



## STEP Academy Student Bullying Policy

STEP Academy strives to provide a safe, secure, and respectful learning environment for all students in school building, on school grounds, on school buses, and at school-sponsored activities. Bullying is conduct that interferes with a student's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to educate.

This policy protects students against bullying and retaliation by other students. This policy also protects any student who voluntarily participates in any district function or activity from prohibited conduct, whether the student is enrolled in the district or not.

### **DEFINITIONS**

"Bullying" is objectively offensive intimidating, threatening, abusive or harmful conduct directed by a student toward one or more students: when either (1) there is a real or perceived imbalance of power between those involved and the conduct reoccurs or forms a pattern; or, (2) the conduct materially and substantially interferes with the student's educational opportunities, performance, or ability to participate in school functions, activities or programs.

Bullying can be, but need not be, based on an individual's actual or perceived race, ethnicity, color, creed, religion, national origin, immigration status, sex, marital status, familial status, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, including gender identity and expression, academic status related to student performance, disability, status with regard to public assistance, age, or any additional characteristic defined in Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 363A (commonly referred to as the Minnesota Human Rights Act). Bullying in this policy includes "cyberbullying," as defined below.

"Cyberbullying" is bullying that occurs when an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a computer or cell phone, is used to transfer a sign, signal, writing, image, sound or data and includes a post to a social network, Internet website or forum.

"Intimidating, threatening, abusive, or harming conduct" may involve, but is not limited to, conduct that causes physical harm or reasonable fear of harm to a student or a student's property, violates a student's reasonable expectation of privacy under Minnesota common law, defames a student, or constitutes intentional infliction of emotional distress against a student or retaliation for, or knowingly making a false report.

"Prohibited conduct" means bullying or cyberbullying as defined under this subdivision or retaliation for asserting, alleging, reporting, or providing information about such conduct or knowingly making a false report about bullying.

“Remedial response” is appropriately prompt action taken to intervene, investigate, correct and prevent bullying from recurring, including protecting and supporting a student subjected to bullying and those who provided aid and support to the student.

“School” means a public or public charter school.

“Student” means a student enrolled in a public or charter school.

## **PROHIBITED CONDUCT**

Bullying is prohibited:

1. On school property, school district-provided transportation, or at designated locations for students to wait for school district-provided transportation.
2. During any school-sponsored or school-sanctioned program, activity, event or trip.
3. Using school computers, electronic technology, networks, forums or mailing lists.
4. Using electronic technology off the school premises that materially and substantially disrupts a student’s learning or school environment.

Apparent permission or consent by a student does not mean that bullying should be tolerated or allowed.

Retaliation is prohibited by any student or district employee against anyone who in good faith asserts, alleges, reports, or provides information pertaining to an alleged incident of prohibited conduct. The school district will take appropriate action against any student or district employee who engages in retaliation. Filing a false accusation of bullying is also prohibited.

## **INITIAL RESPONSE AND REPORTING**

STEP Academy’s Dean of Students & Assistant Deans are responsible for receiving reports of bullying. This team will ensure this policy and its procedures are fairly and fully implemented and serve as the primary team to address policy and procedural matters. If the complaint involves the Dean of Students or Assistant Deans, the complaint shall be made to the Assistant Director of Academics.

Students who believe that they have been bullied or have witnessed bullying are strongly encouraged to bring their concerns to the Dean of Students or Assistant Deans but may bring their concerns to any school employee.

Any employee who witnesses an incident or who possesses reliable information that would lead a reasonable person to believe that bullying has occurred shall:

1. Immediately intervene to protect the safety of the student subjected to the incident and other students involved, as appropriate to the context.
1. Make reasonable efforts to address and resolve the incident, including reporting the incident to the principal/designee, as deemed appropriate.
2. Cooperate fully in any investigation and resolution of the bullying incident.

Anonymous reports will be accepted and investigated, however, no disciplinary action will be determined solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

## **INVESTIGATION**

### **Information Pertaining to Bullying Incidents:**

Information related to bullying reports is subject to state and federal data practices laws. The school will notify affected individuals, including students and parents, of their rights related to information provided to and obtained by the school, in accordance with the school's legal obligations. Information you provide to the district or school is subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. This law classifies certain information as available to the public on request.

### **Procedure:**

Investigation of an alleged bullying incident shall be initiated as soon as possible, but in no instance after more than three school days of receipt of a report, and completed in a timely manner. Investigative records shall be maintained and regulated by the principal/designee.

The investigation should determine whether the reported incident constitutes a case of bullying. The determination should take into consideration the totality of the facts and circumstances surrounding the incident, including, but not limited to:

1. The developmental ages and maturity levels of the parties involved.
2. The level of harm, surrounding circumstances, and nature of the behavior.
3. Past incidences or past or continuing patterns of behavior.
4. The relationship between the parties involved.
5. The context in which the alleged incidents occurred.

In all cases, the student being accused will be able to provide details of the incident and a defensive statement.

## **REMEDIAL RESPONSE**

STEP Academy has designed and continually implements remedial measures to correct and prevent further bullying, protect and provide support for the target of the bullying, and take corrective action for documented systemic problems related to bullying.

Many student conflicts can be resolved immediately and do not require reporting or creation of an incident report. STEP Academy responds to bullying in a manner tailored to the individual incident, considering the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of prohibited conduct and performance.

When a student engages in bullying, STEP Academy uses multi-tiered levels of response that are individualized, consistent, reasonable, fair, age-appropriate, and should match the severity of the student's behavior and developmental age.

When appropriate, STEP Academy provides all affected individuals with information about available community resources to aid in the remedial process.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION**

**School Employees:** At least annually, one hour or more of professional development related to this policy and the prevention of bullying will be provided to all employees who have regular student contact.

**Students:** Students at STEP Academy will receive instruction related to bullying prevention as part of the school's PBIS programming. This instruction will occur at minimum twice per year in grades K-12. In addition, teachers will conduct individual coaching with students as part of an effort to maintain a bully-free learning environment.

As determined by the student's IEP or 504 team, students with 504 Plans or IEP's who have engaged in bullying may have goals related to building skills and abilities targeting a decrease in bullying behaviors

## **POLICY MAINTENANCE**

- Every five years, a committee with a minimum of one representative from each group: students, parents, school employees, volunteers and community members will review the bullying policies and programs and determine modifications. If substantial amendments are needed in a non-review year, a complete committee can be convened to do so. (2016, 2021, 2026) The Dean of Students will be responsible for maintenance of this procedure.
- The policy in its entirety will be posted in the school office, teacher's work rooms, and on the school website. Applicable excerpts from the policy will be contained in family and staff handbooks.