



Bay Farm Montessori Academy Bullying Prevention Policy

Revised September 2015

Montessori schools hold at the center of their mission that each child develops to his/her full potential in a safe and nurturing environment. As a Montessori community, we promote respect for ourselves, respect for others, and respect for the environment. We will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation in our school buildings, school grounds, or in school-related activities. We will investigate promptly all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the victim's sense of safety. We will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent/guardian involvement.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying is the repeated use by one or more students (or a member of a school staff, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity, or paraprofessional) of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property; (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of a school. For the purposes of this section, bullying shall include cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall 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 shall also include (i) the creations of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or message, if the creator or impersonation created any of the conditions enumerated on clause (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution of 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 enumerated on clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Bullying Prevention

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

- **Montessori Philosophy** - It is our mission to utilize the Montessori curriculum to create a learning environment where students are prepared to speak articulately, to celebrate differences, and to step in to defend others, including those most vulnerable. Our vehicle for this is the Grace and Courtesy curriculum, which guides children from a very young age and encourages each person to grow into independent, thoughtful, and caring members 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 ties 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 neighborhoods and their own ideas. They continue their work in Peace Education and honing conflict resolution skills. In middle school, their collaborative work in elementary is put into action as students begin to take on larger tasks within the community. The Peace Education Curriculum expands to include world peace and students' roles as global citizens.

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.

- **Safe Learning Environment** - Students are in an academic environment that supports inquiry, and offers 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 or vulnerable students. Through a combination of self-directed and teacher-directed learning, students are engaged in high-level, non-competitive tasks that absorb their interest and build their confidence. As a result of these aspects of the Montessori Method, students are less apt to engage in negative behaviors.
- **Teacher Observation** - Observation is a foundational tool of all Montessori-trained educators, and it 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 allow teachers to monitor

the social, emotional, and behavioral development of each student and foster effective learning, identifying when additional supports may be needed, including for those students who are more vulnerable.

- **Emphasis on Community** - Montessori schools both allow for independence and foster collaboration. 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** - As a result of multi-age grouping, students have the same teacher for multiple years and are able to develop a 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.

The school will notify parents in writing about the student-related sections of the plan and the school's Internet safety policy and cyberbullying, and how parents can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school plan.

- **Anti-Bullying Curriculum** - Bay Farm delivers an age-appropriate, evidence-based bullying prevention curriculum to all elementary and middle school students. Instruction will include classroom approaches, whole school initiatives, and focused strategies for bullying prevention and social skills development. Bullying prevention curricula is informed by current research, which emphasized the following approaches:
 - 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 cyberbullying, 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 communication
 - Engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference
 - Helping students recognize that certain populations of students are more vulnerable to bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation.
- **Staff Development** – Bay Farm utilizes teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts. These approaches include:
 - 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

- Using positive behavior 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 area of strength.

- **Student Surveys** - At least once every four years, beginning with the 2015/16 school year, the school will administer a Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education-developed student survey to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in our school. Additionally, the school will annually report bullying incidence data to the Department. Similar tools to the student survey may be used with faculty, staff, and parents/guardians to assist in determining student climate needs.
- **Access to Resources and Services** - The school employs a learning specialist who is available to assist families in referral to appropriate and timely services, including social skills programs, education and interventions services for students exhibiting bullying behaviors, behavior interventions plans, and individually focused curricula. The learning specialist is available for student aggressors, victims, and family members of those students.
- **Notice to the School Community** - At the beginning of each school year, the school will provide the school community with written notice of its policies for reporting and responding to acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including contact information for the head of school or designee will be incorporated in student, staff, and parent handbooks, and on the school website.
- **Collaboration with Families** - Each year, the school will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. The school will notify parents in writing about the student-related sections of the plan and the school's Internet safety policy.

Scope of the Bullying Prevention Plan

Bullying is prohibited: (i) on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased, or used by the school, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by the school and (ii) 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 school, if the bullying creates a hostile environmental school environment for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school, or

materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of school. Nothing contained herein shall require schools to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying shall be prohibited.

This plan shall apply to students and members of the school staff, including, but not limited to educators, administrators, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activity, and paraprofessionals. There will be notice and a public comment period for families that have a child attending the school. The plan shall be updated biennially.

We recognize 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, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The school will identify specific steps it will take to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

Annual Staff Training on the Bullying Prevention Plan

Annual training for all school staff on the Plan includes staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the head of school or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at the preschool, elementary, and middle school programs. Staff members hired after the start of the school year are required to participate in school-based training during the school year in which they are hired, unless they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last two years. The training will teach specific strategies regarding vulnerable populations.

