TOMBALL
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
DESTINATION EXCELLENCE

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Dear Tomball ISD Parents and Community Members,

The safety and well-being of our children is at the heart of every decision we make at Tomball ISD. As reflective practitioners, we are constantly evaluating our policies, procedures and resources. As a school district, we are putting forward our maximum efforts to provide a safe learning environment for all students, responding quickly to reports and concerns, working with local partners, and communicating with students, teachers, parents, and the community about resources, expectations, and procedures for the collective work we all share in keeping our children safe.

This work of ensuring student safety is multi-faceted and includes bus rides to and from school, traffic procedures for drop-off and pick-up, entering and visiting school facilities, rules for classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias, procedures for inclement weather, responding to local law enforcement situations or reported threats, intruders, and rules for the appropriate use of technology, to name a few.

Apart from safety concerns related to external factors, we also have strong policies and procedures for internal factors, primarily bullying. In today's world of technology and social media, bullying also includes "cyber-bullying" which often occurs off-campus and beyond the immediate purview of school staff but affects students while they are on campus. As we teach students about appropriate use of social media and technology, we also encourage parents to engage with their children about these important topics.

As students communicate with each other—either in person or virtually—a wide variety of interactions can arise, stretching from friendly conversation to hostility. Bullying occurs when there is a single significant act or a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits an imbalance of power and involves engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct that:

1. Has the effect or will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property;
2. Is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student;
3. Materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of a classroom or school; or
4. Infringes on the rights of the victim at school.

This definition of bullying encompasses cyberbullying which includes acts of bullying done through the use of any electronic communication device, including through the use of a cellular or other type of telephone, a computer, a camera, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, a social media application, an internet website, or any other internet-based communication tool.

Bullying of a student could occur by physical contact or through electronic means and may include hazing, threats, taunting, teasing, confinement, assault, demands for money, destruction of property, theft of valued possessions, name calling, rumor spreading, or ostracism.
Bullying can occur anytime, anywhere and Tomball ISD's policy applies to:

1. Bullying that occurs on or is delivered to school property or to the site of a school-sponsored or school-related activity on or off school property
2. Bullying that occurs on a publicly or privately owned school bus or vehicle being used for transportation of students to or from school or a school-sponsored or school-related activity
3. Cyberbullying that occurs off school property or outside of a school-sponsored or school-related activity if the cyberbullying:
   a. Interferes with a student's educational opportunities; or
   b. Substantially disrupts the orderly operation of a classroom, school, or school-sponsored or school-related activity.

Tomball ISD takes acts of bullying very seriously and expressly prohibits bullying, including cyberbullying.   The district also prohibits retaliation by a student or a district employee against any person who in good faith makes a report of bullying, serves as a witness, or participates in an investigation.

There are several key elements the district is taking to end bullying. The first element focuses on proactive approaches by stopping bullying before it happens through *Bullying Prevention* a bullying prevention program. Tomball ISD has invested in training our teachers, administrators and staff in bullying awareness and is the only district in the Greater Houston area / Region 4 to partner with the Center for School Behavioral Health. As a result of this partnership, every teacher in TISD to date has received training modules on Suicide Awareness, Trauma-Informed Instruction, and Mental Health First Aid. This training project will continue throughout the school year and will include parent and student trainings. Additionally, Tomball ISD is one of the only districts in the state to partner with Teen and Family Services to provide substance abuse screening and social-emotional intervention for students in need. Tomball ISD campuses participate in either the *Character Strong* program which is a social-emotional curriculum that focuses on respect, self-regulation, diversity, inclusion, and other social and emotional learning skills; or *Great Expectations* which has as one of its basic tenets a *Climate of Mutual Respect*.

These approaches focus on recognizing and meeting students' needs before bullying happens on or off TISD campuses. Understanding that bullying prevention and social-emotional well-being is complex and requires a partnership with families, the district is implementing a Parent Prep Academy to inform parents on many critical issues, including how to identify and work through possible bullying situations with their children. TISD is also committed to gathering feedback from students; to achieve this, the district partners with Panorama Education, an online survey tool, to gain knowledge of student perceptions of their safety and well-being while at school. Additionally, the district has launched a web-based counseling service for students and families that may need assistance with a wide range of areas, including bullying. Finally, several departments within TISD are working with Tomball PD to create a video to inform students of the possible consequences related to inappropriate social media postings that affect students and the daily operations of the school. The district continues to evaluate new programs and methods for keeping our students safe, as this is our greatest priority.

A second key element to addressing student safety focuses on how acts of bullying are reported and how the district responds to those reports. The district has readily accessible tools for reporting bullying, clear procedures for the quick and effective investigation of complaints, and a variety of responses to best deal with the incident to keep students safe and to change the behaviors of students who have engaged in bullying.

For reporting incidents of bullying, any student who believes that he or she has experienced bullying or believes that another student has experienced bullying should immediately report the alleged acts to a teacher, school counselor, principal, or other district employee. Parents or other concerned persons can make a report on behalf of a student. Additionally, it is possible to make a report anonymously. Training and district protocols dictate that district employees who suspect or hear of an allegation of bullying must immediately notify the campus administration. Reports can be made orally or in writing, including email, or through the online reporting system via the Tomball ISD website https://www.anonymousalerts.com/tomballisd/ or through the Anonymous Alerts® App available through the App Store or Google Play.

Once a report is received, the campus administration will contact the parent of the reported victim within three school days and the parents of the students reported for bullying promptly. During the course of the investigation, the administration will take any measures required to immediately protect the student. The investigation will include not just an examination of whether or not bullying occurred, but any other prohibited conduct such as harassment, discrimination, and dating violence. Our goal is to conclude any investigation within ten school days of receiving the report. The administration will create a final written conclusion regarding the report.

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If a determination is made that bullying did occur, the district will follow the Tomball ISD Student Code of Conduct in applying a disciplinary action and may take other corrective action to address the behavior. Other corrective action may include a training program for the individuals involved in the complaint, a comprehensive education program for the school community, follow-up inquiries to determine whether any new incidents or any instances of retaliation have occurred, involving parents and students in efforts to identify problems and improve the school climate, increasing staff monitoring of areas where bullying has occurred, and reaffirming the District's policy against bullying. Tomball ISD may also notify law enforcement in certain circumstances and may exercise the option of either transferring the bullying students to an alternative campus as a protective measure, or facilitating the transfer of a bullied student upon request of the parents. To mitigate the effects of bullying, counseling services are available for victims of bullying, students who engaged in bullying, and any students who witnessed the bullying.

All of these procedures, however, must begin with some type of report. Tomball ISD wants each and every child to feel safe in our schools. We are keeping our eyes and ears open but much happens beyond our immediate view, especially cyber-bullying. We need the full cooperation of all of our families in reporting bullying in a timely manner so that we can take the necessary steps to address it. Please take some time to visit the Tomball ISD web page on bullying which includes access and information for the online reporting tool and the smart phone/pad app at:

https://www.tomballisd.net/apps/pages/parents-and-students/bullying

With sincerest regards,

Dr. Martha Salazar-Zamora
Superintendent of Schools