

Oak Meadow School

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

I. Introduction.

At Oak Meadow School (“Oak Meadow”), we want all members of our school community to treat each other with respect and courtesy. As stated in our mission statement, “We cultivate confident, independent and compassionate human beings.” Confidence, independence and compassion are necessary attributes to attain the goal of a better and more peaceful future. Confident students are willing and able to voice their opinions. Independent students know they can, through their own efforts, change the world. Compassionate students care for the welfare of others. Oak Meadow strives to cultivate responsible citizens of the world. Oak Meadow shares Maria Montessori’s belief that “the child is both hope and promise for mankind.”

It is the policy of Oak Meadow to strive to provide and maintain a safe learning environment for all members of its community; one that is free from bullying, cyber-bullying, retaliation, unlawful discrimination, harassment, or any other verbal, physical or emotional misconduct that disrupts the learning environment or makes it unsafe.

The Oak Meadow Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (the “Plan”) is published in response to the Massachusetts law against bullying and is an integral part of Oak Meadow’s efforts to promote learning and to prevent behavior that can impede the learning process. This Plan spells out Oak Meadow’s comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation, as required by the law.

Oak Meadow recognizes that certain students may be more vulnerable to become targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, 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.

This Plan is consistent with broader protections at Oak Meadow against discrimination, harassment, bullying and retaliation that appear in the *Parent/Student Handbook* and the *Employee Handbook*.

It is important that this Plan be understood by all members of the Oak Meadow community. The Head of School is responsible for its implementation and administration. The Head of School may delegate authority for implementation and administration of this policy. Questions and concerns related to this Plan may be referred to the Head of School or his designee.

II. Definitions.

Several of the following definitions are drawn directly from the Massachusetts law against bullying, M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O. In some instances, Oak Meadow has added language to these definitions to clarify them, but not to alter their meaning or scope.

Aggressor . An aggressor is a student or a member of a school faculty/staff who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, as defined, towards another person.

Bullying. Bullying is the use by one or more students or by a member of a school faculty/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 target or damage to the target's property;
- places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or damage to his or her property;
- creates a hostile environment at Oak Meadow for the target;
- infringes on the rights of the target at Oak Meadow; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of Oak Meadow

Bullying includes cyber-bullying as defined below.

Cyber-bullying . Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which may include, but not be limited to, 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, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyber-bullying also includes:

- the creation of 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 creates any of the conditions listed in the bullying definition.

Cyber-bullying shall also include 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 conditions listed in the definition of bullying.

Hostile Environment. A hostile environment is a situation in which bullying causes the Oak Meadow environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education or a member of the faculty/staff's work.

Parent. A parent is a student's mother, father, or guardian.

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

Faculty/Staff. Faculty/staff members include, but are not limited to, teachers, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activity, support staff, or a paraprofessional.

Target . A target is a student or a member of the faculty/staff, against whom bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Oak Meadow Community Expectations and Legal Definitions. It is important to bear in mind that stricter standards of behavior may apply under Oak Meadow's policies in order to

prevent inappropriate verbal and physical conduct before a person has been subject to harm that may result from bullying or cyber-bullying as it is defined under the Massachusetts law. For example, although the law defines bullying as “repeated use” of certain expressions, acts, or gestures, Oak Meadow may impose disciplinary measures and other corrective action in a case of a single expression, act or gesture, if Oak Meadow determines that it is of sufficient severity to warrant disciplinary measures or other remedial action or that the repetition of that expression, act, or gesture might result in bullying.

III. Policy Against Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, And Retaliation.

Oak Meadow expressly prohibits any form of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation about bullying, or witnesses, or has reliable information about bullying.

This policy applies to all of Oak Meadow students and faculty/staff; it also may apply if one of Oak Meadow’s current students is subjected to bullying by a former student who comes on Oak Meadow grounds or who engages in cyber-bullying against one of Oak Meadow’s current students.

Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited at Oak Meadow, at Oak Meadow-sponsored activities, functions, or programs, on Oak Meadow’s grounds, on grounds adjacent to Oak Meadow’s grounds, at Oak Meadow-sponsored or Oak Meadow-related activities (whether on or off Oak Meadow’s grounds), on vehicles owned, leased, or used by Oak Meadow, or through use of technology owned, leased, or used by Oak Meadow.

