

St. Mary of the Annunciation Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan 2011-2012

Introduction

St. Mary of the Annunciation School (SMA) expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

The School is committed to providing all students and staff with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying and cyber-bullying. This commitment is an essential part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

SMA will take specific steps to create a safe, supportive environment for everyone in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying or teasing.

At SMA, we expect that all members of our school community will treat each other with civility and respect. It is the policy of SMA to provide and maintain a learning environment that is free of bullying and any other verbal or physical misconduct that disrupts the learning environment, or makes it unsafe. It is also important that the SMA Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (Plan) be well understood by all members of our school community. The Principal is responsible for the implementation and administration of the Plan. Questions and concerns related to the plan may be referred to the Principal, Assistant Principal, or to a faculty/staff member.

Policy Against Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, and Retaliation

SMA will not tolerate any form of bullying or cyber-bullying, nor will we tolerate retaliation against any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, witnesses or has reliable information about bullying. Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited on school grounds, at school sponsored events and activities, functions, field trips, and programs. Bullying and cyber-bullying are also prohibited on school buses, and other vehicles used by the school and through technology, or an electronic device owned or used by the school. In addition, bullying and cyber-bullying are 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 by the school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at

school for a targeted student, infringes on the rights of a targeted student at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

Definitions and Examples

It is important for everyone to understand what is meant by bullying, cyber-bullying, and other terms covered under the Plan. The following definitions are drawn from the Massachusetts Law against bullying:

Bullying is defined as the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, a physical act, gesture or any combination, directed at a target that:

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

Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings on social networks.

Hostile environment is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Faculty/Staff includes, but is not limited to: educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

Target is a student against whom bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has taken place.

Aggressor is a student who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Examples of bullying: Bullying can include, but is not limited to, any of the following: hitting, slapping, pushing, and other physical conduct that causes bodily harm; teasing or threatening in a manner that puts someone down or is cruel; deliberately excluding someone, spreading rumors, psychological manipulation, and other actions that hurt someone's feelings or demeans them; sexual harassment or hazing activities.

Examples of cyber-bullying: Cyber-bullying may include the following kinds of behaviors:

- taking a private email, instant message or text message and forwarding it, threatening to forward it to others, or posting it where many can see it to embarrass or intimidate a person
- spreading hurtful rumors online about another person
- threatening or insulting through aggressive emails, instant messages, or text messages
- posting or threatening to post embarrassing pictures of someone online without his or her permission
- creating 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 or impersonation causes any of the conditions listed in the definition of bullying.

Legal Definitions and School Policy

It is important to bear in mind that stricter standards of behavior may apply under SMA's policies in order that we may prevent inappropriate verbal and physical conduct before a student has been subject to bullying as it is defined under the law. For example, although the law defines bullying as "repeated use" of certain expressions, acts, and/or gestures, the school reserves the right to apply disciplinary measures and other corrective actions in case of a single expression, act, and/or gesture. If the school determines that it is of sufficient severity to warrant disciplinary measures or other remedial action, or that the repetition of that expression, act, and/or gesture might reasonably result in bullying as defined under the law and action will be taken.

Prevention of Bullying and Cyber-bullying

From the earliest grades at SMA, students learn that as members of our school community they have a right to be treated with respect and dignity. Our curriculum emphasizes respect for differences, and teachers are clear in their expectations for student behavior. The lessons are found in the “Second Step” and “Talking about Touching” curriculum, as well as in other areas of the general curriculum. When necessary, parents are notified and asked to reinforce policy standards for membership in the SMA School community. The administration and faculty/staff recognize that it is essential that expectations for student conduct extends to corridors, bathrooms, lunch, recess, carpool, buses, and the like. The school strives to ensure that ample adult supervision is provided on school premises, at lunch and at recess, and at school sponsored events.

