

MIDDLESEX SCHOOL

BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

Mission Statement of Middlesex School

Middlesex School is an independent, non-denominational, residential, college-preparatory school that, for over one hundred years, has been committed to excellence in the intellectual, ethical, creative, and physical development of young people. We honor the ideal, articulated by our founding Headmaster, of “finding the promise” in every student, and we work together in an atmosphere of mutual trust and shared responsibility to help students bring their talents to fruition as knowledgeable, capable, responsible and moral citizens of the world. As a community, we respect the individual interests, strengths, and needs of each student. We also value the rich diversity of belief and experience each of us brings to the School.

We expect that each student will bring his or her best efforts to the shared endeavor of learning and that the School, through its faculty, will engage and encourage each student’s growth, happiness, and well-being. We aspire for all Middlesex students to develop personal integrity, intellectual vitality and discipline, and respect for themselves and for others. We expect each student to engage energetically and cooperatively in the life of the School, and we seek to inspire in all students the desire to seek understanding of themselves and the larger world, both now and in their futures.

I. Introduction

“As a community, we respect the individual interests, strengths, and needs of each student.”

At Middlesex School, we expect that all members of our community will treat each other with respect and civility. Middlesex School does not permit bullying or any other verbal or physical misconduct that disrupts the learning environment or makes it unsafe.

The Middlesex School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (the “Plan”), set forth below, 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 Middlesex School’s comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation. This Plan is consistent with broader protections at Middlesex against discrimination, harassment, bullying and retaliation that appear in our *Handbook, Faculty Handbook, Staff Handbook* and *Facilities & Operations Handbook*.

It is important that this Plan be well understood by all members of the Middlesex community. The Head of School is responsible for the implementation and administration of the Plan. Questions and concerns related to this Plan may be addressed to the Head of School, the Dean of Students or the Chief Operating Officer.

II. Policy against Bullying, Cyber-Bullying and Retaliation

Middlesex School will not tolerate any form of bullying, nor will we tolerate retaliation against any person who reports, provides information during an investigation of, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Bullying is prohibited on school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, and at school-sponsored or school-related events, activities, functions, and programs. Bullying also is prohibited on school buses and other vehicles owned, leased, or used by the school, and through use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by the school. In addition, 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 a targeted student; infringes on the rights of a targeted student at school; or materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

Definitions

Bullying

Bullying is defined as 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 of 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; or
- materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

The definition of bullying shall include Cyber-bullying.

Cyber-bullying

Massachusetts law defines Cyber-Bullying as bullying through 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 also includes 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 enumerated in the definition of bullying.

Cyber-bullying also includes 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 posing creates any of the conditions enumerated 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.

Retaliation

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

Legal Definitions and School Policy

It is important to bear in mind that stricter standards of behavior may apply under Middlesex School's policies in order that we may prevent inappropriate verbal and physical conduct before a student has been subject 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 warrants disciplinary measures or other remedial action or that the repetition of that expression, act, or gesture might result in bullying as defined under the law.

It is also important to note that in instances related to certain student behavior or activities the School is a mandatory reporter as defined by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Middlesex also recognizes that certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have 1 or more of these characteristics. The School's

comprehensive approach (outlined below) to the issue of bullying and cyber-bullying is intended to support vulnerable students and provide all students with the skills, knowledge and strategies needed to prevent or respond to bullying or harassment.

III. Prevention of Bullying

From the beginning of their Middlesex careers, students learn that as members of our community they have a right to be treated with civility and respect. The School's curriculum emphasizes respect for differences, and teachers are clear in their expectations for student behavior. Our approach is intended to build on our standard expectations of respectful, fair and compassionate behavior and to empower our students over time to recognize, internalize and act on the basis of those values. The School strives to ensure that reasonable adult supervision is provided on School premises, including in the corridors and locker rooms, at meals and on school-provided transportation throughout the school day as well as at school-sponsored events.

In addition to these general programs, the school offers several specific offerings to guide student decision-making and maintain an atmosphere of respect and civility in our community:

