

## Montessori School of Northampton Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

### Introduction

The Montessori School of Northampton (occasionally referred to below as MSN) expects that all members of our school will treat each other with civility and respect. As stated in our mission, our school “emphasizes compassion, inclusiveness and respectful resolution of conflict.” The safety and well-being of each and every MSN student is of paramount concern to our school.

This MSN Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is published in compliance with the 2010 Massachusetts law against bullying.\* This Plan embodies our Montessori philosophy of nurturing and promoting compassionate behavior and spells out our school’s approach to addressing incidents or allegations of bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation.

It is important that this Plan be well understood by all members of the MSN community. The Head of School is responsible for the implementation and administration of this Plan. Questions and concerns relating to this Plan may be referred to the Head of School.

### Definition

Massachusetts law defines “bullying” as the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, directed at another student that:

- causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the other student’s property;
- places the other student in reasonable fear of harm to herself/himself, or of damage to her/his property;
- creates a hostile environment at school for the other student;
- infringes on the rights of the other student at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

The reference to “electronic expression” makes clear that bullying also includes “cyber-bullying,” which is bullying carried out in whole or in part by electronic devices or means such as text or instant messages, e-mail, or internet, social media, blog or chat room postings. In this Plan, all references to bullying include cyber-bullying.

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\* The bullying law is found at Section 370 of Chapter 71 of the Massachusetts General Laws. Much of the law applies only to public schools. However, all schools in Massachusetts, including private schools, are required to implement a plan for addressing bullying conduct.

## **Scope**

This Plan is intended to address incidents or allegations of bullying on the part of students enrolled in the school at the time of the incident.

The scope of this Plan covers any activity (whether initiated within the classroom, on the school grounds or elsewhere) that constitutes or may constitute bullying within the meaning of state law.

## **Relationship of this Plan to school mission**

Montessori schools hold at the center of their mission the belief that each child develops to his/her full potential in a safe and nurturing environment. As a Montessori community we promote respect for ourselves and others.

Our vehicle for this is the Grace and Courtesy curriculum, which guides children from a very young age and encourages each Montessori student to grow into an independent, thoughtful and caring member of the community. In addition to Grace and Courtesy, our youngest students begin Peace Education with a foundation in inner peace.

As students enter the Elementary program, they begin their exploration of the Montessori values of freedom and responsibility, which tie personal freedom with the willingness to take responsibility for one's words and actions. They also begin the Cosmic Education curriculum, which introduces the child to the world beyond their own neighborhood and their own ideas. They continue their work in Peace Education by learning and honing conflict resolution skills.

In Upper Elementary, students are given the opportunity to give voice to the struggles of pre-adolescence through a weekly group run by our school counselor.

This carefully planned progression allows children to grow into ethical, independent thinkers who are willing to stand for what is right and to take action when necessary or appropriate.

At MSN, we consistently endeavor to provide our students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies needed to prevent bullying or similar inappropriate conduct, and constructively address any situation involving such behavior which they may encounter. In particular, our Peace Education program, the Grace and Courtesy curriculum, and the Cosmic Education curriculum in particular help us to achieve these goals and further the purposes of this Plan.

In any school environment, certain students may be more vulnerable to bullying. This vulnerability may arise from actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, physical appearance, 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. At MSN, we teach our children to acknowledge and celebrate

differences, and to support others, including especially any person who may, for any reason, be particularly vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying.

## **Reporting**

Our mission includes creating a school culture that encourages students, teachers and parents to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying or similar inappropriate behavior, both experienced and witnessed. We are a community dedicated to addressing these incidents, and empowering students to be part of the solution.

It is our school's policy to promptly and thoroughly investigate any report of alleged bullying, and take any and all appropriate measures to address the situation. To this end, the school has an open reporting system. ***Any concerned person who believes that bullying is taking place should report the incident by completing Part I of the MSN Bullying Prevention and Intervention Reporting Form and submitting it to the Head of School or a member of the school-designated Learning Team.*** The Intervention Form, which is based on a state-mandated form applicable to Massachusetts public schools, is available on our web site.

No person will be subject to retaliation on account of airing concerns about bullying, submitting an Intervention Form, or participating in any resulting investigation. Retaliation of any type, and for any reason, is categorically unacceptable in our school community.

Our school treats allegations of bullying with the utmost gravity by establishing the facts and taking appropriate action. It is important to bear in mind that the submission of an Intervention Form reflects only the reporter's perception of an incident, and not a conclusion that bullying has in fact occurred. Pre-adolescent and younger children in particular may engage in conduct that, while distressing to other students, is developmentally related and does not constitute "bullying" within the meaning of the law. Inappropriate student behavior that does not amount to bullying can often be addressed through tailored, minimally intrusive mechanisms such as heightened supervision, separation of the children involved, and age-appropriate counseling. For more information, you may wish to refer to our school's Parent Complaint Policy, available on our website.

