

## **The Montessori School of Northampton Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan**

### **Introduction**

The Montessori School of Northampton expects that all members of our school will treat each other with civility and respect. As stated in our mission, the Montessori School of Northampton “emphasizes compassion, inclusiveness and respectful resolution of conflict.”

The Montessori School of Northampton’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, set forth below, makes clear our Montessori philosophy as it pertains to nurturing and promoting compassionate behavior and spells out our school’s approach to addressing bullying, cyberbullying 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 the plan. Questions and concerns related to this plan may be referred to the Head of School.

### **Definitions**

“Bullying” is the repeated use by a perpetrator of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that:

- causes physical or emotional harm to the victim, or damage to the victim’s property;
- places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to her- or himself or of damage to the victim’s property;
- creates a hostile environment at school for the victim (meaning an environment permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the student’s education);
- infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of our school.

“Cyberbullying” is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, or data of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by any electronic means, such as, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. By way of example, cyberbullying also includes:

- creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;
- knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions described in the above definition of bullying;
- distribution by electronic means of any 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 described in the above definition of bullying.

“Perpetrator” means any student or school staff member, such as an educator, administrator, school nurse, custodian, coach, advisor or paraprofessional, who engages in bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation against a victim.

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

“Victim” means a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.

## **Scope**

This policy is intended to prevent, address and eliminate any bullying behavior, including cyberbullying, within the MSN community, regardless of whether such behavior takes place within the classroom, on the school grounds, or elsewhere.

Certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have any of these characteristics. This policy, and our school curricula (including our Grace and Courtesy Curriculum and our

Cosmic Curriculum, described below), are intended to recognize and address these special vulnerabilities.

This policy will apply to the use of electronic devices as well as the use of school or non-school computers, programs or networks.

## **Relationship to Mission of the School**

Montessori schools hold at the center of their mission the belief that each child's full potential develops only in a safe and nurturing environment, free from bullying or harassment in any form. As a Montessori community, we promote respect for ourselves, respect for others and respect for the environment.

Our vehicle for this is the Grace and Courtesy curriculum, which guides MSN children from a very young age and encourages each person 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 to 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 with the skills, knowledge, strategies and willingness to stand up for what is right and to take action, including by effectively preventing or responding to bullying or harassment.

At all steps in the curriculum, care is taken to support the needs of students who may be particularly vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying. It is our mission at MSN to use the Montessori curriculum to create a learning environment wherein students are provided with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to speak with the intention of bringing clarity, to respect and acknowledge differences, and to give support to others when needed.

## **Reporting**

Our school culture encourages everybody, including students, teachers, staff and parents, to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behavior, both experienced and witnessed. We are a community committed to addressing these incidents as they may arise, and to empowering students to be part of the solution.

MSN has an open reporting system for bullying and retaliation. Any person in our community may report an incident of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation to any staff member, and may do so orally or in writing. Part I of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Reporting Form will be filed at the time the report is made, and the alleged incident will be investigated by appropriate school personnel as described in the applicable protocol below.

Designated school personnel will promptly respond to the reporting party, ideally within 24 hours, to confirm receipt of the Reporting Form. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible with respect to the parties involved in the report, however the results of the investigation will be shared with the reporting party as appropriate.

Students, parents, guardians and other non-staff members may report incidents anonymously, bearing in mind that in the school cannot take disciplinary action against an alleged perpetrator based solely on anonymous reports.

## **Retaliation Prohibited**

No person will be subjected to any retaliation for reporting an incident, providing information during an investigation, or witnessing or having information about an act of bullying. Designated school personnel may follow up with any such person to ensure that there has been no retaliation.

## **False Reports**

Knowingly making a false accusation of bullying or retaliation is a violation of this policy and may result in disciplinary action.

## Protocol

All reports or observations of bullying or retaliation will be addressed promptly, and in all cases the Head of School will be immediately apprised of the situation. (If the Head of School is alleged to be a perpetrator, the Board of Directors will be immediately apprised.)

**Please note:** If reasonable suspicion exists that a criminal act may have been committed, the Head of School will immediately report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

### Incidents involving only students

For allegations of bullying or retaliation involving only students, the following protocol will be followed:

1. The matter will be handled by a staff member (typically a teacher or counselor) designated by the Head of School. Other staff will refer any reports or observations of bullying involving students to these personnel, who will address the student(s) involved.
2. At any point during this protocol, and pending resolution of the matter, MSN may, in its discretion, remove one or more students from the general student population, separate one or more students from one another, and/or take any other action reasonably necessary or appropriate to discharging its responsibility for the safety and well-being of everyone in our MSN community, including the students involved in the matter.
3. The designated staff member will speak privately with the alleged perpetrator(s) and victim(s) to gain an understanding of the facts and to determine the severity and intent of the situation. The students' age, maturity level, special needs, particular vulnerability, degree of harm, surrounding circumstances, nature or behavior(s), past incidences, pattern of behavior, relationship between the parties and the context in which the alleged incident occurred are all factors that will be taken into consideration. As is appropriate in a school serving children as young as 24 months old, incidents of student bullying will be dealt with in a way that is developmentally appropriate for the ages of the children involved.
  - a. If the findings reveal a lack of intent to bully, the students involved will be encouraged to participate in developmentally-appropriate mediation facilitated by school personnel with a view to resolving the matter. Under no circumstances will any child be compelled to mediate under this policy. The parents of all parties will be informed of the situation.

- b. If the findings reveal bullying or possible bullying, and in any other situation that is not amenable to resolution by age-appropriate mediation, the process will continue to step 4 of this protocol. At such time, the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Reporting Form will be passed to the Head of School.
4. The designated staff member will refer the matter to the Head of School for further investigation, which may include additional information-gathering, taking into account other resources as needed (such as a student's file, past incident reports, etc.) as well as speaking with the school counselor, other students, teachers, or staff. All investigative meetings/conversations will be held outside of the classroom in a private location. Notes will be taken. Part II of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Reporting Form will be completed.
5. The parents of the student(s) involved will be notified and a meeting will be arranged to discuss the situation. At the meeting or as soon as practicable thereafter, the following steps will be taken:
  - a. Each student will be asked separately to explain what has happened and any background leading up to the incident(s).
  - b. In determining any appropriate consequences, the Head of School will take into consideration students' integrity in addressing the situation and their willingness to take responsibility for their actions.
  - c. The school may also seek the input of any school staff who took the report or observed the bullying behavior, or otherwise have relevant information.
  - d. The students' parents will be given time to respond.
  - e. The Head of School will state any consequences. Depending on the severity of the incident, MSN may impose student discipline up to and including suspension or expulsion. Any disciplinary action taken will balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. Consistent with our mission, MSN will attempt to reach a resolution agreeable to all parties.
  - f. Part III of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Reporting Form will be completed and signed.
  - g. The substance of the meeting will be memorialized in writing and available for review by all adult participants.
6. Following the parent meeting, and if appropriate under the circumstances (bearing in mind especially the need for safety and well-being of any victim), the Head of School or school counselor may seek to facilitate voluntary mediation with the students involved. The goal of this mediation will be to encourage any

perpetrator(s) to make amends, to emphasize the importance of safety and respect for the victim(s), and to allow for ongoing communication.

7. With the goal of ensuring a final resolution of the situation preventing further incidents:
  - a. All student(s) involved will have regular check-in sessions with their teachers and the school counselor. MSN may provide in-school counseling to perpetrators and/or victims, and may refer them or their families to appropriate services. The school maintains a list of relevant resources.
  - b. There may be one or more follow-up sessions with the whole class (or classes) to discuss and reinforce community values.
  - c. The Head of School will meet with the involved personnel to debrief the incident, identify additional resources for the student(s), the teacher(s) or MSN and refine implementation of this protocol.
8. Specific attention will be given to restoring the sense of safety of any victim and assessing that victim's needs for protection. This will involve individualized periodic follow-up by the Head of School and any other appropriate personnel with the student and her or his parents. The parents of any victim will be notified of actions taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation.
9. Copies of all reports relating to the situation will be kept on file according to the school's system.

#### Incidents involving staff

For allegations of bullying or retaliation involving school staff, the following will be the school's response:

1. Any allegation of bullying involving school staff will be handled directly by the Head of School. (Any allegation that the Head of School is a perpetrator will be handled by the Board of Directors.)
2. All MSN staff are expected to treat all students with dignity and respect at all times. Conduct that is inappropriate, offensive, or degrading will not be tolerated and may result in discipline up to and including termination. Nothing in this protocol is intended to restrict MSN's general disciplinary authority over its employees.
3. At any point during this protocol, and pending resolution of the matter, the school may, in its discretion, remove any employee from school property

and/or from the general student population, and take any other action reasonably necessary or appropriate to discharging its responsibility for discharging its responsibility for the safety and well-being of everyone in our MSN community, including all of our students.

4. The Head of School will promptly conduct an investigation. This may include speaking separately and privately with the alleged perpetrator(s) and victim(s) to gain an understanding of the facts, taking into account all relevant information, including any particular vulnerability of the student(s) involved. The parents of any student(s) involved will be notified.
  - a. If the findings reveal a clear lack of intent to bully, the Head of School may engage in a discussion with the staff member(s) to establish how the situation resulted in allegations of bullying and determine ways to prevent such situations going forward. After consultation with the parents, and if both the Head of School and the parents determine it would be appropriate, the Head of School may facilitate an age-appropriate discussion between the staff member(s) and the student(s) to resolve the situation.
  - b. In all cases, MSN will take any appropriate action based on the totality of the circumstances, which may include discipline up to and including termination.
6. In an effort to ensure resolution of the situation and to prevent further incidents, the Head of School and/or the school counselor may follow up with all staff and student(s) involved and, where appropriate, facilitate discussions within the school to reinforce our community values. The parents of any victim will be notified of actions taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation.
7. Specific attention will be given to restoring the sense of safety of any victim and assessing that victim's needs for protection. This will involve individualized periodic follow-up by the Head of School and any other appropriate personnel with the student and her or his parents.
8. Copies of all reports relating to the situation will be kept on file according to the school's system.

## **Prevention**

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

- **Safe Learning Environment** – At MSN, 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 such as bullying.
- **Professional Development** – Our school seeks to build the skills of all staff members to prevent, identify and respond to bullying and related behavior with periodic professional development activities. Topics may include developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent and respond to bullying incidents; identifying the often complex interactions and power differentials that can take place between and among perpetrator(s), victim(s) and witnesses to bullying; discussing research findings on bullying and about students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying; and disseminating information about cyber-bullying and online safety.
- **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 policy took effect January 1, 2011 and was most recently amended on \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.

## **Monitoring Implementation**

The implementation of this policy is monitored by the Head of School and reviewed at the close of any incidents. In accordance with Massachusetts law, it will be updated at least biannually.