Reports of Bullying, Cyber-bullying, Retaliation

Any student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying, or has witnessed an incident of bullying or cyber-bullying, or otherwise relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying prohibited by this Plan, is strongly encouraged to promptly report the matter orally or in writing to the Principal, Assistant Principal, or faculty/staff member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. Also, any student who is subject to retaliation in violation of this Plan, or who knows of another student who has been subject to retaliation, is urged to report it as soon as possible.

A parent of a student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying, or of a student who has witnessed or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying, is strongly urged to promptly notify the Principal, Assistant Principal, or faculty/staff member. Furthermore, any parent who has him or herself witnessed bullying, or cyber-bullying, or has relevant information concerning such an incident is strongly urged to come forward to the Principal, Assistant Principal, or member of the faculty/staff. A parent should also report any incident of retaliation in violation of this Plan.

Any member of the administration, or faculty/staff of SMA who witnesses or otherwise becomes aware of bullying or cyber-bullying in violation of this Plan, or who becomes aware of retaliation against a student who reported information concerning a violation of this Plan, is required to report it immediately to the Principal or Assistant Principal. There are to be no exceptions. A member of the faculty/ staff may not make promises of confidentiality to a student or parent who informs him/her of an allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Administrators and faculty/staff may not make reports under this policy anonymously. The school also urges students and their parents not to make reports anonymously. Although there are circumstances when 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. Students and parents are encouraged to bear in mind that the school takes retaliation seriously. Also, while the school cannot promise strict confidentiality because information must be shared in order to conduct an investigation, the school releases information concerning complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation only on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

Responding to a report of Bullying, Cyber-bullying, or Retaliation

Preliminary Considerations When a complaint of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation is brought to the attention of the Principal, Assistant Principal, or a faculty/staff member, an assessment is made as to whether any initial steps are needed to protect the well-being of the students and to prevent the disruption of their learning environment while the investigation is being conducted. As appropriate, strategies such as increased supervision may be implemented to prevent further bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation during the investigation.

Investigation The following is an outline of the procedure that is pursued once a complaint has been brought to the attention of the Principal, Assistant Principal, or faculty/staff member. An impartial investigation of the complaint is conducted. That investigation may include (but will not necessarily be limited to) interviews with the person who made the complaint, with the student who is the target of the alleged bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, with the person or persons against whom the complaint was made, and with any students, administration, faculty/staff, or other persons who witnessed or who may otherwise have relevant information about the alleged incident.

Obligation to Notify Parents It is the policy of SMA to notify parents of any student who is an alleged target of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation and the parents of any student who may have been accused of engaging in such behavior.

Resolution, Notification, and Follow-Up Following interviews and other investigation undertaken, as the school deems appropriate, the Principal will determine whether and to what extent the allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been substantiated. If it is determined that the policy set forth in this Plan has been violated, the Principal will determine what disciplinary action, and/or other remedial action is appropriate and how it will be implemented. This includes the potential need to notify local law enforcement if necessary.

The goal of an investigation and any disciplinary or other remedial process that is imposed following that investigation is to correct the situation to the extent it is reasonably possible and to take such steps as can be taken to prevent there being repetition of the incident and to prevent the student or students targeted and others who participated in the investigation from being subject to retaliation.

Upon the completion of the investigation, the Principal will meet individually with the student or students who were the target of the alleged incident and the student or students against whom the complaint was made and their parents to report the results of the investigation, and where disciplinary or other corrective action is determined to be appropriate and to inform the parties of the steps that will be taken to correct the situation. The amount of information provided in these meetings may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student records. Follow-up contacts will be made with any student found to have been targeted in violation of this Plan.

Conclusion

This Plan is intended:

- to prevent bullying and cyber-bullying among our students
- to encourage students and their parents to have confidence in SMA procedures and to come forward promptly whenever a student is subject to conduct that is prohibited by this or any other SMA policy
- to implement appropriate discipline and other corrective measures when they are found to be warranted

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Addendum to 2011-2012 Parent/Student Handbook