## **Protocol**

Submission of an Intervention Form with Part I completed will initiate the following process:

1. **Immediately:** The Intervention Form will immediately be reviewed by the Head of School. (If the Intervention Form was submitted to a member of the Learning Team, it will immediately be passed on to the Head of School.) School personnel will be instructed to closely supervise all students referenced in the Intervention Form and to intervene as necessary to ensure student safety and prevent any inappropriate conduct. The reporter will be contacted and assured that the Intervention Form is being handled in accordance with this protocol. If the Head of School believes that a criminal act may have been committed, he/she will report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

2. **Investigation:** The Head of School will promptly designate appropriate school personnel, such as a member of the Learning Team, to carry out an impartial investigation of the matter. (To ensure impartiality, the reporter will not be designated to investigate.) It is the school's expectation that all parents of all children involved will actively cooperate with the investigation. The investigation shall proceed as follows:

- The designee will privately interview the students and their parents, and, as necessary, other persons with knowledge of the situation. The identity of the reporter will not be disclosed, but the particulars of the allegations will be explained to the parents of any student who is the subject of a report.
- The designee will also consider any other relevant information of which he or she is aware, such as the nature of the behavior, the context in which the alleged incident occurred, the ages of the children involved and their maturity levels, any special needs, the degree of any harm, any past incidents, any pattern of behavior, the relationship between the parties, and any power imbalance.

As soon as possible (ideally within three school days) the designee will thoroughly brief the Head of School as to the nature and the results of the designee's investigation. The Head of School may further investigate the matter. Further investigation may include review of documents (for example, student files and any past incident reports) as well as discussions with the school counselor, students, parents or teachers.

All investigative discussions and interviews will be held in private locations, with due regard for confidentiality and the need to minimize disruption of the school environment.

3. **Conclusion and follow-up:** Upon conclusion of the investigation, Parts II and III of the Intervention Form will be completed.

a. If it is determined that the situation does **not** implicate bullying conduct:

- The reporter and the parents of the students involved will be notified accordingly.
- School personnel will continue to monitor the situation in accordance with the school's usual conflict resolution procedures. If appropriate, additional measures may be taken, such as separation of the students involved, counseling or mediation. The parents of the students involved will be kept fully apprised of all developments.

b. If it is determined that bullying conduct **has** taken place, any student who has engaged in bullying will immediately be removed from the student population pending resolution of the matter. The parents of the student will immediately be contacted and a meeting will be arranged with the Head of School. The Head of School's investigating designee and the student will also attend this meeting.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Discuss what has happened and review any background leading to the incident.
- Ensure that the student understands the gravity of the situation, takes responsibility for his/her actions, and is prepared to make amends (including by participating in any anticipated follow-up).
- Outline the action to be taken, which may include loss of student privileges, suspension, or other appropriate consequences.

Minutes of the meeting will be taken. In no event will the student reintegrate into the school population until this meeting occurs and the safety of any targeted student has been ensured.

Follow-up may include, among other things:

- Regular check-in sessions for the involved students with their teachers and the school counselor.
- Counseling and/or mediation.
- Class-wide session(s) to reinforce community values.
- Head of School to meet with the involved school personnel for debriefing, identification of any additional resources for the student(s), the teacher(s) or the school, and refinement of this protocol.

4. It is the school's expectation that the parents of all children referenced in the Intervention Form will co-operate fully in the investigation and resolution of the matter. This includes actively and constructively participating in investigative interviews, meetings, and follow-up, in accordance with this protocol. The matters addressed in this protocol can be extremely sensitive and emotionally charged. The school urges parents to make every effort to maintain an atmosphere of civility, and to refrain from inflammatory conduct.
5. Our school is subject to state and federal laws mandating the confidentiality of student records. The Intervention Form and all documents relating to the investigation (including all notes and minutes) will be maintained in a file kept separate from regular student files and records. Absent unusual circumstances requiring disclosure (for example, a subpoena or court order) it is the school's policy to maintain strict confidentiality with respect to these materials.

## Prevention

Our school relies on the following to support student growth and prevent incidents of bullying:

- **Safe Learning Environment** – Students are in an academic environment that supports inquiry, and both independent and collaborative exploration. The materials and instruction are differentiated to provide students at all levels

with satisfying work that does not expose struggling students. Through a combination of self-directed and teacher-directed learning, students are engaged in high level, non-competitive tasks that absorb their attention and build their confidence. As a result of these aspects of the Montessori Method, students are less likely to engage in negative behaviors.

- **Teacher Observation** – Observation is a fundamental tool of all Montessori-trained educators and is used in a variety of ways, in both the academic and social arenas, to evaluate student progress and inform teacher-directed lessons. These observations will allow teachers to monitor the social, emotional and behavioral development of each student and foster effective learning, identifying when additional support may be needed.
- **Emphasis on Community** – Montessori schools both allow for independence and foster collaboration. Daily, students sit together as a whole class to reflect on what they are learning, both academically and socially. Class agreements are made that are often reviewed or referred to during this time. This supports students in making decisions that have a positive effect on their peers.
- **School Culture** – Teachers are not an authority over children, but instead co-creators of the school environment. As a result of the multi-age grouping, students have the same teacher for multiple years and are able to develop rapport and trust. These supportive connections can serve as the basis for strong behavioral health and provide students with the comfort to confide in adults.
- **Parents as Partners** – Parents in the school are partners in supporting their children’s growth and development. Regular communication is fostered in order to address any emerging difficulties in a timely manner. In this way issues do not accumulate and high-level incidents are prevented.

### **Implementation Date**

This Plan took effect on January 1, 2011, and was amended on October 21, 2013, and \_\_\_\_\_, 2014.

### **Monitoring Implementation of this Plan**

The implementation of this Plan will be monitored by the Head of School and reviewed at the close of any incidents. This Plan will be revised as necessary to reflect the severity and scope of issues which arise. Additionally, training protocols and materials will be updated at least biannually. Input will be solicited from teachers, parents and the Board of Trustees.