- **New student orientation:** Each fall, new students at Middlesex receive a comprehensive orientation program, including a module focusing on diversity, inclusion and acceptance. This module helps prepare students to live together as a community, respecting each student's background and lifestyle. Through this work, all new students come to appreciate their fellow school mates and others in the community.
- **Choices :** the Choices program, which all members of Class IV and all new members of Class III attend, is a six-week educational program that deals with integrity issues, life management skills, positive friendships, healthy relationships, and alcohol and drug education. Each weekly meeting is typically hosted in the apartment of a faculty member who lives on campus and is led by a male and female faculty member and a student Peer Support leader with eight to ten students, split evenly by sex, in attendance. The Choices program helps new students integrate themselves into the community and offers them a safe space to discuss issues that directly impact their social lives and physical well being.
- **Community Life meetings:** each year the School community holds between six and eight community life meetings. Each meeting focuses on a different aspect of life in a residential community. The topics of the meetings in past years have included: respect, friendship, inclusion and acceptance, kindness, acceptable use of technology and cyber-bullying. Each of these topics engages students and adults in conversations about the values of respect and decency in our community.
- **Senior leadership meetings:** Each Middlesex senior participates in a series of senior leadership meetings which engage our oldest students in an ongoing dialogue about the

life of the School. These sessions help the faculty hear student voices about the welfare of other students, and help our seniors create a positive and accepting school culture.

- **Peer Support, Diversity officers, Proctors:** all of the School's senior leadership positions are dedicated to helping students adjust to the school community, to protecting the welfare of fellow students and to developing actions plans for struggling students.
- **Radar screen and Health Committee:** The School's Health Committee holds weekly meeting to discuss students who may be struggling with adjustments to school life, and develop action plans to help them.
- **Affinity groups and Student Clubs (GSA, Spectrum, etc.):** The School supports a wide variety of clubs and groups that provide a voice in the community for minority and underrepresented groups in our school community.

IV. Reports of Bullying Retaliation

Any student who is the target of bullying or 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 promptly the matter orally or in writing to the Head of School, Chief Operating Officer or Dean of Students, or to any other faculty member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. Similarly, any student who is subject to retaliation in violation of this policy or who knows of another student who has been subject to retaliation is urged to report it as soon as possible either orally or in writing.

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

Any member of the faculty or staff of the School who witnesses or otherwise becomes aware of 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 one of the Head of School, Dean of Faculty or Chief Operating Officer. 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 or retaliation.

Faculty and staff may not make reports under this policy anonymously. Parents and students may make reports under this policy anonymously. However, 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. Further, no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Also, while the School cannot promise strict confidentiality, because information must be shared in order to conduct an effective investigation, the School releases information concerning complaints of bullying and retaliation only on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

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

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 a the Head of School, an assessment is 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 and residential environment while the investigation is being conducted. As appropriate, strategies such as increased supervision may be implemented to prevent further bullying or retaliation during an investigation.

B. Obligation to Notify Parents

It is the policy of the School to notify the parents or guardians of any student who is the 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.

C. Investigation

The following is an outline of the procedure that is pursued once a complaint has been brought to the attention of the Head of School: An impartial investigation of the complaint is conducted by the Head of School and Dean of Students; that investigation may include (but will not necessarily be limited to) interviews with the person who made the complaint, with the student who was the target of the alleged 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 Head of School conducting the investigation also may choose to consult with other faculty and/or staff, including the School Counselor.

D. Resolution, Notification, and Follow-up

Following interviews and any other investigation undertaken, as the School deems appropriate, the Head of School 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 Head of School 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 is imposed following that investigation is 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.

At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, 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 Head of School 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.

If the reported incident involves students from more than one school, the Head of School, as a professional courtesy, will notify by telephone the principal or designee of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations.

Follow-up contacts will be made with any student found to have been targeted in violation of this policy and his/her parents to inquire as to whether there have been any further incidents and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the Head of School will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

Middlesex School provides student support through its advisor program and the heads of its residential and non-residential houses, supported by the Director of the Cruz Health Center, school counselor and the office of the Dean of Students. The School also maintains ongoing relationships with counselors and other medical professionals to support students, including linguistically and culturally appropriate counselors. Based on the findings of the investigation and after consultation with appropriate personnel at Middlesex, the Head of School will determine whether a need for counseling exists and whether or not it is a requirement, and will meet with the student and his/her family to communicate next steps.

The plan for any student who is the object of bullying would be (in conjunction with the student's family) an initial evaluation by the director of counseling services. This would include input from school personnel with information about the incident and individuals who work with this student as well as the family. If deemed appropriate, the student would have an additional evaluation with our consulting psychiatrist. Using these evaluations, this team would generate treatment recommendations. Then, the School, in conjunction with the family, would seek the most appropriate providers or agencies to provide ongoing support services.

As part of this plan, Middlesex School maintains relationships with a range of providers, including Emerson Hospital, Lahey Clinic and Children's Hospital, Boston and their affiliated clinical staffs.

VI. Conclusion

This Plan is intended (1) to prevent bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation among our students; (2) to encourage students and their parents to have confidence in the School's procedures and to come forward promptly whenever a student is subject to conduct that is prohibited by this or any other School policy; and (3) to implement appropriate discipline and other corrective measures when they are found to be warranted.

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