Ongoing Professional Development

The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. The content of school-wide professional development will be informed by research and include information on:

- (i) Developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- (ii) Developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate effective intervention to stop bullying incidents;

- (iii) Information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, victim, and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) Research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment;
- (v) Information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- (vi) Internet safety issues as they relate to bullying

Written Notice to Staff

The school will provide all staff with an annual written notice of the Plan by publishing information about it, including sections relating to staff duties and bullying of students by school staff, in the school employee handbook.

Reporting Bullying Incidents

The school has an open reporting system where any concerned person may report an incident of bullying or cyberbullying. Reports of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation may be made anonymously; however, no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report. The *Bullying Prevention and Incident Reporting Form* will be available in the school's main office and on the school's website.

Reporting by School Staff

Staff members are required to report in writing and immediately to the head of school or designee when s/he witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavior consistent with school policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline. Part I of the *Bullying Prevention and Incident Reporting Form* will be completed by school staff. School staff may request assistance from another staff member to complete a written report.

Reporting by Students, Parents, Guardians, or Others

The school expects students, parents, and guardians who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the head of school or designee. Part I of the *Bullying Prevention and Incident Reporting Form* will be completed by students, parents, guardians, or others. Students, parents, guardians, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. Students will be provided practical, safe, private, and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member.

The Following Process will Surround All Reported Incidents of Bullying Behavior

Designated school personnel will respond to the reporting party within 24 hours. Insofar as legally allowed by state law, confidentiality will be maintained with respect to the parties involved in the report; however the party reporting the incident will be notified that the incident is being investigated and results will be shared as is appropriate.

1. Safety

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the head of school or designee will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged victim and/or protect the alleged victim from possible further incidents. The head of school will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary. Responses to promote safety may include creating a personal safety plan, pre-determining seating arrangements, identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the victim, and altering the aggressor’s schedule and access to the victim.

2. Investigation

The head of school or designee will investigate promptly all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved. During the investigation, the head of school or designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents, guardians, and others as necessary. The head of school or designee will speak privately with the students and others to determine the severity and intent of the situation. Factors used to determine this will include: age, maturity level, vulnerability, degree of harm, surrounding circumstances, nature of behavior(s), past incidences, pattern of behavior, relationship between the parties, and the context in which the alleged incident occurred. The head of school or designee will remind the alleged student aggressor, victim, and witnesses of the importance of the investigations, their obligation to be truthful, and that retaliation against someone who reports bullying or provides information during a bullying investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. The head of school or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation. All investigative meetings and conversations will be held in a private location. Notes will be taken and Part II of the *Prevention and Intervention Reporting Form* will be completed.

3. Determinations

- a. The head of school or designee will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances.
- b. If, after investigating, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the head of school or designee will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent reoccurrence and to ensure the victim is not restricted in participation in school or in benefitting from school activities. The head of school or designee will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or

disciplinary action is necessary. The head of school or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the victim and the parents or guardians of the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is substantiated, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. The head of school or designee will inform the parent or guardian of the victim about the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system, regardless of the outcome of the bullying determination.

- c. If the reported incident involves student(s) from another school, the head of school or designee will promptly notify, by telephone, the head of school or designee of the other school(s) of the incident, so that each school may take appropriate action.
- d. At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, if the head of school or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the head of school will notify the local law enforcement agency.
- e. If it is determined that a student knowingly made a false accusation of bullying, that student will be subject to disciplinary action.

Responses to Bullying

Upon the head of school or designee determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, Massachusetts law requires that the school use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior.

1. Teaching Appropriate Behavior

Skill-building approaches that the head of school or designee may consider include:

- Offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's anti-bullying curricula;
- Providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students;
- Implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals;
- Meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skill-building activities at home;
- Adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on specific social skills; and
- Making a referral for evaluation.

2. Taking Disciplinary Action

If the head of school or designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of the facts found by the head of school or designee, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior.

3. Promoting Safety

The head of school or designee will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the victim's sense of safety and that of others as well.

Within a reasonable period of time, the head of school or designee will contact the victim to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct.

Responsibility of Implementation of Bullying Policy and Procedures

The head of school or designee is responsible for the range of disciplinary actions. The director of education is responsible for professional development, curricular choices and execution, publication and notice of the Plan, the administration of the student survey, and reporting to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Methods for Collecting, Maintaining, and Reporting Bullying Incident Data

The director of education is responsible for the collection, maintenance, and reporting of bullying incident data. As required by Massachusetts law, bullying incident data will be submitted to the Department of Education annually.

Monitoring the Implementation of this Policy

The effectiveness and implementation of this policy will be monitored by the head of school and reviewed at the close of any incidents. It will be revised as necessary. In addition, training protocols and prevention plans will be updated at least once every two years. Input will be solicited from school staff and parents with respect to policy modification.