Bullying and cyber-bullying are also prohibited at a location, activity, function, or program that is not Oak Meadow-related, or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by Oak Meadow, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at Oak Meadow for the target, infringes on the rights of the target at Oak Meadow, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of Oak Meadow.

IV. Procedures For Students, Faculty, Staff, Parents, Or Others To Report Bullying Or Retaliation.

A target of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation, or a student or parent who has witnessed an incident of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation, or who is made aware of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation or otherwise has relevant information about bullying, cyber-bullying, retaliation or related conduct prohibited by this policy, is urged to promptly report the matter in person, in writing, electronically by email, or through a telephone message to the Head of School or his designee. The Head of School or his designee will acknowledge receipt of the report and generally will memorialize the report in writing if it was made orally.

Faculty/staff members who witness or otherwise become aware of bullying or cyber-bullying in violation of this policy, or any retaliation against a student in violation of this policy, is required to report it immediately to the Head of School or his designee. Any faculty/staff member who witnesses or otherwise becomes aware of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation but does not report it, may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Faculty/staff may not make reports under this policy anonymously. Oak Meadow also urges students and their parents/guardians not to make reports anonymously, but anonymous reports

by parents/guardians or students of either bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation are permitted, although they will not be guaranteed anonymity in the event that law enforcement becomes involved. Although there are circumstances in which an anonymous report can sometimes be better than none at all, it is more difficult to determine the facts of what occurred if complaints are made anonymously, and no disciplinary action will be taken against a student *solely* on the basis of the anonymous report.

While Oak Meadow cannot promise strict confidentiality, because information must be shared in order to conduct an effective investigation, Oak Meadow releases information concerning complaints and investigations of bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation only on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

If a member of the faculty/staff witnesses an act of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation in progress, the faculty/staff member is expected to take reasonable steps to stop the act by communicating directly with the person whose behavior is considered unacceptable, offensive, or inappropriate.

V. Response To A Report Of Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, Or Retaliation.

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, the Head of School or his designee will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but are not limited to, creating a personal safety plan, pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a faculty/staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target; and altering the alleged aggressor’s schedule and/or access to the target. The Head of School or his designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as may be appropriate, including implanting protocols for protecting individuals who report or witness bullying, or who are interviewed regarding bullying.

The Head of School or his designee may, at their sole discretion, work with faculty/staff, or other persons to restore a sense of safety. The Head of School or his designee may, at their sole discretion, work with faculty/staff, or other persons to protect from bullying or retaliation a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about an act of bullying.

The Head of School or his designee will promptly investigate the alleged bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation. Steps may include, but are not limited to, interviewing the alleged target(s) and aggressor(s), other students, faculty/staff members, parents, or other persons who may have knowledge of the alleged bullying or alleged retaliation. The Head of School or his designee will remind the alleged aggressor, alleged target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited. To the extent practicable, given the obligation to investigate and address the matter, the Head of School or his designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The Head of School will maintain a written record of the investigation.

All persons involved in an investigation should understand that false or exaggerated accusations can be extremely damaging to innocent persons; therefore, all claims require the honest and full disclosure of acts by all involved persons. Any student found to have made a false allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation may be subject to disciplinary action. If, as the result of an investigation, the Head of School determines that faculty/staff should also be

subject to disciplinary action, such disciplinary action will be handled in accordance with the policies set forth in the *Employee Handbook*.

If the Head of School or his designee determines that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Head of School or his designee will:

- generally notify the parents of the target and the aggressor of the determination and Oak Meadow's procedures for responding to the bullying or retaliation; and
- inform the target's parent of actions that Oak Meadow personnel will take to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation.

Nothing prohibits the Head of School or his designee from contacting a parent of an alleged target or alleged aggressor about a report of bullying or retaliation prior to a determination that bullying or retaliation has occurred.

There are a range of disciplinary actions that may be taken (from educating to suspending or dismissing the aggressor) in the event that the Head of School or his designee determines that bullying or retaliating has occurred. The Head of School or his designee may, at their sole discretion, consult with teachers, staff members, or other persons when determining appropriate disciplinary actions. The disciplinary actions shall balance the need to teach appropriate behavior with the need for accountability.

