

BULLYING, INTIMIDATION AND HARASSMENT

At MSP, we take a proactive stance on bullying, intimidation and harassment. As a community, we work to create a learning environment where students are prepared to clearly articulate their concerns, speak honestly, appreciate individual differences and feel empowered to advocate for themselves and others. As a Montessori school, education for peace is an integral part of our curriculum, with our ground rules of respect for the individual and the environment, as the central guide to appropriate conduct for students. Through peace education, we work with students at each level to see the cause and effect of their behavior in ways that are developmentally appropriate.

The school ground rules, posted in each classroom as a reference for the students, are introduced to the classrooms by the teachers and are consistent throughout the day. Expectations for behavior vary based on the development of the students at each program level. Based on Montessori pedagogy, our policy is to assist children in developing self-discipline and skills to control their behavior, incorporating conflict resolution skills to address disagreements in a peaceful manner. In the Primary classrooms the teachers may, as needed, remind the children of the written rules. In the Elementary programs, the students create and sign the ground rules, using them to facilitate independent conflict resolution discussions. Adults step in when a student asks for assistance, or if the adult feels that the situation warrants support or intervention from an adult.

This policy prohibits bullying, intimidation and/or harassment of students on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, physical or mental disability, mental status, sexual orientation, gender-related identity or expression, military status, unfavorable discharge from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic. Bullying is contrary to Illinois state law as well as the policy of MSP. This is not intended to infringe upon the right to exercise free expression or the free exercise of religion or religiously views protected under the First Amendment of the US Constitution

The School does not tolerate verbal or physical behavior that constitutes bullying (including cyber-bullying), harassment or discrimination, hazing, sexual assault and sexual harassment (also referred to as “interpersonal misconduct”). The School is also committed to promptly addressing any behavior that impedes the learning of any student or interferes with the experience of any other member of the school community.

Bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual harassment and sexual assault are prohibited on the School’s campus and the property immediately adjacent to School grounds, on vehicles driven on school trips, and at School-sponsored events, activities,

and off-campus trips. School-owned technology may not be used to intimidate, harass, threaten or bully another student. In addition, interpersonal misconduct is prohibited at a location, activity, function or program that is not School-related or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by the School, if such conduct: (a) creates a hostile environment at school for a student, (b) infringes on the rights of a student at the School, or (c) substantially disrupts the educational process or the School's orderly operations.

Bullying Defined

"Bullying", including "cyberbullying," is defined as any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to:

1. Place the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;
2. Cause a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;
3. Substantially interfere with the student's or students' academic performance; and/or
4. Substantially interfere with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by the school.

Bullying may take various forms, including without limitation: pushing, hitting, threatening, stalking, name-calling, or other physical or verbal conduct of an aggressive, belittling or browbeating nature; sexual harassment; sexual violence; public humiliation; threatened or actual destruction of property; using derogatory slurs; wearing or possessing items depicting or implying hatred or prejudice against individuals based on one or more of the distinguishing characteristics listed in the third paragraph of this policy; or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying.

"Cyber-bullying" relates to bullying using technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation 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 system, photoelectronic system, or photooptical system, including without limitation electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. "Cyber-bullying" includes the creation of a webpage or weblog 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 or impersonation creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this Section. "Cyber-bullying" also includes 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 effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this Section.

Legal Definitions and School Policies

In accordance with the School's mission, values and standards of conduct, the School has, at times, supplemented and/or provided broader protections against bullying, discrimination, harassment and other inappropriate conduct than may be required under applicable laws. In essence, the School's standards may be stricter than the law and the School may impose discipline accordingly. The School's efforts to enhance its protection of students in no way expand an individual's rights under the law and other applicable laws may supersede this policy. Further, the School may modify and amplify the standards set forth above and use its discretion in the interpretative enforcement of all ideals and standards of conduct.

Responding to Bullying and Harassment

A student who is the target of bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual assault or sexual harassment, or who has witnessed such an incident or any incident of retaliation, or who otherwise has relevant information about conduct prohibited by the School, is strongly encouraged to report the matter promptly (either orally or in writing) to the Head of School, or to any other administrator or faculty member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. If a student is uncomfortable contacting one of these individuals, the student may ask another adult or a classmate to help. Oral reports made to a member of the faculty/staff will generally be memorialized in writing.

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With respect to reporting sexual assault in particular, students are strongly urged to speak to a trusted adult at school or at home. When making such outreach, students may share as little or as much information as they would like. Parents/guardians of a student who is the target of interpersonal misconduct, or of a student who has witnessed or otherwise has relevant information about such misconduct, are urged to immediately notify the Head of School. Furthermore, any parent/guardian who has witnessed interpersonal misconduct, or has relevant information concerning such an incident or any incident of retaliation, are strongly encouraged to contact one of these administrators immediately. The School urges students and parents/guardians not to make anonymous reports. Although there are circumstances in which an anonymous report can be better than none at all, it is far more difficult to determine the facts of what occurred if complaints are made anonymously and disciplinary action will generally not be taken against an individual solely on the basis of an anonymous report. The School cannot promise absolute confidentiality to those reporting bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual assault or sexual harassment, as there may be a need to share information during an investigation or otherwise; however, the School will disclose such information with discretion, on a need-to-know basis.

