The Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps RFK Academy is committed to providing the highest quality education and treatment services to its students. It is a primary goal of RFK Academy that our students perceive themselves as capable, worthy, and exceptional learners, with much to offer their families, communities, and society as a whole. We strive to help students achieve their highest level of independence, and their own definitions of success, and to see that their actions and learning guide them there. This is achieved by incorporating innovative approaches to teaching and learning in both the classroom and the community, and by fostering collaboration, as well as creative and critical thought.

There can be no place for bullying in such a school, and for these reasons, RFK Academy is committed to the prevention of bullying or immediate intervention whenever bullying occurs. Our programming and culture have always fostered positive relationships and a strong sense of community among students and staff. In addition to this however, the RFK Academy has developed the following prevention and intervention plan ("the Plan") to further reduce the possibility of bullying behavior, in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71 §37O.

DEFINITIONS

Bullying is the severe or repeated use by one or more students, or school staff, of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at another student that has the effect of:

- causing physical or emotional harm to the other student or damage to the other student’s property
- placing the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property
- creating a hostile environment at school for the target
- infringing on the rights of the target at school
• materially and substantially disrupting the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings.

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 and create an abusive school environment.

Retaliation includes, but is not limited to, any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment in connection with filing a complaint or assisting with an investigation under this policy.

Staff includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, support staff, or paraprofessionals

Target is a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Aggressor is a student, or staff who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

**PROHIBITION**

RFK Academy is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying and cyberbullying. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

We recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to become targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The School will engage in the preventive strategies listed below to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and will provide all students with the skills,
knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. Each student will have the individualized skills, knowledge, and strategies necessary identified in their individual learning/treatment plan.

Bullying is prohibited on RFK Academy 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 through the use of any school technology or electronic device.

Bullying is also prohibited at any non-school location, activity, function or program and/or through the use of non-school technology or electronic device if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the target, infringes on the rights of the target at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of the School.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, who provides information during an investigation of bullying, or who is a witness to or has reliable information about bullying is strictly prohibited.

**PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES**

- The purposeful creation of a culture of caring that ensures the underlying needs of all students are addressed
- Opportunities for student leadership and decision making
- The positive and supportive use of behavioral intervention
- Building relationships and communication with families
- **Professional development**: RFK Academy’s bullying prevention and intervention plan will include ongoing professional development to build the skills of all school staff members to prevent, identify and respond to bullying.

“School staff members” includes: educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals. The content of such professional development will include, but not be limited to:

- developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents;
- developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective
interventions to stop bullying incidents;
• information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can exist among the aggressor, the target and any witnesses to the bullying;
• research findings on bullying
• Internet safety issues as they relate to bullying.
• Purposeful development of a positive culture
• Annual staff training on the Plan

• Developmentally appropriate instruction on bullying prevention incorporated into each grade level curriculum that includes, but is not limited to
  o Empathy/acceptance
  o Internet safety
  o Impulse control/anger management
  o Problem-solving/Conflict resolution
  o Empowering bystanders
• As all of RFK Academy students are special needs students, and the majority of these students have disabilities that affect social skills development, special attention is paid to utilizing the IEP process as a preventive measure against bullying. As required by M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, when the IEP Team determines the student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her disability, the Team will consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student’s skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

RFK Academy’s bullying prevention and intervention plan will include provisions for educating parents and guardians about the School’s bullying prevention curriculum, how they can reinforce that curriculum at home, how they can support the RFK Academy’s prevention and intervention plan, the dynamics of bullying, and online safety and cyber-bullying.

RFK Academy will notify students and their parents/guardians annually of the relevant sections of the bullying and prevention policies. A description of the policies will be included in the school’s Policy Handbook which is distributed to all parents and staff. In addition, a description of the policies will be included in the packet of information sent to all students at the beginning of each school year and to newly admitted students throughout the year. RFK Academy’s bullying prevention and intervention policies will also be posted on the school’s website.
In addition, bullying prevention and the Plan is incorporated into RFK Academy’s School Improvement Planning cycle. Our School Improvement Planning process surveys parents, students, and school staff on a variety of issues to develop a comprehensive needs assessment, and to ascertain progress on goals developed in prior school improvement cycles. Bullying prevention has always been included, as the surveys measure students’, parents’, and staff’s thoughts on school climate and school safety issues. That data, along with data collected from reports of bullying and subsequent investigations will be collected and analyzed to identify school-specific data on the prevalence and characteristics of bullying (e.g., focusing on identifying vulnerable populations and “hot spots” in school buildings, on school grounds, or on school buses. This information will help to identify patterns of behaviors and areas of concern, and will inform decision-making for prevention strategies including, but not limited to, adult supervision, professional development, age-appropriate curricula, and in-school support services.

The School Improvement Planning cycle begins in February, led by the Principal, and considers the following:

- survey input from all stakeholders (including the DESE student survey)
- curriculum mapping
- school-wide evaluation and assessment
- standardized assessment (MCAS or PARCC)
- DESE regulatory compliance measures
- IDEA and special education indicators
- attendance

The draft School Improvement Plan is developed and presented to parents and guardians at the School’s spring Parent Advisory Committee meeting. After feedback is gathered, the plan is finalized, and put into action.

Any necessary revisions, supports, or additions to the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan are presented as part of that meeting, and updates are incorporated, in order to keep the Plan a “living document” that is responsive and dynamic.

**REPORTING**

*In School reporting*

School staff will immediately report any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member has witnessed or of which the staff member has become aware. The report should be made to the school principal or designee or to any other school official identified in the bullying prevention and
intervention plan as responsible for receiving such reports. Failure to report may subject the staff member to disciplinary action. Staff members will use the “Bullying Incident Report Form” appended to these policies.

Any student, who believes that he or she has been subjected to bullying or retaliation, or who has witnessed or learned about the bullying or retaliation of a student, has the right to report the information to the principal or designee. This may be done in writing or orally by informing the principal or designee as soon as possible. If the individual does not wish to discuss the issue with either, the student may report to any staff member at the RFK Academy with whom he or she feels comfortable. Any parent or guardian who witnesses or becomes aware of an instance of bullying may also file a report.

Reports can be made orally, by using the “Bullying Incident Report Form”; by calling the RFK Academy Principal, Andrea Bailey, at 413-507-2029; by email to abailey@rfkchildren.org; or by mail to Andrea Bailey, Principal, RFK Academy, 1 Federal Street, Building 102-1, Springfield, MA 01105.

Reports of bullying may be made anonymously by students or by those not directly employed by RFK Academy; provided, however, that no disciplinary action can be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report. All reasonable efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality and protect the privacy of all parties, but proper enforcement of these policies may require disclosure of any or all information received.

Prior to investigating any report of bullying, the Principal or designee will work to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target, or to protect any student who reports an incidence of bullying, from retaliation. Any necessary personal safety plan will continue throughout the investigation.

DESE Reporting

New reporting requirements from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education require that at least once every four years beginning with 2015/16 school year, the district will administer a Department of Elementary and Secondary-developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our schools. Additionally, the school or district will annually report bullying incident data to the Department.
INVESTIGATION

RFK Academy’s Principal or designee is responsible for investigating reports of bullying and/or retaliation. The investigation shall be prompt, fair and of sufficient duration to understand the circumstances of the complaint, including the type, severity and frequency of the alleged bullying. The investigation will generally include interviews of the target, the alleged aggressor, witnesses, individuals whom any of the foregoing identifies as having knowledge of the situation, and anyone else the investigator believes may have such knowledge. The investigator will take notes during the interviews for the purpose of maintaining accurate records.

The investigator will also review any documents that may be relevant to the allegations of bullying or retaliation, whether in electronic format or otherwise, and including photographs, emails, voice mails, telephone records, etc. The investigator will maintain a confidential file of interview notes and other documents pertaining to the investigation.

RESOLUTION

The Principal has specific requirements to fulfil should it be determined that bullying or retaliation has occurred. It should be noted that any disciplinary action enforced will take into account specific students’ developmental and diagnostic individualities and needs.

If the investigator determines that bullying or retaliation has occurred, he or she will:

- take whatever action is necessary to end the bullying or retaliation;
- take disciplinary action in accordance with RFK Academy’s written policies on “Student Conduct and Behavior Management”;
- teach appropriate behavior through skills building;
- immediately notify the local law enforcement agency if there is reason to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor;
- if the incident involves students from another school district, RFK Academy’s investigator will immediately notify the principal of the other school so that they may take appropriate action;
- notify the parents/guardians of the aggressor;
- notify the target and his or her parents/guardians, to the extent allowed by state and federal law, of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation;
• inform the parent or guardian of the target about 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;

• *Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2014 amended Section 37O of chapter 71 of the General Laws to include (g) (v): The Plan shall inform parents or guardians of the target about the Department’s **problem resolution system** and the process for seeking assistance or filing a claim through the problem resolution system. This information will be made available in both hard copy and electronic formats:*

  Any parent wishing to file a claim/concern or seeking assistance outside of the district may do so with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa](http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa), emails can be sent to compliance@doe.mass.edu or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information are also available at the Principal’s office.

• if indicated, provide information concerning counseling or referral to appropriate services for aggressors, targets and parents/guardians.

If the investigator determines that an individual has knowingly made a false report of bullying or retaliation, that individual will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with RFK Academy’s written policies on “Student Conduct and Behavior Management”.

*RFK Academy*