

Bullying FAQs

What is Bullying?

Bullying is defined under Massachusetts Law (M.G.L. Chapter 71, section 370) as the repeated use of written, verbal, or electronic communication or physical acts or gestures that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to the victim
- Damage the victim's property
- Places the victim in reasonable fear of harm
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the victim
- Infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
- Disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school

Bullying is the repeated use by one or more students or by a member of a school staff, including but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor of an extracurricular activity, or a paraprofessional of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damages the victim's property
- Places the victim in reasonable fear of harm or damage to his property
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the victim
- Infringes on the rights of the victim at school
- Materially or substantially disrupts the education process or orderly operation of a school.

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying under Massachusetts Law (M.G.L. Chapter 71, section 70) is defined as:

- Sending or posting humiliating, upsetting, intimidating text or pictures using Facebook, SnapChat, instagram, other social media or cell phones
- Spreading rumors to damage the victim's reputation or exclude the victim from the social group

Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire,

radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications.

Cyberbullying shall also include:

- The creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation of impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.
- The distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

What is the difference between bullying and conflict?

| Bullying | Conflict |
|--|---|
| Imbalance of power in relationship | Equal Power in relationship |
| Unwanted intentionally aggression with purpose to harm another | Both sides are aggressive to each other |
| Repeated incidences | One time |
| Victim upset, bully is not | Both Children upset |
| Victim has no concession to make | Can be fairly resolved by discussion and compromise |

My child is being bullied, what do I do next?

Members of the QPS school community are encouraged to report bullying incidents directly to the building principals or other designees at their school. They may also report incidents anonymously to the senior director of Student support through the use of this interactive form. [QPS Bullying Reporting Form \(google.com\)](#)

Downloadable form: [bullying report form TEMPLATE.docx \(sharpschool.com\)](#)

Who is in charge of implementing QPS bullying prevention? School principals or their designees have primary responsibility for implementation of bullying prevention and intervention procedures, including investigating and responding to all charges of bullying, cyberbullying and/or retaliation.

Who can report bullying incidents?

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others. These reports may be oral or written and can be made face-to-face, via telephone, by email, or through the internet when he/she/they witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

A school or district staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designees any instance of bullying or retaliation that the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses.

After a report of bullying is made how do we know my student will be kept safe?

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Principal and a team designated by her/him will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to:

- Creating a personal safety plan
- Pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus
- Identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target
- Altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target

What happens once a decision has been made after an investigation?

The Principal or designee will promptly notify the parents/guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and if bullying or retaliation is found, what disciplinary and future prevention action is being taken. All notices to parents/guardians must comply with applicable local, state and federal education and privacy laws and regulations. All notices to parents/guardians will be linguistically appropriate. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the Principal or designee cannot report specific information to the target's parent/guardian about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a “stay away” order or other directive that the target must be away from in order to report violations. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, DESE, requires that the Principal or designees notify the parents or guardians of the victim about the DESE problem resolution system and the process for filing a claim, regardless of outcome of the bullying determination.

Are there students who are more at risk of being bullied?

Yes, QPS recognizes 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, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, development or sensory disability or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics.

What are some signs that my student might be being bullied?

Some warning signs a child is being bullied

- Unexplained injuries or damaged personal items
- Loss of friends, reluctance to be with peers
- Loss of interest in preferred activities
- Absenteeism & school refusal
- Difficulties eating and/or sleeping
- Decline in school achievement, academic aspirations, dropping out of school

Does QPS have any obligations on how they respond to bullying?

QPS has an obligation to develop, adhere to, and regularly update a school plan to address bullying and cyberbullying:

- Require mandatory reporting by all staff
- Promptly investigate all alleged incidents
- Post-investigation: notify law enforcement, parents of perpetrator & parents of victim
- Provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying in each grade
- IEPs must address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying. Massachusetts **has an Anti-bullying Law?**

Massachusetts Anti-bullying Law-M.G.L. Ch. 71, Section 370

Schools must promptly investigate reports of bullying or retaliation.

If the school determines that bullying or retaliation has occurred, it must:

- Take appropriate disciplinary action
- Notify the parents or guardians of both students
- Inform the parents or guardians of both students about DESE's problem resolution system and the process for filing a Problem Resolution System (PRS) complaint
- Notify law enforcement, if warranted

Are there special laws involving students with a disability and IEP?

M.G.L. Ch. 71 Section 370

Whenever a child has a disability that affects social skills development or is vulnerable to bullying, the IEP must address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying

The IEP team, which includes the parent should identify strategies to be written into the IEP to help prevent or stop bullying

Include appropriate goals and benchmarks for social pragmatic skills, assertiveness and/or self-advocacy training in the IEP

Is there any prohibition against bullying

Bullying is prohibited:

- On school grounds;
- On property immediately adjacent to school grounds school-sponsored or school-related activities, functions or programs, where on or off school grounds;
- At a bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle leased or used by the school;
- Through the use of technology or an electronic device owned leased or used by school; or
- At a location, activity, function or program that is not school related, or through use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a school district or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment as school for the target, infringes on their rights at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school

I don't agree with how my school/district is handling bullying, is there anything I can do?

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 <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs>, 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 Superintendent's office.