COUNCIL OAK MONTESSORI SCHOOL

"Nurturing the best within each child to bring about a better world"

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

The COMS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is modeled on the Illinois Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, Illinois Department of Education.

Council Oak Montessori School will not tolerate any form of bullying or cyber-bullying, nor will we tolerate retaliation against any person who reports bullying, or provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses bullying. Additionally, bullying is contrary to State Law.

Nothing contained in this Section is intended to infringe upon any right to exercise free expression or the free exercise of religion or religiously based views protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or under Section 3 of Article I of the Illinois Constitution.

"Bullying", including "cyber-bullying", is any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

1. Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property.
2. Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical mental health.
3. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; or
4. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by the school.

Cyber-bullying is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation 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 system, photoelectronic system, or photo-optical system, including without limitation electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. "Cyber-bullying" includes the creation of a webpage or weblog 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 effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this Section. "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

posting creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this Section. "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 posting creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in [105 ILCS 5/27 – 23.7(b)].

Prohibition on Cyberbullying: Bullying is prohibited through the transmission of information from a computer that is accessed at a non-school-related location, activity, function, or program or from the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school if the bullying causes a substantial disruption to the educational process or orderly operation of a school.

I. LEADERSHIP

A. Leadership at all levels plays a critical role in developing and implementing the COMS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan in the context of other whole school and community efforts to promote positive school climate. Leaders have a primary role in teaching students to be civil to one another and promoting understanding of and respect for diversity and difference. Leadership is responsible for setting priorities and for staying up-to-date with current research on ways to prevent and effectively respond to bullying. The plan applies to students and all COMS employees, including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, cafeteria workers, custodians, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activity and paraprofessionals. COMS provides the entire plan in the COMS Parent Handbook.

B. Assessing needs and resources (Ongoing): The Head of School and Administrative Assistant, with input from families and staff, assess the adequacy of the current Bullying Prevention and Intervention program; review current policies and procedures; review process for recording and tracking incident reports and for accessing information related to targets and aggressors; planning for the ongoing professional development that is required by the law ; reviewing and updating this Plan with each incident or minimum every two years.

C. Developing priority statements: COMS will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior, including any form of bullying, harassment, disrespectful behavior, cyberbullying, or retaliation, in our school buildings, on school grounds, or in school-related activities. COMS will investigate promptly (within 10 days) all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation, and take prompt action to end that behavior and restore the target's sense of safety. COMS will support this commitment in all aspects of our school community, including curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities, and parent or guardian involvement.

D. In any school environment, certain students may be more vulnerable to bullying. At COMS, we teach our children to acknowledge and celebrate differences, and to support others, including especially any person who may, for any reason, be particularly vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying. This vulnerability may arise from actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, physical appearance, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. Additional areas identified by COMS for schoolwide professional development may include: 1) promoting and modeling the use of respectful language; 2) fostering an understanding of and respect for diversity and difference; 3) building relationships and communicating with families; 4) constructively managing classroom behaviors; 5) using positive behavioral intervention strategies; 6) applying constructive disciplinary practices; 7) teaching students skills including positive communication, anger management, and empathy for others; 8) engaging students in classroom planning and decision-making; and 9) maintaining a safe and caring classroom for all students.

E. Written notice to staff COMS provides all staff with an annual written notice of the COMS Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties, in the COMS Staff Handbook. The COMS Plan includes a strategy for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for aggressors, targets, and family members of those students.

F. Counseling and other services: COMS will refer parents to professional services in the community to address areas of need not available at COMS. The Head of School will refer students and families to outside services. Referrals will comply with relevant laws and policies.

INSTRUCTION IN BULLYING PREVENTION

A. Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches: 1) using scripts and role plays to develop skills; 2) empowering students and staff to take action when they witness other students or staff engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult help; 3) helping students and staff understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance; 4) emphasizing cyber safety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies; 5) enhancing students' and staff's skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and 6) engaging students and staff in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and differences.

B. General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts: Teachers are committed to working through conflicts as they occur, engaging with students, modeling acceptable and supportive behaviors, and carefully protecting the boundary between acceptable behaviors (including conflicts) and bullying. The following approaches underscore the importance of our Bullying Intervention and Prevention initiatives: 1) setting clear expectations for students and staff; 2) establishing school and classroom routines; 3) creating respectful school and classroom environments for all students and staff including for students with disabilities, and diverse living styles; 4) modeling healthy, and respectful behaviors; 5)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; and 6) adhering to the COMS Acceptable Use of Technology policy.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION

COMS has in place the following policy and procedures regarding potential bullying be reported, as multiple reports from different sources may alert the administration to a pattern of which individual staff members would be unaware.

