***DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD***

***Catholic Schools Office***

# BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

## Introduction:

The Diocese of Springfield ("Diocese") and the Catholic Schools Office ("CSO") believe that each Catholic school in the Diocese of Springfield must be aware that its purpose is rooted in the mission of the Church. Each Catholic school, in fulfilling its role within the educational mission of the Church, must share and live out, through Catholic Christian tradition, the message of Jesus Christ and be committed to providing an integrated Catholic educational environment that permeates all aspects of its daily life and operations.

Each child should be challenged to reach his/her full potential, develop a love of learning and learn in an environment that fosters respect and understanding of one another. It is essential that a safe, positive and productive educational environment be established where students can achieve the highest academic standards and where no student shall be subjected to Bullying, Cyber-Bullying or Retaliation. Bullying, Cyber-Bullying or Retaliation or other like disruptive or violent behaviors constitute conduct that disrupts both a student's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its students in a safe and embracing environment. Pastors, principals, faculty, Staff and volunteers are expected to demand that all students behave appropriately and treat others with civility and respect. Bullying, Cyber-Bullying and Retaliation are not to be tolerated.

Accordingly, Timothy A. McDonnell, Bishop of Springfield, (the "Bishop") hereby promulgates this Bullying Prevention Policy (the "Policy") which shall be applicable to all Catholic parish schools and all other Catholic schools over which the Bishop has authority to appoint trustees, directors, governors or officers (each herein sometimes referred to as a "school").

## Definitions.

For purposes of this Policy, the following definitions shall apply:

“Aggressor”, means a student who engages in Bullying or Retaliation.

“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 him/herself, or of damage to his/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 education process or the orderly operation of a school.

*For the purpose of this Policy, whenever the term "Bullying" is used it is to denote either Bullying or Cyber-Bullying.*

"Cyber-Bullying" means Bullying through the 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:

- wire
- radio
- electromagnetics
- photo-electronic or photo-optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications.

Cyber-Bullying shall also include the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or knowingly impersonates another person as author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of Bullying.

Cyber-Bullying 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 enumerated in the definition of Bullying.

"Hostile Environment" means 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 the student's education.

"Plan", a Bullying prevention and intervention plan established by a school.

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

"School Grounds" mean property on which a school building or facility is located or property that is owned, leased or used by a school for a school-sponsored activity, function, program, instruction or training.

"Staff" includes, but is not limited to, educators, faculty, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletics coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, and paraprofessionals.

"Target", a student against whom Bullying or Retaliation has been perpetrated.

## **Prohibition Against Bullying and Retaliation.**

Bullying is prohibited:

- On School Grounds owned, leased or used by a school;

- On property immediately adjacent to School Grounds;
- At any school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off School Grounds;
- At a school bus stop;
- On a school bus or any other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school; or,
- Through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by a school;

Bullying is also 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 a school if the act or acts in question:

- create a Hostile Environment at school for the Target;
- infringe on the rights of the Target at school; or
- materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

**Prevention and Intervention Plan.**

On or before December 31, 2010, the Principal (or the individual who holds a comparable position) (herein, the "Principal") of each school in the Diocese that is subject to this Policy shall be responsible for overseeing the development of a prevention and intervention plan (a "Plan"), in consultation with representative stakeholders, which may include teachers, Staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents and guardians, consistent with the requirements of this Policy, as well as Massachusetts and federal laws. In particular, reference is made to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 370. Written communication regarding the Bullying Plan including **Exhibit** E – Parent Information Sheet, should be sent to all school families in January, 2011 and at the start of every school year.

