

## **Bullying Policy**

*Guided by our Blessed Mother, Saint Mary Academy is a Catholic faith community that educates children in mind, body, and spirit. We strive to inspire our students to honor God, love learning, and serve others.*

As Catholics, we believe that everyone is created by God and loved by God. As followers of Jesus, we are called to value other people's dignity and to treat them with respect just as Jesus did. Bullying of any kind goes against our call to be like Jesus and it is never acceptable.

Saint Mary Academy is committed to providing all students with a safe school environment in which all members of its community are treated with respect. The school believes that protecting against and addressing bullying is critical for creating and maintaining a safe, secure and positive school climate and culture; supporting academic achievement; increasing school engagement; respecting the rights of others; and upholding our Christian values.

The Principal or Principal's Designee is responsible for ensuring that the Anti-Bullying Policy is implemented.

### **1. Definitions**

Bullying means a single, significant incident or a pattern of incidents involving a written, verbal, or electronic communication, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at another pupil which:

- Physically harms a student or damages the student's property; or
- Causes emotional distress to a student; or
- Interferes with a student's educational opportunities; or
- Creates a hostile educational environment; or
- Substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school.

Cyberbullying means bullying conduct (as defined above) that is undertaken through the use of electronic devices. Electronic devices include, but are not limited to, telephones, cellular phones, computers, pagers, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, electronic readers, videogames, and websites.

### **2. Statements of Prohibition**

Bullying and cyberbullying shall not be tolerated and are hereby prohibited.

Saint Mary Academy reserves the right to address all forms of prohibited conduct and, if necessary, impose discipline for such misconduct that occurs on or is delivered to school property or a school-sponsored event on or off school property; or occurs off of school property or outside of a school-sponsored activity or event, if the conduct interferes with a pupil's educational opportunities or substantially disrupts the orderly operations of the school or school-sponsored activity or event.

False Reporting- A student found to have knowingly made a false accusation of bullying may face disciplinary or remedial action within the discretion of the principal or principal's designee.

Retaliation- The policy of Saint Mary Academy is to encourage individuals to report bullying and cooperate with investigations. As a result, individuals who make good faith reports of bullying will not be subject to retaliation for reporting bullying or assisting in a complaint investigation.<sup>1</sup> Anyone who believes that he/she has been subjected to retaliation for making a complaint of bullying or cooperating in connection with an investigation should report the matter to the school principal, his/her designee, or the Superintendent of Schools. Any student found to have engaged in retaliation against those described above shall be subject to disciplinary action.

### **3. Reporting Incidents of Bullying**

#### **a. Reporting During School Hours**

##### *Reporting by Students-*

Any student who believes that he/she has been the victim of bullying should report the act immediately to a teacher or to any other school employee.

Any student who has knowledge of or observes bullying of another student is encouraged to report the bullying to a teacher or to any other school employee. If a student is unsure whether an incident learned of or observed may constitute bullying, the incident should be discussed with a teacher or another school employee.

##### *Reporting by Parents/Guardians and School Volunteers-*

Any parent, guardian, or school volunteer who suspects, has witnessed, received a report of, or has information that a student may have been subjected to bullying is encouraged to promptly report such incident to a teacher, a school employee, or the principal.

##### *Reporting by School Employees-*

Any teacher, staff member, or school employee who suspects, has witnessed, received a report of, or has reliable information that a student has been subjected to bullying or suspected bullying as defined above shall promptly report such incident to the principal or principal's designee.

#### **b. Reporting Outside of School Hours**

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<sup>1</sup> However, if after investigating any complaint of bullying, the principal or principal's designee determines that the complaint is frivolous and was not made in good faith, or that a student has provided false information regarding the complaint, disciplinary action may be taken against the student who filed the false complaint or gave the false information.

The Diocese of Manchester has made available a phone number to be used by those who wish to report suspected incidents of bullying outside of school hours. The phone number is (603) 663-0178. Reports made by this method will be recorded and forwarded to the appropriate school the following school day. Reporters will be encouraged to provide their names, but anonymous reports will be accepted.

#### **4. Response to Reports<sup>2</sup>**

##### Investigation

The principal or principal's designee shall promptly (within 2 school days) initiate an investigation into any report of bullying or suspected bullying.

##### Initial Notice to Parent/Guardian

The principal or principal's designee shall promptly (within 2 school days) notify the parents/guardians of the reported victim of bullying and the parents/ guardians of the reported perpetrator of bullying of the incident. Such notification may be made orally or in writing. A waiver of this notification may be granted by the Superintendent of Schools if such waiver is deemed to be in the best interest of the victim or perpetrator.

##### Timeline for Investigation

The investigation will be concluded within 5 school days. An extension may be granted by the Superintendent of Schools if necessary.

##### Notification to Parent/Guardian Upon Completion of Investigation

Upon the conclusion of the investigation, the principal or principal's designee shall promptly report the findings of the investigation to the parents/ guardians of the reported victim of bullying and the parents/ guardians of the reported perpetrator of bullying. Such notification may be made orally or in writing. The notification must comply with school policy and rules of confidentiality.

##### Written Record

A written record of any substantiated act of bullying shall be maintained by the school.

#### **5. Disciplinary Action for Substantiated Bullying**

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<sup>2</sup> If the report of bullying suggests that a crime may have been committed, notifications to appropriate civil authorities must be made and the school will cooperate with any investigation by law enforcement. The school's investigation may be delayed should law enforcement become involved.

If an investigation concludes that a student has engaged in bullying conduct prohibited by this policy, the principal or principal's designee shall determine the consequences on a case-by-case basis. Bullying behavior can take many forms. Accordingly, there is no single, appropriate response to substantiated acts of bullying.

When acts of bullying are identified early and/or when such acts do not reasonably require a severe disciplinary response in the judgment of the principal or designee, students should be counseled as to the definition of bullying, its prohibition, and their duty to avoid any conduct that could be considered bullying.

While bullying as defined above will generally warrant disciplinary action against the student responsible for the bullying, whether and to what extent disciplinary action is required is a matter for the discretion of the principal or designee. The goal is for the child responsible for the bullying to receive redemption, learn, and refrain from bullying others in the future. Any disciplinary or remedial action shall be designed to correct the problem behavior, prevent future occurrences of such behavior, protect the victim, provide support and assistance to the victim and perpetrator, and prevent the likelihood of retaliation.

Nothing in this policy prevents the school from taking disciplinary action against a student for conduct that does not meet the definition of bullying or cyberbullying but nevertheless is inappropriate for the school.

## **6. Notification**

Handbooks- Saint Mary Academy will provide notice of this Policy to students, staff, parents/guardians, and volunteers via student and employee handbooks.

### Training-

When possible and as materials become available, the school will provide to its students, parents, staff, and volunteers information and education about the definition of bullying, the effects of bullying, the school's prohibition of such conduct, the means of reporting bullying, and the importance of promoting a positive school climate to minimize the occurrence of bullying.