Reporting by Students, Parents or Guardians, and Others: The school expects students, parents or guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student or staff member to immediately report it to the Head of School. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Students, parents or 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, or with the Head of School.

Complaint Manager: Lila Jokanovic

708-926-9720

Lila.Jokanovic@CouncilOakMontessori.org

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

A person who has been found to have falsely accused another of bullying as a means of retaliation or as a means of bullying will be subject to the same level of investigation and consequence as those who are found to be bullying.

Discipline will be consistent with the school's discipline policy. The range of disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to, verbal warnings, written warnings, reprimands, reflective writing assignments, short term or long term suspensions or expulsions from school. When disciplinary action is

imposed and Parts I, II and III of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Reporting form has been completed, this becomes a permanent part of the student's or staff member's record.

Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation: Our school treats allegations of bullying with the utmost gravity by establishing the facts and taking appropriate action. It is important to bear in mind that the submission of a report reflects only the reporter's perception of an incident, and not a conclusion that bullying has in fact occurred. Pre-adolescent and younger children in particular may engage in conduct that, while distressing to other students, is developmentally related and does not constitute "bullying" within the meaning of the law. Inappropriate student behavior that does not amount to bullying can often be addressed through tailored, minimally intrusive mechanisms such as heightened supervision, separation of the children involved, and age-appropriate counseling.

1) Safety Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the 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. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on field trips; identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target; and altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target. The Head of School will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The Head of School and staff will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying or retaliation: a) a student or staff member who has reported bullying or retaliation, b) a student or staff member who has witnessed bullying or retaliation, c) a student or staff member who provides information during an investigation, or d) a student or staff member who has reliable information about a reported act of bullying or retaliation. COMS ensures all staff involved are informed, confidentiality is maintained, and the student or staff member feels safe.

If an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the Head of School shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor.

INVESTIGATION

The Head of School will investigate promptly all reports of bullying or retaliation, making all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within ten (10) school days after the date of the report of the incident of bullying was received and taking into consideration additional relevant information received during the investigation about the reported incident of bullying (updated 12/15/2021), and in doing so will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students or staff members involved.

During the investigation the Head of School will interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The Head of School will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. Interviews may be

conducted by the Head of School or other staff members as determined by the Head of School and in consultation with medical personnel, as appropriate. To the extent practicable and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the Head of School will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The Head of School will maintain a written record of the investigation. COMS considers bullying an extremely serious issue requiring immediate action in every case. At the same time, COMS takes care to protect the student body by not confusing behaviors typical of specific developmental stages, with bullying. For example, children in the 9-12 age-ranges begin to acquire increased social awareness. They may engage in cliquish behaviors, comparing themselves and testing their personal power with others, while simultaneously developing the skills required to constructively manage these dynamics. These conflicts, while upsetting for students and adults alike, are a natural stage of a child's development. The Head of School will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. School personnel must weigh all of the evidence objectively to determine whether the alleged events occurred and, if they did, whether the events constitute bullying or retaliation. The determination must be based upon all of the facts and circumstances and the perspective of a reasonable person. Courts have determined that, when applied to children, the "reasonable person" standard is that of a reasonable person of like age, intelligence, and experience under like circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the Head of School will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities.

The Head of School will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary and 3) record the plan on the Student Target Intervention Plan and the Aggressor Intervention Plan.

Depending upon the circumstances, the Head of School may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or a school psychologist, and the target's or aggressor's parents or guardians, to identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying behavior and to assess the level of need for additional social skills development.

The Head of School will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notice to parents will comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the Head of School cannot report specific information to the target's parent or guardian about the disciplinary action taken.

Discipline will be consistent with the school's discipline policy. The range of disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to, verbal warnings, written warnings, reprimands, reflective writing assignments, short term or long-term suspensions or expulsions from school. When disciplinary action is imposed and Parts I, II, and III of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Incident Reporting form has been completed, this becomes a permanent part of the student's or staff member's record.

Council Oak Montessori School's Bullying Policy is based on the engagement of all stakeholders – students, parents / legal guardians, staff, and the Board of Directors. It is in compliance with the Illinois State Board of Education guidelines for process and procedure. (Updated 12/15/2021)

Reviewed and approved by Board of Directors 08/08/2022