students within the school building
- PTO Science Cart Program
- Strategic Student Supervision at Recess
- Professional Development for Staff
- Practice Drills for Fire, Weather, and Security
- Assemblies and programs that promote safety, good character, and involvement with the community
- Annual Science and Health Fair
- Ongoing communication with parents through newsletters, phone calls, website, and school events
- New Security System for School Entrances
- Curriculum Based Social Skills Lessons
- Friendship Groups; Social Skills Groups
- Counseling Services / Social Worker
- Superflex / Social Skills Detective
- Lunch Bunch
- District-wide Health Teacher Provides Classroom Lessons

## New Initiatives to Improve School Climate

- Creation of a School Climate Committee representing administration, certified and non-certified staff, parents and community members
- Assignment of School Climate Coordinator
- Ongoing Professional Development on Positive Behavior Supports and Safe School Climate
- Weekly grade level collaboration meetings for staff
- Ongoing review and revision of bullying reporting and documentation procedures to align with new state legislation



### Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate

- Character education program
- Character Traits displayed in building
- Publication of code of conduct in handbooks, website, halls, cafeteria
- School behavior code based on PBIS model
- Student-led, daily morning announcements with a closing with the PBIS Pledge
- Student Council
- Service projects (“Noble Helpers”)
- Lunch Bunch with Counselors
- Pro-social skills groups
- PBIS survey of staff & PTO
- Increased supervision at recess
- 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade student transition meetings
- Documentation of school-wide behavior
- O.S.C.A.R. Program –Outstanding Student Character Award Recognition
- PTO-sponsored Character Ed presentation
- SRBI Committee
- Parent meeting for incoming 4<sup>th</sup> graders
- Mentoring Program
- Addition of new Health Educator

### New Initiatives to Improve School Climate

- Survey students, parents & staff every 2 years
- Designate a School Climate Coordinator
- Annual presentations to students, parents and staff on our collective power to improve school climate
- Create a School Climate Committee of staff, parents, administration and community members
- Attach PBIS pledge to all publications distributed to parents and students
- Offer professional development on positive behavior supports and safe school climate
- Review and revise reporting and documentation procedures to align with new state legislation.
- Grade level student meetings with principal
- Increase awareness of diversity through assemblies, presentations, publications
- Promote recognition of positive behaviors using “How Full is *Your* Bucket” approach



## **Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate**

- **Staff training in Positive Behavior Support**
- **Middle School team structure**
- **Student Council activities and social events**
- **Student clubs, activities, and opportunities**
- **Training of all faculty and staff in the new legislation**
- **Weekly Student Assistance Team meetings**
- **Involvement, cooperation and partnership with law enforcement through our SRO**
  - **Weekly SRBI meetings**
  - **Faculty/Administration Monthly Council**
  - **Monthly PTO meetings**
  - **Staff surveys on School Climate**
  - **Reward system for positive behavior**
  - **Monthly recognition of a character trait**
  - **School Counselors and SRO give classroom lessons to students on the dangers of bullying and cyber- bullying**
  - **School Counselors meet with students to create individualized goal setting twice a year**
  - **Students are involved in community service projects**

## **New Initiatives to Improve School Climate**

- **Formation of a School Climate Task Force with student and parent representation**
- **Assignment of a School Climate Coordinator**
- **Development of a Professional Training Plan**
- **Implementation of an anonymous reporting system**
- **Providing assembly programs, class meetings and advisory activities targeting “mean behaviors”**



## **Current Practices and Past Initiatives Promoting a Safe School Climate**

- Social/Civic expectations that all students must meet
- Our Advisor/Advisee program for all students
- Weekly SRBI meetings
- Youth leadership training
- “Dirt” assembly which addressed positive decision making and other issues relevant for teens
- 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Names Assembly program – sponsored by the ADL (2001-present)
- Cyber-bullying assembly which addressed how to safely use the Internet to manage social media
- ALLY Pledge – signed by staff and students each year
- Character Education Committee of faculty and students
- NAMES Assembly for 9<sup>th</sup> Graders
- Student-run steering committee for NAMES program (11-12<sup>th</sup> Graders)
- GSA and Best Buddies clubs and activities
- Involvement, cooperation and partnership with law enforcement through our School Resource Officer

