



**Daniel E. Gutekanst, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools**

TO: Principals and Central Office Administrators
FROM: Dan Gutekanst
DATE: Wednesday, April 10, 2019
RE: Protocol for Principals and School Administrators When Responding to Acts of Bias and Hate in the Needham Public Schools

The following document is intended for internal and staff use. However, it may be appropriate to share key elements with the broader community in order to provide context for and understanding of the District's response to these incidents when they occur.

Rationale and Purpose

The first priority for a school administrator in the Needham Public Schools (NPS) is to ensure student safety and wellbeing. If a student feels unsafe or unwelcome in our schools or classrooms, learning cannot occur for that individual and the school environment is adversely affected. Acts of bias or hate¹ clearly will have a detrimental and damaging impact both on individuals targeted and the community as a whole.

The NPS is committed to providing a learning environment in which all students and staff feel included, welcomed, and safe. Our actions will be guided by the following four principles:

- Students who engage in behavior at school that threatens the safety or wellbeing of another will be held accountable for their behavior according to procedures outlined in each school's handbook.
- Individuals outside of the school community who jeopardize the safety, security, and wellbeing of students and staff will be referred to the police.
- Those members of the school community who are targeted by an act of bias or hate, directly or indirectly, will be supported and assisted in the aftermath of an incident.
- We will communicate appropriate and necessary information about acts of bias or hate to the school community in an effort to be transparent and as a way to call out bigoted and hateful actions.

¹ Note: See definitions for *acts of bias or hate* and *hate crimes* on p.4 of this document.

Administrative Response to an Act of Bias or Hate

In regard to students, school administrators are responsible for enforcing school rules and guidelines, and they must also communicate appropriate information and updates to those impacted by an act of bias or hate, including notifications to: a) the student victim, b) the student alleged to have violated school rules, c) the families of both students, and d) the staff. Depending on the circumstances the principal (or designee) will also notify the Superintendent of Schools (or designee), the School Resource Officer (or police), and the school community.

When acts of bias or hate occur in the schools, administrators will follow appropriate steps to address the issues, including those as described above. Depending on the individual circumstances, and in an effort to balance student privacy or an ongoing school or police investigation, acts of bias may initially require a restrained and muted response by the school administration. *In any incident, the judgment of the Principal will be critical in determining what immediate response, including communication, will be required.* Communication may be necessary in the immediate aftermath of an incident, or it may come later depending on the circumstances.

As a general rule, we will share essential and appropriate information, updates, and resources without amplifying the biased and hateful voices or actions of those who violate school rules, school norms, commit crimes, or jeopardize the safety and wellbeing of members of the school community.

Specific Steps Addressing an Act of Bias or Hate

Each school will respond to incidents of bias or hateful acts based on the developmental needs of students and the following guidelines². When an act of bias, hate, or a hate crime occurs administrators will:

1. **Ensure safety.** Take all possible measures to ensure the victim is safe and accounted for; follow up with parents and staff as necessary. Notify the School Resource Officer (or police if the SRO is unavailable) for incidents involving violence, threats to safety, or vandalism (including graffiti regardless of its location, size, or type).
2. **Investigate.** Document (i.e., photograph) the incident and inform appropriate colleagues and the SRO/Police to begin an investigation into the situation. If the incident involves graffiti/visual display, determine with the SRO if and when the graffiti/visual display can be removed to prevent further disruption.
3. **Communicate.** Working with administrative colleagues both within the school and from the central office, communicate the situation as necessary and appropriate. Follow the outline that will not only denounce the act but explain next steps. Involve a central office administrator and, as appropriate, the Police Chief in developing public statements, including emails to families, that may

² Excerpted from *Responding to Hate and Bias at School: A Guide for Administrators, Counselors, and Teachers* www.tolerance.org

generate questions from the media. Communications to, between, and among various constituents will include:

- Communications from Principal to school community and Superintendent's office;
- Communications from Principal to School Leadership Team
- Communications from Principal to District Civil Rights Coordinator
- Communications from the Superintendent's Office to Police Chief, Town Manager, district staff, School Committee, and NPS families & community.

The Superintendent's Office, in consultation with the Police Chief, will handle and facilitate questions and inquiries from the media. No NPS staff should speak with the media unless authorized to do so by the Superintendent.

4. **Involve others.** Ensure communications to those with direct ties to the school provide appropriate and updated information. In consultation with the Superintendent's Office, follow up with local and community groups that may require or appreciate information about the incident. These groups include the Needham Public Health Department, SEPAC, ELPAC, METCO Parents Association, Needham Human Rights Committee, Needham Clergy Association, mental health providers and partners, and other community-based groups. In consultation with school staff and central office, determine if further outreach to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), DESE's Safe Schools Program, or other educational and human rights organizations is appropriate.
5. **Support impacted or marginalized students and staff.** Recognize that an act of bias or hate may impact a student, group of students, or staff member(s) in different ways. In consultation with school staff, determine what outreach, counseling services, or other support is necessary for impacted individuals or groups. In some cases, this might involve a one-on-one conversation and check in with a grade level, individuals, or a classroom of students and/or staff. In other instances, this might involve more intensive support and services. School staff should lean on the central office administration for guidance, support, and resources.
6. **Promote healing.** In collaboration with the staff—and as appropriate with the student council and/or parent groups (e.g., PTC)—consider how best to address the needs of the entire school community in the wake of an incident. School assemblies, student advisory, Morning Meeting, student-led conversations, the use of music, art, or writing to allow student expression are some ways to both acknowledge the impact an incident has had on students and can be a way of moving forward and promoting a positive sense of community and wellbeing. Lean on SEL programming and student voices to guide planning.

Definitions

The United States Department of Justice defines acts of bias or hate and hate crimes in these ways:

Bias or Hate Incident: Acts of prejudice (e.g., racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia) that do not involve violence, threats, or property damage.

Hate Crime: A crime such as assault, murder, arson, vandalism and motivated by bias against race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.³

In Conclusion

The Needham Public Schools prioritizes student and school safety, and we strive to ensure the dignity, worth, and wellbeing of each child under our care. I hope this protocol and guidance will assist you as you lead your schools and promote an equitable, safe, and inclusive learning environment for all.

³ United States Department of Justice <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes>