

MOUNT ALVERNIA ACADEMY BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

I. Introduction

The culture of Mount Alvernia Academy fosters the mission statement which is rooted in the belief that all members of our school community are worthy of and will treat each other with civility and respect.

It is the policy of the School to provide and to maintain a learning environment that is free of bullying and any other verbal and physical misconduct that disrupts the learning environment or makes it unsafe.

The Mount Alvernia Academy Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, set forth below, is published in conjunction with the Massachusetts law against bullying and is an integral part of our efforts to promote learning and to prevent behavior that can impede the learning process. Our Plan spells out Mount Alvernia Academy's comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation.

The Academy will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, in the school buildings, on school grounds, or at school-related activities. The School will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation, take prompt action to end that behavior, and restore the target's sense of safety. The School will support this commitment in all aspects of the school community, including instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

It is important that this Plan be well understood by all members of the Mount Alvernia Academy community. The Principal is responsible for the implementation and administration of the Plan. Questions and concerns related to the Plan may be referred to the Principal.

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

Mount Alvernia Academy will not tolerate any form of bullying or cyber-bullying, nor will it tolerate retaliation against any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses who may have reliable information about bullying.

Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited on school grounds and at school-sponsored events, activities, functions, and programs. Bullying and cyber-bullying also are prohibited at school bus stops, on school buses, and through use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used at 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 Academy, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at School for a targeted student, infringes on the rights of a targeted student at School, or 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 as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370.

Aggressor: a student who engages in bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation

Bullying: the 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 a target that:

- causes physical or emotional harm to the targeted student or damage to the targeted student's property;
- places the targeted student in reasonable fear or 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;
- disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the School.

Cyber-bullying: bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles.

Hostile Environment: 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 a student's education.

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

Staff: including but not limited to the following: educators, administrators, school nurse, cafeteria workers, plant facility manager, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, paraprofessionals, and the Franciscan Sisters.

Target: student against whom bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Legal Definitions and School Policy. It is important to bear in mind that stricter standards of behavior may apply under Mount Alvernia Academy's policy in order that the School may prevent inappropriate verbal and physical conduct before a student has been subjected to bullying as it is defined under the law. For example, although the law defines bullying as "repeated use" of certain expressions, acts, and/or gestures, the School reserves the right to apply disciplinary measures and other corrective action in a case of a single expression, act, or gesture, if the School 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 reasonably result in bullying as defined under the law.

III. Prevention of Bullying and Cyber-bullying

From the earliest grades at Mount Alvernia Academy, students learn that as members of the school community they have a right to be treated with civility and respect. The Academy's curriculum emphasizes respect for differences, and teachers are clear in their expectations for student behavior. When necessary, parents are notified and asked to reinforce standards for membership in the Academy community.

The administration and faculty recognize that it is essential that expectations for student conduct extend to hallways, restrooms, cafeteria, recess, carpools, buses and the like. The Academy strives to ensure that ample adult supervision is provided on school premises, including the hallways, cafeteria, recess, and school-provided transportation throughout the school day as well as at school-sponsored events.

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

Any student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying, has witnessed an incident of bullying or cyber-bullying, or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying prohibited by this policy, is strongly encouraged to report the matter promptly as oral statement or in writing to the Principal or Designee or to any other faculty or staff member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. Also, any student who is subject to retaliation in violation of this policy, or who knows of another student who has been subjected to retaliation is urged to report it as soon as possible.

A parent of a student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying or of a student who has witnessed or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying is strongly urged to notify the Principal or Designee promptly. Furthermore, any parent who has witnessed bullying or cyber-bullying or has relevant information concerning such an incident is strongly urged to come forward to the Principal or Designee. A parent should also report any incident of retaliation in violation of this policy to the Principal or Designee.

Any member of the faculty or staff of Mount Alvernia Academy who witnesses or otherwise becomes aware of bullying or cyber-bullying in violation of this policy, or who becomes aware of retaliation against a student who reported information concerning a violation of this policy is required to report it immediately to the Principal or Designee. There are to be no exceptions. A member of the faculty or staff may not make promises of confidentiality to a student or parent who informs him/her of an allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Faculty and staff may not make reports under this policy anonymously. The School also urges students and their parents not to make reports anonymously. Although there are circumstances in which an anonymous report can be better than none at all, it is far more difficult to determine the facts of what occurred if complaints are made anonymously. Students and parents are encouraged to bear in mind that the School takes its policy against retaliation seriously. Also, while the School cannot promise strict confidentiality, because information must be shared in order to conduct an effective investigation, the School will release information concerning complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation only on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

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

- A. Preliminary Considerations.** When a complaint of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation is brought to the attention of the Principal or Designee, an assessment will be made as to whether any initial steps need to be taken to protect the well-being of students and to prevent disruption of their learning environment while the investigation is being conducted. As appropriate, a strategy such as increased supervision may be implemented to prevent further bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliations during an investigation.
- B. Safety.** Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Principal or Designee will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be 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 staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target. The Principal or Designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The Principal or Designee will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying or retaliation, a student who has reported bullying or retaliation, a student who has witnessed bullying or retaliation, a student who provides information during an investigation, or a student who has reliable information about a reported act of bullying or retaliation.