The Plan ***shall*** include, but not be limited to:

- descriptions of and statements prohibiting Bullying and Retaliation;
- clear procedures for students, Staff, parents, guardians and others to report Bullying or Retaliation;
- a provision that reports of Bullying or Retaliation may be made anonymously; provided, however, that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report;
- clear procedures for promptly responding to and investigating reports of Bullying or Retaliation;
- the range of disciplinary actions that may be taken against an Aggressor for Bullying or Retaliation; provided, however, that the disciplinary actions shall balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior;
- clear procedures for restoring a sense of safety for a Target and assessing that Target's needs for protection;
- strategies for protecting 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;

- procedures consistent with state and federal law for promptly notifying the parents or guardians of a Target and an Aggressor; provided, further, that the parents or guardians of a Target shall also be notified of the action taken to prevent any further acts of Bullying or Retaliation; and provided, further, that the procedures shall provide for immediate notification by the Principal or designee to the local law enforcement agency when criminal charges may be pursued against the Aggressor;
- a provision that a student who knowingly makes a false accusation of Bullying or Retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action; and
- a strategy for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for Aggressors and Targets and for appropriate family members of said students.

The Plan shall afford all students the same protection regardless of their status under the law. A school may establish separate discrimination or harassment policies that include categories of students. Nothing in the Plan shall prevent a school from remediating any discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, Massachusetts or federal law.

- Although not required by applicable Massachusetts law; the Plan may include·a provision for ongoing professional development to build the skills of all Staff members, including, but not limited to, the Principal, educators, faculty, Staff, custodians, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities and volunteers to prevent, identify and respond to Bullying.

The Plan shall include provisions for informing parents and guardians about the Bullying prevention curriculum of the school and shall include, but not be limited to: (i) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school or school plan; (ii) the dynamics of Bullying; and (iii) online safety and Cyber-Bullying.

The Plan shall be reviewed and updated at least every two years.

The Principal is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Bullying prevention and implementation plan within his or her school.

**Retaliation.**

Retaliation against a person who reports Bullying, provides information during an investigation of Bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about Bullying shall be prohibited.

**Training.**

Annual training on the Plan shall be provided for Staff and, at the discretion of the Principal, for volunteers who have significant contact with students.

**Publication and Notice.**

At the beginning of each school year, the Principal or his or her designee shall provide notice to the Staff of this Policy and the Plan. Relevant sections of the Plan relating to the duties of Staff shall be included in the school employee handbook.

Annual written notice of the relevant student-related sections of the Plan shall be included in the school handbook provided to students and their parents or guardians, in age-appropriate terms and in languages which are most prevalent among the students, parents or guardians.

The Plan shall be posted on the school's website.

**Reporting.**

A member of a Staff shall immediately report any instance of Bullying or Retaliation the Staff member has witnessed or become aware of to the school Principal or to the Staff member designated in the Plan as responsible for receiving such reports, or to both the Principal and such designee.

**Investigation.**

Upon receipt of such a report, the Principal or his or her designee shall promptly conduct an investigation.

**Minimum Required Actions.**

If the Principal or his or her designee determines that Bullying or Retaliation has occurred, he/she shall:

- notify the local law enforcement agency if the Principal or his or her designee believes that criminal charges may be pursued against an Aggressor;
- take appropriate disciplinary action;
- notify the parents or guardians of the Aggressor; and
- notify the parents or guardians of the Target and, to the extent consistent with Massachusetts and federal law, notify them of the action taken to prevent any further acts of Bullying or Retaliation.

If the reported incident of Bullying or Retaliation involves students from more than one school district, Catholic school, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the Principal or his or her designee first informed of the incident shall, subject to Massachusetts and federal law, promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school district or school(s) of the incident so that each school district and school may take appropriate action.

If an incident of Bullying or Retaliation occurs on School Grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the Principal or his or her designee informed

of such incident 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.

**Target Assistance.**

Each school shall provide counseling or referral to appropriate services, including guidance, academic intervention, and protection to students, both alleged Targets and Aggressors, affected by Bullying or Retaliation, as necessary.

**Available Consultation.**

If any Staff member has questions concerning this Policy, he or she is encouraged to contact the Catholic Schools Office or the Office of the General Counsel of the Diocese.