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Bullying Policy

I. Introduction

At Montessori Pathways School, we are committed to providing a caring, friendly, and safe environment for our students so they can learn in a relaxed and secure atmosphere. School is a place where students learn the norms and mores of social interactions. As part of the socialization process, all students experiment with a range of behaviors as they learn about social power. However, students sometimes push the limits of this range and engage in behaviors we would consider bullying, as defined in accordance with Illinois State Law below.

Bullying and other forms of peer mistreatment are detrimental to the school environment, as well as student learning, achievement, and well-being. Peer mistreatment interferes with the mission of the school to educate students and disrupts the operations of school. Bullying and other forms of peer mistreatment affect not only students who are targets, but also those who participate in and witness such behavior. These behaviors must be addressed to ensure student safety and an inclusive learning environment.

It is not our intent to prohibit students from expressing their ideas or from engaging in civil debate. However, the school does not condone and will take action in response to conduct that interferes with students' opportunity to learn, our educational mission, and the operation of the school.

Bullying and Cyberbullying are contrary to Montessori Pathway's Mission Statement and core values as expressed through ROARS (Respect, Ownership, Appreciation, Responsibility, Safety) and to Illinois state law.

II. Prohibited Behavior

The following behaviors are prohibited:

1. Bullying;
2. Cyberbullying;
3. Harassment;
4. Retaliation against those reporting such defined behaviors; and
5. Making knowingly false accusations of bullying behavior.

Any person who engages in any of these prohibited behaviors that constitutes bullying shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary actions.

III. Bullying and Cyberbullying Defined

A. "Bullying," including "cyberbullying," is 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 have the effect of one or more of the following:

1. *Placing the student in reasonable fear of harm to their person or property*
2. *Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health*
3. *Substantially interfering with the student's academic performance*

4. *Substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by the school*

B. "Cyberbullying" is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including, but not limited to, a transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted by the use of any electronic device, including, but not limited to, a computer, telephone, cellular telephone, or text messaging device.

Examples of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying may take various forms, including, but not limited to, one or more of the following:

1. Repeated or pervasive taunting, name-calling, belittling, mocking, put-downs, or demeaning humor
2. Behavior that is likely to harm someone by damaging or manipulating his or her relationships with others, including, but not limited to, gossip, spreading rumors, and social exclusion
3. Non-verbal threats and/or intimidations
4. Hate speech, such as the use of words or images to harass individuals or groups based on gender, gender expression, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other aspect of identity

Cyberbullying may take various forms, including, but not limited to, the following actions on any electronic medium:

1. Posting slurs or rumors or displaying any defamatory, inaccurate, disparaging, violent, abusive, profane, or sexually oriented material about a student on a website, an app, in social media, or any other electronic platform;
2. Posting misleading or fake photographs or digital video footage of a student on websites or creating fake websites or social networking profiles in the guise of posing as the targeted student;
3. Impersonating or representing another student through the use of that other student's electronic device or account to send e-mail, text messages, instant messages (IM), phone calls, or other messages on a social media website;
4. Sending e-mail, text messages, IM, or leaving voice mail messages that are mean or threatening, or so numerous as to bombard the target's e-mail account, IM account, or cell phone; and
5. Using a camera phone or digital video camera to take and/or send embarrassing photos or "sexting" photographs of other students.

Obviously, the school cannot control the bullying behavior of students through the transmission of information from a computer that is accessed at a non-school related location, activity, function, or program, or from the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by the school. If the out-of-school bullying causes a substantial disruption to the educational process or orderly operation of school, parents of all parties will be contacted, and the school will determine the appropriate natural consequences. This applies if a school administrator or teacher receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred.

C. "Retaliation" means an act or gesture against a student for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. "Retaliation" also includes knowingly falsely reporting an act of bullying.

D. "Alternative discipline" means disciplinary action other than suspension or expulsion from school that is designed to correct and address the root causes of a student's specific misbehavior while retaining the student in class or school, or restorative school practices to repair the harm done to relationships and persons from the student's misbehavior.