- C. Obligation to Notify Parents.** It is the policy of Mount Alvernia Academy to notify the parents/guardians of any student who is an alleged target of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, and the parents of any student who may have been accused of engaging in such behavior promptly after a complaint has been made.

D. Investigation

The following is an outline of the procedure that is pursued once a complaint has been brought to the attention of the Principal or Designee:

An impartial investigation of the complaint will be conducted by the Principal or Designee. That investigation may include interviews with the person who made the complaint, with the student who was the target of the alleged bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation, with the person or persons against whom the complaint was made, and with any students, faculty, staff or other persons who witnessed or who may otherwise have relevant information about the alleged incident.

Depending on the circumstances, the Principal or Designee conducting the investigation may also choose to consult with other teachers or the Response Team.

E. Resolution, Notification, and Follow-up

Following interviews and any other investigation undertaken, as the School deems appropriate, the Principal or Designee will determine whether and to what extent the

allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been substantiated. If it is determined that the policy set forth in this Plan has been violated, the Principal or Designee will determine what disciplinary action and/or other remedial action is appropriate and how it will be implemented.

The goal of an investigation and any disciplinary or other remedial process that will be imposed following that investigation will be to correct the situation to the extent it is reasonably possible, and to take such steps as can be taken to prevent there being a repetition of the incident, and to prevent the student or students targeted and others who participated in the investigation from being subject to retaliation.

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.

Upon completion of the investigation, the Principal or Designee who conducted the investigation will meet individually with the student or students who were the target of the alleged incident, and the student or students against whom the complaint was made and their parents to report the results of the investigation and, where disciplinary or other corrective action is 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 may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student records.

Follow-up contacts will be made with any student found to have been targeted in violation of this policy and his/her parents/guardians to inquire as to whether there have been any further incidents.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the reporting, investigation, and disciplinary process. Confidentiality will be used to protect anyone who reports bullying or retaliation, who provides information during an investigation, or who is witness to or has reliable information about an act of bullying. As previously stated, the School cannot promise strict confidentiality because information must be shared in order to conduct an effective investigation. Therefore, it may be necessary to release information on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

Internet & Electronic Communication Device Use

Mount Alvernia Academy has an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) which guides the use of electronic communication devices and other technologies. The AUP will be reviewed annually to ensure that the content of the AUP reflects the rapidly changing technologies and related safety concerns. All students, employees, and parents will be notified of the policy and will be required to sign the AUP.

Support for Students and Families

Mount Alvernia Academy is committed to ensuring that our students and staff feel safe and supported within the school community. The School will continue to work with students, staff, parents and guardians, alerting all to the need for more heightened observation of bullying behaviors. Following investigations, if deemed appropriate by the Principal, a personalized action plan may be developed to address the needs of the target and/or to work with the aggressor to change behavior and to recognize the harmful effects of his/her actions.

VI. Conclusion

This Plan is intended (1) to prevent bullying and cyber-bullying among our students, (2) to encourage students and their parents to have confidence in Mount Alvernia Academy's procedures and to come forward promptly whenever a student is subject to conduct that is prohibited by this or any other School policy, (3) to implement appropriate discipline and other corrective measures when they are found to be warranted, and (4) all in the Mount Alvernia Academy community, including faculty and staff, parents and students will be made aware of the Plan and will be encouraged to read and follow it.

The law requires that all schools provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying in each grade. The following lists will be priorities that will be followed in classroom instruction and in professional development workshops. Professional development of faculty and staff will be to increase the skills of all members to prevent, identify and respond to bullying.

General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts. The following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of our bullying intervention and prevention initiatives.

- Setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
- Creating safe school and classroom environments for all students;
- Using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- Using positive behavioral supports;
- Encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- Modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- Using positive approaches to behavioral health, including collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution training, teamwork, and positive behavioral supports that aid in social and emotional development;
- Using the Internet safely;
- Supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength; and
- Speakers will be invited to address the children, parents, and faculty on safe cyber-communication.

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Areas for ongoing professional development to be reviewed at faculty meetings include the following:

- Promoting and modeling the use of respectful language;
- Fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity;
- Building relationships and communicating with families;
- Constructively managing classroom behaviors;
- Using positive behavioral intervention strategies;
- Applying constructive disciplinary practices;
- Teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others;
- Engaging students in school or classroom planning and decision-making; and
- Maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.

Specific bullying prevention approaches will emphasize the following:

- Using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
- Empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- Helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyber-bullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- Emphasizing cyber-safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- Enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications;
- Engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity.

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Response Team

Principal

Vice Principal

Guidance Counselor

Intermediate Representative (faculty/staff)

Primary Representative (faculty/staff)

If the incident is of a serious nature, the Franciscan Sisters' Provincial and the members of the Board of Directors will be notified.

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