

Park Street School

Anti-Bullying: Prevention & Intervention Plan

April, 2019

I. Introduction

Park Street School (the “School”) is designed to be a nurturing and safe environment for all students, a place in which students develop positive self-image and self-control. As such, we expect all members of our school community to treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences, understanding that each person is a unique being, created by God.

The Park Street School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (the “Plan”), is published in response to the recently-enacted Massachusetts law against bullying and is an integral part of our 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. This Plan will be reviewed and updated at least annually and is designed to:

- Prevent bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation within our School community;
- Empower members of our School community to speak up if they experience or witness bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation;
- Provide a framework by which bullying behaviors can be reported, investigated, and resolved.

The Plan is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyber-bullying and the School is committed to working with students, staff, families, law enforcement agencies, and the community to prevent issues of violence. In consultation with these constituencies, the School has established this Plan for preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The Plan is supported by the School’s anti-discrimination and discipline policy as stated in our Parent and Staff Handbooks. This Plan will be reviewed at the beginning of each academic year during Staff and Parent Orientations. Beginning in Academic Year 2014/2015, the School will provide annually a notice and comment period on the Plan for families with students enrolled at the School. Teachers will address the Plan in age-appropriate terms with their classroom students at the beginning of the year and as an ongoing part of the school’s program. This Plan will be stated in the Staff and Parent Handbooks and will be posted on the School’s website.

The Head of Schools is responsible for the implementation and administration of the Plan, except when a reported bullying incident involves the Head of Schools as the alleged aggressor. In such cases, the Board of Trustees shall be responsible for investigating the report, and taking other steps necessary to

implement the Plan. Questions and concerns related to this Plan may be referred to the Head of Schools, the Park Street School Elementary School Principal, or the Preschool Director.

II. Policy against Bullying, Cyber-bullying, and Retaliation

The School 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, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

The School understands that members of certain groups, including but not limited to race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics, may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying, harassment or teasing. The School will take specific steps to create a safe and supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying or harassment.

Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited on school grounds and at School-sponsored events, activities, functions and programs. Bullying and cyber-bullying are also prohibited at school bus stops, on school buses, on other vehicles used by the School, and through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased 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, leased, or used 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 under the Law

The following definitions are drawn from the Massachusetts law against bullying.

Aggressor is a student or a member of a school staff who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation towards a student.

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

- causes physical or emotional harm to the targeted student or damage to the student's property;
- places the targeted student 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 targeted student;
- infringes on the rights of the targeted student at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

Cyber-bullying: Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, fax machines, and the internet. It includes, but is not limited to, e-mail, instant messages, text messages, and internet postings, whether on a webpage, in a blog, or otherwise.

Hostile Environment: A 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 the student's education.

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

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

Legal Definitions and School Policy: It is important to note that stricter standards of behavior may apply under Park Street School in order to prevent inappropriate verbal and physical conduct before a student has been subject to bullying as defined by the Massachusetts law. For example, although the law defines bullying as "repeated use" of expressions, acts, and/or gestures, the School reserves the right to apply appropriate disciplinary measures and other corrective action in the case of a single expression, act or gesture.

III. Prevention of Bullying and Cyber-bullying Through Training and Professional Development

A. Students. From the toddler level through Grade 6, each student is taught to understand his or her worth as a unique being created by God. Students are encouraged to express their ideas, appreciate the differences of others, respect one another, make right choices, take responsibility for their actions and accept consequences. Consistent expectations for student conduct apply to all aspects of the school day and all areas of the School's facilities such as: hallways, bathrooms, lunch, recess, drop-off and pick-up,

field trips, and after-school activities. Bullying prevention curricula will be research-based, age-appropriate, and may include a variety of approaches: using scripts and role plays to develop skills; empowering students to take action when they witness acts of bullying, including seeking adult assistance; helping students understand the power dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying; emphasizing cyber-safety; and promoting healthy relationships and respectful communications.

B. Staff. The Park Street School Elementary School Principal, Early Elementary Director, and the Director of the Preschool will work closely with the teachers to ensure that students are well informed about what is expected of them and to reinforce positive conduct. Teachers will support and empower students to take action if they feel targeted or if they witness other students engaging in bullying or other unacceptable behavior.

C. Annual Staff Training. Annual training for all School staff will include staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps the Head of Schools or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades.

D. Ongoing Professional Development. The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a School climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. The content of the School professional development will be research-based and will include information on the following: (1) age-appropriate strategies to prevent bullying; (2) age-appropriate strategies for effective interventions to stop bullying; (3) information regarding the power differential that takes place among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying; (4) research findings on bullying, including information about at-risk students; (5) information on the nature of cyber-bullying; and (6) internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying.

IV. Reports of Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, or Retaliation

A. By Students. Any student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying or has witnessed an incident of bullying or cyber-bullying or possesses information about bullying or cyber-bullying as defined by the Massachusetts law, is strongly encouraged to promptly report the situation orally or in writing to the Head of Schools, the PSS Elementary School Principal, or the Preschool Director, or to any other staff member to whom the student is comfortable speaking. Also, any student who is subject to retaliation or who knows of another student who has been subject to retaliation is urged to report it as soon as possible. A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation may be subject to disciplinary action.