IV. Reporting

Bullying or suspected bullying should be reported in person or in writing (including anonymously) to the Director of Montessori Pathways School, Ms. Alena Baradzina, montpathways@hotmail.com

A. School staff, coaches, and teachers of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are required to report alleged incidents of bullying to the Director of Montessori Pathways School. Any other adult working or volunteering in the school will be encouraged to promptly report observed or suspected alleged incidents of bullying to the Director of Montessori Pathways School

B. Students who are believed to have been bullied or are aware of incidents of bullying are strongly encouraged to report this behavior to a staff member or school administrator.

C. Parents and other adults who believe that an incident of bullying has occurred are encouraged to report this behavior to a staff member or school administrator.

D. Acts of reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an alleged incident of bullying are prohibited. Any student who is determined to have knowingly falsely accused another of bullying shall be subject to disciplinary consequences.

V. Responding

The Director of Montessori Pathways School will:

A. Promptly (usually within ten days) investigate and respond to allegations of bullying behavior;

B. Keep written documentation of all allegations of bullying behavior and outcomes of the investigations.

C. Inform parent(s) or guardian(s) of the student(s) who was alleged to have bullied AND of the student(s) who was believed to have been bullied that a report of an alleged incident of bullying has been made;

D. Communicate to the parent(s) or guardian(s) of a student(s) who was believed to have been bullied the measures being taken to ensure the safety of the student(s) who was believed to have been bullied and to prevent further acts of bullying;

E. Inform parent(s) or guardian(s) of the students involved the findings of the investigation and actions to be taken;

F. Communicate with local or state law enforcement agencies, if, in the judgment of the school, it is believed that the pursuit of criminal charges or a civil action under Illinois law may be appropriate.

VI. Remediation

The Director of Montessori Pathways will:

A. Identify the specific nature(s) of the incident.

B. Apply disciplinary actions, which may include, but are not limited to, imposing a series of graduated consequences that follow our Misbehavior and Natural Consequences guidelines and/or include alternative discipline. In determining the appropriate response to students who engage in bullying behavior, school administrators will consider the type of behaviors, the frequency and/or pattern of behaviors, and other relevant circumstances. Alternative discipline includes, but is not limited to:

1. Meeting with the student and the student's parent(s)/guardian(s);
2. Reflective activities, such as requiring the student to write an essay about the student's misbehavior;
3. Mediation, but only when there is mutual conflict between peers, rather than one-way negative behavior, and both parties voluntarily choose this option;
4. Counseling;
5. Anger management;
6. Health counseling or intervention;
7. Mental health counseling;
8. Participation in skills building and resolution activities, such as social-emotional cognitive skills building, resolution circles, and restorative conferencing;
9. Community service; and
10. In-school detention or suspension, which may take place during lunchtime or after school.

C. Remediate any substantiated incident of bullying to counter the negative impact of the bullying and reduce the risk of future bullying incidents, which may include referring the victim, perpetrator, or other involved persons to counseling or other appropriate services.

VII. Assignment of Responsibility

A. The Director of School is responsible for:

1. Annually providing written versions of this policy and related procedures to students, parent(s) and guardian(s), volunteers, administrators, teachers, and school staff;
2. Posting this policy and related procedures on the school website;
3. Including in the Community Handbook a section that addresses in detail this policy and related procedures;
4. Oversight, implementation, and enforcement of this policy and its procedures;
5. Designating School staff, the instructors of Extra-Curricular Programs, or other school personnel to administer the policy;
6. Ensuring that the prohibition on bullying and retaliation and the attendant consequences apply to any student, school employee, contractor, visitor, or volunteer who engages in conduct that constitutes bullying or retaliation;
7. Providing professional development and staff training in the best practices in prevention of bullying and harassment and implementation of this policy; and
8. Filing this policy that addresses bullying and cyberbullying with the Illinois State Board of Education.

References:

ISBE Bullying Policy Requirements:

<http://www.iasb.com/law/ISBEBullyingPolicyRequirements.pdf>