False Complaints

All persons involved in a complaint or investigation should understand that false or exaggerated accusations can be extremely damaging to innocent persons; therefore, the School expects and requires the honest and full disclosure of facts, taking into account the ages of the individuals, by all involved. Any person who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual assault, sexual harassment or retaliation may be subject to disciplinary action.

Problem Resolution

The goals of an investigation, and any supportive, disciplinary or other remedial process that is imposed following that investigation, are to correct the situation to the extent reasonably possible and to take steps to prevent repetition of the incident and retaliation. The School strives to make all reasonable efforts to complete an investigation in a prompt manner.

When a complaint is brought to the attention of the Head of School or the Head of School's designee, an assessment is made to determine the initial steps appropriate to protect the wellbeing of the students involved (including both the alleged targets and aggressors) and to prevent disruption of the learning environment while the investigation is undertaken. The School may use strategies, such as increased supervision, stay-away mandates and personal safety plans, as may be appropriate to prevent further misconduct, witness interference and/or retaliation during the course of and after the investigation.

The Head of School or Head of School's designee will conduct an impartial, fact-finding investigation of the complaint. This investigation, made with all reasonable effort within ten (10) school days after the date of the report of the incident, may include (but is not necessarily limited to) interviews with the complainant, alleged target(s), alleged aggressor(s) and any other witnesses or parties who have information relevant to the alleged incident. The School may consult with faculty, the parents/guardians of the alleged target(s) and/or the alleged aggressor(s), or any other person deemed to have knowledge about, or circumstances surrounding, the complaint.

The School neither tolerates nor engages in retaliation against an individual for filing a complaint about interpersonal misconduct or cooperating in an investigation of such a complaint. The School will not take adverse action against a student for making a good faith report of interpersonal misconduct. An individual who is found to have engaged in retaliation against a student for filing a complaint, or participating in the investigation of a complaint, may be subject to disciplinary action.

Upon completion of the investigation, the Head of School (or the Head of School's designee) will generally make the following determinations:

- Whether and to what extent the allegation of bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual assault or sexual harassment has been substantiated.

- Whether any disciplinary action and/or other remedial action is appropriate and, if so, how it will be implemented.
- Whether counseling, or a referral to appropriate services, should be offered to targets, aggressors, or family members of the affected students or targets.

The Head of School (or the Head of School's designee) will determine any appropriate disciplinary action for a student who is found to have committed an incident of bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual assault, sexual harassment or retaliation.

Information about consequences or other corrective action may be shared with the School community as deemed appropriate by the Head of School. Such announcement may be made in person, by electronic communication or otherwise. Resources such as counseling or referral to appropriate services are available to all students – including the alleged aggressor(s) and the alleged target(s) – during and after an investigation.

Notification to Parents/Guardians

The School will generally notify the parents/guardians of the alleged target(s) and the alleged aggressor(s) promptly after a complaint has been filed, upon completion of the investigation and to report the results of the investigation. Parents/guardians of the target(s) will generally also be notified of any action to be taken to prevent further acts of bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual assault, sexual harassment or retaliation. Parents will also be made aware, as appropriate, of the availability of social work services, counseling, school psychological services, other interventions, and restorative measures.

In all situations, the amount of information shared by the School may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student and employee records, other confidentiality or privacy considerations and/or concerns regarding the integrity of the investigation processes.

Notification to Government Authorities

In appropriate circumstances, such as when a crime may have been committed or a child may have been subjected to abuse or neglect of the type that is reportable under Illinois law to DCFS, law enforcement or other appropriate government agencies may be notified. At any point after receiving a report of misconduct, including, but not limited to, bullying, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexual assault or sexual harassment, the School may notify local law enforcement or other government agencies.

Interventions

MSP will make or suggest any and all necessary interventions in order to address bullying, which may include, but are not limited to, school social work services, restorative measures, social-emotional skill building, counseling, and community-based services.

Evaluation

This bullying policy will be evaluated every two years to assess the outcomes and effectiveness. Such factors that will be evaluated may include

- a.) The frequency of victimization.
- b.) Student, staff, and family observations of safety at a school.
- c.) Identification of areas of a school where bullying occurs.
- d.) The types of bullying that are common or occurring
- e.) Bystander intervention or participation.

Results of each assessment will be made available to the MSP community via the Parent Portal of the school website.

This policy was developed in consultation with school parents and through discussion with students. It is consistent with the MSP Policy Blueprint.

Date Revised: September, 2022