B. By Parents or Guardians. Parents and guardians are urged to promptly notify the Head of Schools or the PSS Elementary School Principal or the Preschool Director if they believe their child has been the target of bullying or cyber-bullying or if their child has witnessed or has relevant information about bullying/cyber-bullying. Also, any parent or guardian who witnessed bullying or cyber-bullying, or who

has information regarding an incident is strongly encouraged to contact the Head of Schools or the PSS Elementary School Principal or the Preschool Director immediately. A parent or guardian should also report any incident of retaliation and violation of this policy to the Head of Schools or PSS Elementary School Principal or Preschool Director. Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made anonymously and the School will conduct an appropriate investigation. Parents and guardians, however, are encouraged not to make reports anonymously, although it is an option. While there may be times for which an anonymous report would be advantageous, it is more difficult to investigate and determine the facts of what has occurred. Massachusetts law provides that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

C. By School Staff. Any member of the School staff who witnesses or otherwise becomes aware of bullying or cyber-bullying as defined by Massachusetts law, or who becomes aware of retaliation against a student who reported information, is required to report the incident and the names of students or members of the School staff involved immediately to the Head of Schools, the PSS Principal, the Early Elementary Director, or the Preschool Director, and complete the Bullying Incident Report Form. A staff member may not make promises of confidentiality to a student or parent or guardian who informs him/her of an allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

D. Confidentiality. Park Street School takes its policy against bullying, cyber bullying, and retaliation seriously. Although School personnel will handle these matters discreetly, we cannot guarantee strict confidentiality because information may need to be shared in order to conduct a thorough investigation. The School reserves the right to communicate necessary information to appropriate parties in the course of its investigation.

V. Responding to a Report of Bullying, Cyber-bullying, or Retaliation

A. Initial Steps. Upon receiving notification of bullying or cyber-bullying the PSS Elementary School Principal or the Preschool Director will assess the situation to determine if immediate steps must be taken to ensure the safety of students and to maintain an effective learning environment during further investigation. As deemed necessary, strategies will be implemented to prevent further incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation. In severe or repeated cases of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation, the School reserves the right to suspend and/or terminate a student, in accord with the Suspension and Termination policies in our Staff and Parent Handbooks.

B. Notice to Parents/Guardians. Parents or guardians will be notified promptly by the PSS Elementary School Principal, the Early Elementary Director, or the Preschool Director if their child is an alleged target of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation or if their child is accused of engaging in bullying behavior according to Massachusetts law.

C. Notice to Another School. If any incident of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation involves students from another school, the PSS Principal or the Preschool Director will notify the Head of School or Principal of the school involved.

D. Notice to Law Enforcement. At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the Head of Schools has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the Head of Schools will promptly notify the local law enforcement agency.

E. Investigation: Once a complaint has been brought to the attention of the Head of Schools, the PSS Elementary School Principal, or the Preschool Director, an immediate impartial investigation will be conducted by the School. No disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report. The investigation will include interviews with the following individuals:

- The individual who registered the complaint;
- The alleged targeted student(s) of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation;
- The person or persons against whom the complaint was made;
- Any individuals such as students or staff members who may have information about the alleged incident.

The purpose of the investigation and any disciplinary actions and/or interventions is to:

- Balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior,
- Implement steps to prevent repeated bullying behavior
- Protect the student(s) targeted and those who participated in the investigation from retaliation

In the process of investigation, the student(s) will be encouraged to report any incident previous to or subsequent to the reported incident(s).

D. Resolution, Notification, and Follow-up

Following the investigation process, the PSS Elementary School Principal, the Early Elementary Director, or the Preschool Director will determine if and to what extent the allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been verified. If bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation has been substantiated, the PSS Elementary School Principal or the Preschool Director, along with the Head of Schools, will determine what disciplinary action and/or intervention is appropriate, as well as the steps for implementation.

Once the course of action has been determined, the PSS Elementary School Principal or the Preschool Director, and the classroom teacher and/or Head of Schools, if necessary, will meet individually with the targeted student(s) of the alleged incident and the student(s) or School staff member(s) against whom the complaint was made and their parents to report the results of the investigation. Parents will be informed of any disciplinary or corrective measures. The information provided in these meetings may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student records. Follow-up meetings will be conducted with

any student who has been a target of bullying and or retaliation and his/her parents to ask if there have been any subsequent incidents.

The PSS Elementary School Principal or the Preschool Director may provide assistance for a referral(s) for appropriate services, such as counseling to the family of the targeted student(s) and/or the family of the student(s) who engaged in bullying conduct.

In appropriate circumstances, such as when a crime may have been committed or a child may have been subject to abuse or neglect of the type that is reportable under Section 51A of the Massachusetts laws, law enforcement or another appropriate government agency may be notified.

Bullying includes aggressive or hostile behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the bullied. These behaviors are typically repeated over time. Bullying takes many forms, including but not limited to physical and/or verbal assaults, nonverbal or emotional intimidation, social exclusion and isolation, extortion, and the use of a computer or telecommunications to send embarrassing slanderous, threatening, or intimidating messages. Bullying can also be characterized by teasing, put-downs name-calling, cruel rumors, false accusations, and hazing. Bullying is a form of victimization and is not necessarily a result of or part of an ongoing conflict.

Bullying is distinguished from other kinds of aggression by negative behaviors that are intentionally targeted at a specific individual (non-accident), the repetitive nature of bullying and the power imbalance between students.

The Massachusetts law is all encompassing, defining bullying as “repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at another student that has the effect of: (i) causing physical or emotional harm to the other student or damage to the other student’s property; (ii) placing the other students in reasonable fear of harm to himself or damage to his property; (iii) creating a hostile environment at school for the other student; (iv) infringing on the rights of the other student at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupting the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

It is the responsibility of all school staff members and students to report acts of bullying immediately to the principal. All such reports will be investigated promptly to determine the facts in order to verify the validity of the allegations. Consequences will be delineated in the school’s anti-bullying policy.

(The Anti-Bullying Prevention and Policies can also be found in the PSS Parent Handbook and in the PSS Staff and Faculty Handbooks.)

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