## **New Initiatives to Improve School Climate**

- Merging of School Climate and Character Education Committees representing administration, certified and non-certified staff, parents and community members
- Assignment of School Climate Coordinators
- Student Council and review and revision of school behavior code and plan to increase awareness
- Ongoing professional development on Safe School Climate
- Ongoing review and revision of bullying reporting and documentation procedures to align with new state legislation
- Faculty training by Bill Howe and JoAnn Freiberg, experts in the field
- Rachel’s Challenge Assembly program
- Friends of Rachel Club and pledge
- Common Ground training program

# Helpful Information for Parents, Guardians and Friends



# Why Don't Other Kids Stop Mean Behavior?

- Fear retaliation at a later time;
- Believe that adults will not be of help and may intervene and make the situation worse;
- Experience social pressure from their peer group not to intervene;
- Blame the victim;
- Believe that telling an adult about bullying is a form of “tattling” or “ratting;”
- Benefit in some way from the victimization of a student (e.g., gain a possession or social status or feel empowered)
- Fear getting caught in the middle and being bullied, as well.

# Recommendations for Parents

- **Communicate regularly with your child and their friends.**
- **Talk specifically about bullying and the consequence of mean behaviors.**
- **Monitor your child's use of the internet.**
- **Know all your child's digital accounts and passwords.**
- **Model and help reinforce digital citizenship and responsibility.**

# **What to Look for (Bully). . .**

- **Becomes violent with others.**
- **Gets into physical or verbal fights with others.**
- **Gets sent to the principal's office or detention a lot.**
- **Has extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained.**
- **Is quick to blame others.**
- **Will not accept responsibility for their actions.**
- **Has friends who are mean toward others.**
- **Needs to win or be best at everything.**

# What to Look for (Victim) . . .

Does your child:

- Have many school absences?
- Show increased anxiety over school attendance?
- Show withdrawal from peers or change in friendships?
- Show a decline in school performance?
- Avoid school activities and lack involvement?
- Have missing belongings or report losing them?
- Have frequent physical complaints?
- Have a change in eating or sleeping habits?
- Come home from school unhappy or angry?

# **What to Do . . .**

**Please notify the school guidance counselor or administration if you suspect your child is experiencing bullying, harassment or mean behaviors.**

**The Safe School Climate Specialist in each school is:**

- Hill and Plain – Dr. Sandra Nadeau**
- Northville – Mrs. Susan Murray**
- John Pettibone – Mrs. Paula Kelleher**
- Sarah Noble Intermediate – Dr. Len Tomasello**
- Schaghticoke Middle School – Mrs. Dana Ford**
- New Milford High School—Mr. Greg Shugrue**
- District-Wide School Climate Coordinator- To Be Announced before July 1, 2012**

# **Our Commitment**

**New Milford Public School administration and staff are committed to continuing our efforts to eradicate mean behavior and bullying in all forms, as we strive to create a learning community that values respect and responsibility for all. As always, we will work in partnership with parents, our School Resource Officer and community members in reinforcing this message and communicating our collective intolerance for “mean behavior.”**

# Online Resources for Parents

- BullyingUK • Covering a range of advice for parents including contacting the school and your rights • <http://www.bullying.co.uk/>
- Committee for Children • A nonprofit working globally to prevent bullying, violence, and child abuse • <http://www.cfchildren.org/index.cfm>
- Education.com • Bullying at school and online. Bullying affects ALL of our children-those who bully, those who are victimized, and those who are witnesses or assistants to interpersonal violence. We can and must reduce this age-old problem... • <http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/>
- KidsHealth • KidsHealth is the #1 most-visited website for children's health and development. • <http://kidshealth.org/parent/>
- National Association of School Psychologist: Helping children achieve their best. In school. At home. In life. • Bullies and Victims: Information for Parents • <http://www.nasponline.org/>
- National PTA: every child. one voice • By working together, educators, parents, concerned citizens, business leaders, advocates, and community members can support the implementation of bullying prevention programs, reinforce bullying prevention messages, and advocate for bullying policies to be implemented... • <http://www.pta.org/bullying.asp>
- STOPBULLYING.gov • Parents can play a key role in preventing and stopping bullying. But first they have to know if their children bully or are bullied by others... • <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>