

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY FOR STUDENTS

As Christians, we believe that all persons are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth. Additionally, federal and state law prohibits racial, ethnic, religious, age or sexual harassment of any student or employee; the courts also hold schools responsible for taking appropriate action to address bullying/harassing behaviors which interfere with a student's educational process. Accordingly, and in faithfulness to its mission, Sacred Heart School does not tolerate any form of bullying, harassment, disruption of the educational process, or interference with another's educational or work environment. All students and employees are to be treated with dignity and respect. Bullying or harassment of another person of either gender in any form is prohibited. The prohibition against bullying and harassment applies to all students, employees, and volunteers in the school building, on school property, or at any time while representing the school.

Sacred Heart School is committed to a "zero indifference" approach which means that any and all witnessed or reported incidents of bullying or harassment will be addressed appropriately, which may include conferences with students and parents, conducting an investigation, the requirement of outside counseling, and taking disciplinary action as warranted (detention, demerits, suspension, expulsion) by the severity of the situation.

Prohibited bullying and harassment are defined as, but is not limited to, the following behaviors:

Sexual harassment/bullying: Unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when

- Submission to such conduct is made whether explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's educational development, participating in a school-related activity, or employment; or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for educational or employment decisions affecting such individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's school or work performance, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive school or work environment.
- Sexual harassment/bullying may also include spreading sexual rumors or making sexually suggestive or sexually abusive remarks.

Verbal bullying/harassment: includes, but is not limited to, the following whether in oral or in written form:

- Derogatory comments, jokes, slurs, off-color language or innuendos;
- Belligerent or threatening words communicated to another student or employee
- Name-calling, sarcasm and put-downs, mocking, belittling, hurtful teasing, taunting.

Social/relational aggression/harassment: is defined as the systemic diminishment of another's sense of self and/or damaging the social status, relationships, or reputation of another through:

- Ignoring, isolating, excluding, or shunning;

- A pattern of behavior in which a student or a group of students picks on another student or treats him/her in such a way that makes him/her feel uncomfortable or alienated;
- Spreading false and/or malicious rumors;
- Gossiping or revealing personal information; embarrassing or publicly humiliating another.

Cyber bullying/harassment: includes, but is not limited to, offending, harassing or threatening others through technological means, including email, instant messages, web pages, blogs, FaceBook or other social networking sites, video and digital photo images, and/or text messages; it is considered inappropriate speech when it involves

- Obscene, profane, lewd, vulgar, rude, inflammatory, threatening, or disrespectful messages;
- Posting information that could cause damage, danger, or disruption of the educational process;
- Making a personal attack, including prejudicial or discriminatory attacks;
- Knowingly or recklessly posting false or defamatory information about a person;
- Using technological communication to intimidate, bully, harass, or embarrass others in any area included in this policy.
- **PLEASE NOTE:** Students' home and personal use of technology can have an impact on the school and on other students. If a student's personal expression involving technology – such as a threatening message to another student or a violent website – creates a likelihood of disruption of the educational process, the student may face school discipline as well as criminal penalties. The courts have ruled, in fact, that the school has not only an ethical obligation but also a legal obligation to take action in these kinds of situations.

Visual bullying/harassment: includes derogatory, demeaning, or inflammatory posters or signs, cartoons, written words, drawings, video or photographic images, novelties, or gestures (including subtle gestures such as aggressive stares, eye rolling, sighs, frowns, sneers, snickers, and/or hostile body language.)

Physical bullying/harassment: includes unwanted physical touching or contact (such as shoving, pushing, bumping, hitting or slapping, tripping, poking, kicking, scratching) assault, deliberate impeding or blocking movement, or any intimidating interference with normal movement or work; it may also include damaging or destroying another's belonging's or property; it also includes physical acts that are demeaning and humiliating but not bodily harmful.

Retaliation: includes intimidation, coercion, discrimination, or retaliation in any form against an individual who reports or threatens to report harassment, or who testifies, assists, or participates in any manner in an investigation.

Disruption of the Educational Process

Behavior that disrupts the educational process, whether on school property or at school-sponsored events and activities, will not be tolerated and will subject the offending student to

appropriate disciplinary action. Behavior which disrupts the educational process includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Behavior which threatens the health, safety or welfare of others;
- Behavior which may damage public or private property, including the property of students or of faculty/staff;
- Illegal activity;
- Behavior that interferes with another student's access to educational benefit from institutional and extracurricular activities; or
- Behavior that disrupts the delivery of instructional services or interferes with the orderly administration of the school and school-related activities.

Complaint/Reporting/Follow-up Procedures

A student who feels that he/she is a victim of bullying/harassment is encouraged to confront the offender and clearly state that the behavior or conduct is offensive and needs to stop. Doing nothing, saying nothing, or trying to ignore the behavior of someone who is bullying or harassing is almost never interpreted by the perpetrator as sign that the student wants him/her to stop.

If the bullying/harassment continues, or if the student is not comfortable confronting the perpetrator, he/she has a responsibility to report the bullying/harassment as soon as possible to the principal who will investigate the complaint.

Any student who is not directly being bullied/harassed, but is an observer or third party who is offended by the behavior witnessed should bring the situation to the attention of the principal so the actions being witnessed can be investigated and possible corrective action taken. It should be noted here that in a school where integrity matters, students who are bystanders or witnesses have a responsibility to demonstrate compassionate support for the targeted student and to report dangerous behaviors and/or situations to appropriate school personnel.

Reports of bullying/harassment will be documented in writing by the principal and will include details of the incident(s), names of the individuals involved, and names of any witnesses.

Sacred Heart School follows a "zero indifference" approach which required all staff to respond to all incidents of bullying or harassment of which they are aware. The administration will take every report of bullying/harassment seriously. All reports of harassment will be investigated by the principal promptly and in an impartial and in as confidential a manner as possible.

If the school determines that bullying/harassment has occurred, effective remedial action will be taken in accordance with the circumstances involved. Any student determined by the administration to be responsible for bullying/harassment will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion; any employee determined by the administration to be responsible for unlawful harassment will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

For **unsubstantiated incidents**, parents of all involved students will be notified of allegations, investigation results, and recommended follow-up action, if any; counseling through the Berks County Intermediate Unit will be offered to any alleged perpetrator and victim. No student will be subjected to disciplinary or academic action in retaliation for any good faith report of

bullying/harassment or participating in an investigation about bullying/harassment under this policy.

For **substantiated incidents**,

- Appropriate disciplinary consequences will be applied to the offending student;
- Parents of all involved students will be notified of the incident(s), results, and school follow-up actions;
- If the bullying/harassment involves physical assault and/or threats or gestures to cause life-threatening harm to another person, law enforcement authorities will be notified of the incident for possible criminal investigation;
- Offenders, if allowed to remain in the Sacred Heart School community, will be required to participate in a minimum number (as determined by the administration) of counseling sessions with a counselor from the Berks County Intermediate Unit. If the counselor recommends outside assessment or work with an outside mental health professional, this must be pursued and will be the financial responsibility of the harasser and his/her parents;
- Victims will be offered counseling with a counselor from the Berks County Intermediate Unit.

Whatever action is taken against the offending student will be made known to the targeted student and his/her parents. If a student or his/her parents feel that a report of bullying/harassment has not been addressed properly or resolved to his/her/their satisfaction, he/she/they may bring the matter to the direct attention of the principal.