

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, 12/31/2010

Oak Meadow Montessori School

I. Introduction.

At Oak Meadow Montessori School, we want all members of our school community to treat each other with respect and courtesy. As stated in our school philosophy, "We cultivate confident, independent and compassionate human beings. Confidence, independence and compassion are necessary attributes to attain the goal of a better and more peaceful future. Confident students are willing and able to voice their opinions. Independent students know they can, through their own efforts, change the world. Compassionate students care for the welfare of others. We cultivate responsible citizens of the world. We share Maria Montessori's belief that 'The child is both hope and promise for mankind.' "

It is the policy of Oak Meadow to maintain a safe learning environment for all members of its community; one that is free from bullying.

The Oak Meadow Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is published in response to the recently enacted 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. This Plan spells out Oak Meadow's comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, as required by the law.

It is important that this Plan be understood by all members of the Oak Meadow community. The Head of School and Assistant Head of School are responsible for its implementation and administration. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School may delegate authority for implementation and administration of this policy. Questions and concerns related to this Plan may be referred to the Head of School or the Assistant Head of School.

II. Definitions.

The following definitions are from the Massachusetts law against bullying.

Aggressor. An aggressor is a perpetrator of bullying or retaliation as defined.

Bullying. Bullying is 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 target or damage to the target's property;

- Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or damage to his or her property;
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- Infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- Materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

Bullying shall include cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but 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. Cyberbullying shall also include:

- The creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person, or
- The knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions listed in the bullying definition. Cyberbullying shall also include the distribution by 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 listed in the definition of bullying.

Hostile Environment. A hostile environment is 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.

Parent. A parent is a student's mother, father, or guardian.

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

or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Target. A target is a student victim of bullying or retaliation.

III. Policy Against Bullying and Retaliation.

Oak Meadow expressly prohibits bullying and retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation about bullying, or witnesses, or has reliable information about bullying.

Bullying is prohibited at school or at school-sponsored activities, functions, or programs. Bullying is prohibited on school grounds, at school-sponsored or school-related activities (whether on or off school grounds), on vehicles owned, leased, or used by the school, or through use of technology owned, leased, or used by the school.

Bullying is 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 school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the target, infringes on the rights of the target at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of the school. Nothing contained herein shall require the school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

Oak Meadow prohibits retaliation against a person who reports bullying, who provides information during an investigation of bullying, or who witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

IV. Procedures for Students, Staff, Parents, or Others to Report Bullying or Retaliation.

A target of bullying or retaliation, or a student, staff member, parent, or other person who witnesses bullying or retaliation or who is made aware of bullying or retaliation, shall report the bullying or retaliation to the Head of School or Assistant Head of School. The reporter may request anonymity in reporting, although he or she will not be guaranteed anonymity in the event that law enforcement becomes involved. If an anonymous report is made, no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of the anonymous report.

The report of bullying or retaliation may be made in person, in writing, electronically by email, or through a telephone message. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School will acknowledge receipt of the report. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School will document the report.

V. Response to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation.

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Head of School or Assistant Head of School will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School may, at their sole discretion, work with teachers, staff members, or other persons to restore a sense of safety. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School may, at their sole discretion, work with teachers, staff members, or other persons to protect from bullying or retaliation a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about an act of bullying.

The Head of School or Assistant Head of School shall promptly investigate the alleged bullying or retaliation. Steps may include but are not limited to interviewing the alleged target(s) and aggressor(s), other students, staff, parents, or other persons who may have knowledge of the alleged bullying or alleged retaliation. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School will remind the alleged aggressor, alleged target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited. To the extent practicable, given the obligation to investigate and address the matter, the Head of School or Assistant Head of School will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School will maintain a written record of the investigation.

If the Head of School or Assistant Head of School determines that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Head of School or Assistant Head of School shall:

- promptly notify the parents of the target and the aggressor of the determination and the school's procedures for responding to the bullying or retaliation, and
- inform the target's parent of actions that school officials will take to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation.

Nothing prohibits the Head of School or Assistant Head of School from contacting a parent of an alleged target or alleged aggressor about a report of bullying or retaliation prior to a determination that bullying or retaliation has occurred.

There are a range of disciplinary actions that may be taken (from educating to suspending or dismissing the aggressor) in the event that the Head of School or Assistant Head of

School determines that bullying or retaliating has occurred. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School may, at their sole discretion, consult with teachers, staff members, or other persons when determining appropriate disciplinary actions. The disciplinary actions shall balance the need to teach appropriate behavior with the need for accountability.

At any point after receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, the Head of School or Assistant Head of School shall notify the local law enforcement agency if the Head of School or Assistant Head of School has a reasonable basis to believe criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor. The parents of the target will be informed if law enforcement is notified. The Head of School or Assistant Head of School shall document the reasons for his or her decision to notify law enforcement. Nothing in this plan shall be interpreted to require reporting to a law enforcement agency in situations in which bullying and retaliation can be handled appropriately within the school.

A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action.

The Head of School or Assistant Head of School may refer aggressors or targets and appropriate family members to counseling or other appropriate services.

In order to maintain confidentiality of records, the Head of School or Assistant Head of School may not disclose to a parent any student record information regarding an alleged target or alleged aggressor who is a student and who is not the parent's child. Similarly, the Head of School or Assistant Head of School may not disclose to a parent any student record information regarding a target or aggressor who is a student and who is not the parent's child.

VI. Dissemination of this Policy.

This policy shall be included in the *Student and Parent Handbook* which is distributed annually to all Oak Meadow parents and students. This policy shall be included in the *Oak Meadow Employee Handbook*, which is distributed annually to all Oak Meadow employees. This policy shall be posted on the school's website, www.oakmeadow.org.

The policy shall be reviewed at least biennially, and shall be updated in accordance with Massachusetts law and with practices of the school.