

# Highland Community School Bullying Policy

## Introduction

Highland Community School strives to provide a safe, secure, and respectful learning environment for all students in school, on school the playgrounds, and at all HCS school-sponsored activities. Bullying has a harmful social, physical, psychological, and academic impact on bullies, victims, and bystanders. Highland consistently and vigorously addresses bullying so that there is no disruption to the learning environment and learning process.

## Definition

Bullying is deliberate or intentional behavior using words or actions, intended to cause fear, intimidation, or harm. Bullying may be repeated behavior and involves an imbalance of power. The behavior may be motivated by an actual or perceived distinguishing characteristic, such as, but not limited to: age; national origin; race; ethnicity; religion; gender; gender identity; sexual orientation; physical attributes; physical or mental ability or disability; and social, economic, or family status.

Bullying behavior can be:

1. Physical (e.g. assault, hitting or punching, kicking, theft, threatening behavior)
2. Verbal (e.g. threatening or intimidating language, teasing or name-calling, racist remarks)
3. Indirect (e.g. spreading cruel rumors, intimidation through gestures, social exclusion, and sending insulting messages or pictures by mobile phone or using the internet – also known as cyber bullying)

## Prohibition

Bullying behavior is prohibited in Highland, the playground, field trips, or any other educational environment. Educational environments include, but are not limited to, every activity under school supervision.

## Procedure for Reporting/Retaliation

All school staff members and school officials who observe or become aware of acts of bullying are required to report these acts to the School Social Worker, Executive Director, or Montessori coach. Any other person, including a student who is either a victim of the bullying or is aware of the bullying or any other concerned individual is encouraged to report the conduct to the School Worker, Executive Director or Montessori Coach

Reports of bullying may be made verbally or in writing and may be made confidentially. All such reports, whether verbal or in writing, will be taken seriously and a clear account of the incident is to be documented. A written record of the report, including all pertinent details, will be made by the recipient of the report.

The school official receiving a report of bullying shall immediately notify the Highland staff assigned to investigate the report. The following Highland Community staff have been identified as the investigator: school social worker, Montessori Coach, executive director.

There shall be no retaliation against individuals making such reports. Individuals engaging in retaliatory behavior will be subject to disciplinary action.

### **Procedure for investigating reports of bullying**

The designated staff assigned to investigate the bullying report shall, within two school days, interview the person(s) who are the victim(s) of the bullying and collect whatever other information is necessary to determine the facts and the seriousness of the report.

Parents and/or guardians of each pupil involved in the bullying will be notified prior to the conclusion of the investigation. Highland staff shall maintain the confidentiality of the report and any related pupil records to the extent required by law.

### **Sanctions and supports**

If it is determined that students participated in bullying behavior or retaliated against anyone due to the reporting of bullying behavior, the executive director and/or Montessori Coach may take disciplinary action, including educational and/or social support, suspension, expulsion, and/or referral to law enforcement officials for possible legal action as appropriate. The school social worker or school counselor will provide support for the identified victim(s).

An annual summary report shall be prepared and presented to Highland's Board of Director's, at the last board meeting of the year (June) which includes trends in bullying behavior and recommendations on how to further reduce bullying behavior.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES FOR BULLYING**

Bullying prevention requires a sustained effort to both prevent bullying from occurring and to respond effectively when bullying situations do occur. The following procedures shall be followed when a student is a victim and/or offender in a bullying situation. For reports of bullying involving staff, see HCS Employee Handbook pg. 9 depending on the circumstances.

### **(1) TIMELINE**

(a) 2-day, 2-day, 10-day rule: Staff member has 2 school days to make a report once they become aware of a suspected bullying situation. Administrator has 2 school days to begin the investigation. Administrator has 10 school days from date of the written report to complete the investigation unless good cause documentation exists to extend the investigation.

### **(2) RECEIVING STUDENT REPORTS OF BULLYING**

- (a) When receiving a report of bullying, staff should utilize the 4-A Response: Affirm the reporter's feelings; Ask relevant questions to determine the situation; Assess the safety of all students involved; and Act according to steps 3-6.
- (b) Questions should be asked to clarify whether the incident is potentially bullying, as defined in Administrative Policy, or is a conflict. Conflict situations should be handled pursuant to school/classroom disciplinary procedures. Ask questions to determine the students involved, as well as the frequency and intentionality of the behaviors. Also consider any safety needs for the student who is being bullied, those who have witnessed the bullying, and the student making the report.