At any point after receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, the Head of School or his designee will notify the local law enforcement agency if the Head of School or his designee has a reasonable basis to believe criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor. In appropriate circumstances, such as when a crime may have been committed or a child may have been abused or neglected as reportable under M.G.L. c. 119, § 51A, law enforcement or another appropriate government agency may be notified.

Upon completion of the investigation, the Head of School (or other designee of the School who conducted the investigation) will meet individually with the target(s) of the alleged incident, the alleged aggressor(s) and relevant parents/guardians (if the target was a student) to report the results of the investigation and, if disciplinary or other corrective action has been determined to be appropriate, to inform the parties of the steps that will be taken to correct the situation. The amount of information provided in these meetings, however, may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student and employee records.

Follow-up contacts may be made with any student or other person found to have been targeted in violation of this policy and his/her relevant parents/guardians (if the target was a student) to inquire as to whether there have been any further incidents.

The Head of School or his designee may refer aggressors or targets and appropriate family members to counseling or other appropriate services.

In order to maintain confidentiality of records, the Head of School or his designee may not disclose to a parent any student record information regarding an alleged target or alleged aggressor who is a student and who is not the parent's child. The amount of information provided, however, may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student and employee records.

Follow-up contact may be made with any student or other person found to have been targeted in violation of this policy and his/her relevant parents/guardians (if the target was a student) to inquire as to whether there have been any further incidents. If Oak Meadow receives a report of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation involving students from another school, the Head of School may notify the appropriate administrator of the other school so that both may take appropriate action.

VI. Prevention of Bullying, Cyber-Bullying And Retaliation.

Students at Oak Meadow are taught that as members of the community, they have a right to be treated with civility and respect and are expected to treat others in the same manner. Our curriculum emphasizes respect for differences, and teachers are clear in their expectations for student behavior. Furthermore, parents/guardians are notified and asked to reinforce standards for membership in the Oak Meadow community.

The *Parent/Student Handbook* is reviewed with students and shared with parents/guardians each fall. This Handbook includes, among other rules of conduct, explicit policies regarding prohibitions against bullying, harassment and retaliation, as well as the acceptable use of technology at the school.

Meetings of all students and teachers are used by the Head of School to help students be well informed about what is expected of them and to reinforce positive conduct. Health classes focus on peer relationships and help empower students to take action if they feel targeted or if they witness other students engaging in bullying or other unacceptable behavior.

The administration and faculty recognize that expectations for student conduct extend to corridors, locker rooms, lunch, recess, carpool, buses, and the like. Oak Meadow strives to ensure that ample adult supervision is provided on the school's premises, including in the corridors and locker rooms, at lunch and at recess, and on transportation throughout the school day as well as at events sponsored by Oak Meadow.

Oak Meadow conducts an annual training for faculty/staff (and more often, as deemed necessary by the Head of School), which includes: (a) developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents; (b) developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents; (c) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, victim and witnesses to the bullying; (d) research findings on bullying, including information about students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment; (e) information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying; and (f) internet safety issues as they relate to cyber-bullying.

VII. Dissemination Of This Plan.

This Plan is referenced in the *Parent/Student Handbook* which is distributed annually to Oak Meadow parents and students. This Plan will be included in the *Oak Meadow Employee Handbook*, which is distributed annually to Oak Meadow employees. This Plan will be posted on Oak Meadow's website, www.oakmeadow.org. The policy shall be reviewed at least

biennially, and shall be updated in accordance with Massachusetts law and with practices of Oak Meadow.

VIII. Conclusion.

This Plan, which is consistent with Oak Meadow's mission and policies that appear in its *Parent/Student Handbook* and *Employee Handbook*, outlines Oak Meadow's bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation policy and is consistent with Oak Meadow's ongoing commitment to fostering a safe, supportive, and respectful learning environment for all members of the Oak Meadow community. This Plan and the policies incorporated into it are intended to: (a) prevent bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation at Oak Meadow and in the Oak Meadow community; (b) encourage students, their parents/guardians and faculty/staff to have confidence in Oak Meadow's policies and procedures and to come forward promptly if a student or other member of the Oak Meadow community is subject to conduct that is prohibited by this Plan or any other of Oak Meadow's policies; and (c) implement appropriate discipline and other corrective measures when they are found to be warranted.