### **(3) DOCUMENTING SUSPECTED BULLYING**

- (a) If staff have information to suggest that an incident of bullying has occurred, as defined in Administrative Policy, staff must document the behavior as bullying on an Infinite Campus behavior referral within 2 school days.
- (b) For all incidents of suspected bullying, the event must include at least 2 participants, an offender (the student engaging in bullying behavior) and a victim (the student being bullied).
- (c) Document general event details on the Incident Detail Information screen; however participant names should not be used. Individual participant names should only be used on the participant details specific to that student.
- (d) On the participant details screen, if the reason for bullying is suspected or known, select the appropriate event type. If it is unknown, choose Bullying – Reason Unknown.

### **(4) RESPONDING TO A REPORT**

- (a) As necessary, the administrator will take steps to promote safety after a report is made and for the duration of the investigation. Strategies that may be used to create a safer environment for the reporters, victims, offenders, and witnesses include but are not limited to:
- Increasing adult supervision at times or in locations where incidents have occurred,
  - Temporarily changing the offender's class schedule and/or seating arrangements,
  - Establishing a safe zone or safe person for the victim to go to when they feel vulnerable,

- Creating a personal safety plan for anyone at risk of retaliation.
- (b) Within 24 hours of a report being made, the administrator will notify parents/guardians of the affected students that a report of bullying has been made and of any safety measures put in place. Documentation of this parent contact should be included on the victim's contact log, but not on the offender's unless bullying is substantiated.

## **(5) INVESTIGATION OF REPORTED BULLYING**

- (a) The administrator will initiate an investigation within two school days of receiving a report of bullying. The administrator will complete the investigation within ten school days of receiving the report unless good cause exists to extend the investigation.
- (b) As part of the investigation, the administrator will gather all available information, including but not limited to date, time, and location of the incident; individuals involved and their ages; details of the incident; and any knowledge of prior incidents. The administrator will consider all the information provided in the report, as well as gather additional information from interviews of students, staff, witnesses, parents/guardians, or others as necessary. Interviews of each party shall be conducted separately to avoid revictimization and contamination of information.
- (c) The administrator will maintain a written record of the investigation.
- (d) Throughout the investigation process, the administrator will remind all parties that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. To the extent practicable, the administrator will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process.
- (e) Upon completion of the investigation, the administrator will determine, based upon all of the facts and circumstances, whether or not bullying occurred in accordance with the definition of bullying outlined in Administrative Policy.
- (f) The administrator will promptly notify the parents/guardians of the victim and offender, as well as other affected parties as necessary about the results of the investigation,
- (g) If bullying is substantiated, communicate to parents/guardians what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying and/or retaliation. All notice to parents/guardians must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations.
- (h) If the allegations of bullying cannot be substantiated, the administrator will notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim/s, through a formal letter, detailing the investigation and the inability to substantiate the allegation of bullying. The incident referral shall be recoded or deleted as appropriate, and a PLP-Behavior Allegation for Victim note should be created, documenting that an investigation could not substantiate the allegation of bullying.

## **(6) TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION**

- (a) The administrator will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the victim's sense of safety and the sense of safety for others as well. As appropriate, support may include continuation of strategies implemented during the investigation.
- (b) Peer mediation, repairing harm and/or restorative conferencing, group interventions composed of students who bully, and removal of the victim from their classes are **NOT** recommended strategies.

(c) When students are found to have engaged in bullying behavior, the school will use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability (discipline) with the need to teach appropriate behavior (supports).

(1) Discipline should be utilized in accordance with the Code of Classroom Conduct. Additional disciplinary alternatives may include awareness-raising consequences, school service activities, restricted access and/or increased supervision for specific areas of the school, and/or behavior change reflection sheet and plan. Resources are available on the MPS mConnect site for Bullying Prevention.

(2) Supports should be designed to build student skills in the areas of social communication, problem solving, relationships, social awareness, empathy, emotion management, and other skills deemed necessary. Suggested activities include re-teaching of behaviors, behavior reflection sheet, scenarios/role plays, reviewing or previewing Second Step lessons including Bullying Prevention Unit lessons, one-on-one participation in the Act Now! Tier 2 program, inclusion in a Social Academic Instructional Group (SAIG), and/or the development of a behavior intervention plan.

(d) Within five school days following the implementation of supports, safety measures, and/or disciplinary action, the administrator will contact the victim(s) to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the bullying behavior and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the administrator will work with appropriate school staff to implement them. Follow-up should continue to occur at regular intervals.

(e) Retaliatory behavior or action against persons who complain, testify, assist, or otherwise participate in the complaint process established pursuant to this procedure will not be tolerated. Any retaliatory behavior will be subject to appropriate discipline.