

# HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, DISCRIMINATION, AND BULLYING POLICY

Discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying are all disruptive behaviors, which interfere with students' ability to learn, negatively affect student engagement, diminish school safety, and contribute to a hostile school environment. As such, Bright Star Schools ("BSS" or the "Charter School"), prohibits any acts of discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying altogether.

As used in this policy, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying are described as the intentional conduct, including verbal, physical, written communication or cyber-bullying, including cyber sexual bullying, based on the actual or perceived characteristics of mental or physical disability, sex (including pregnancy and related conditions, and parental status), sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, immigration status, nationality (including national origin, country of origin, and citizenship), race or ethnicity (including ancestry, color, ethnic group identification, ethnic background, and traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles such as braids, locs, and twists), religion (including agnosticism and atheism), religious affiliation, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, age or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics or any combination of those characteristics or based on any other characteristic protected under applicable state or federal law or local ordinance. Hereafter, such actions are referred to as "misconduct prohibited by this Policy."

To the extent possible, BSS will make reasonable efforts to prevent students from being discriminated against, harassed, intimidated, and/or bullied, and will take action to investigate, respond, address and report on such behaviors in a timely manner. BSS school staff who witness acts of misconduct prohibited by this Policy will take immediate steps to intervene when safe to do so.

This policy applies to incidents occurring on the school campus, at school-sponsored events and activities regardless of the location, through school-owned technology, and through other electronic means, whether perpetrated by a student, employee, parent/guardian, volunteer, independent contractor or other person with whom BSS does business, and all acts of BSS's Board of Directors ("Board") in enacting policies and procedures that govern BSS.<sup>1</sup>

BSS complies with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations and local ordinances in its investigation of and response to reports of misconduct prohibited by this Policy.

## Definitions

**Harassment** means conduct based upon one or more of the protected characteristics listed above that is severe or pervasive, which unreasonably disrupts an individual's educational or work environment or that creates a hostile educational or work environment. Harassment includes, but is not limited to:

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<sup>1</sup> This policy becomes effective on August 1, 2024. Conduct occurring before August 1, 2024 will be addressed in accordance with the former version of this policy, which was entitled "Title IX, Harassment, Intimidation, Discrimination and Bullying Policy."

- Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes, comments or slurs.
- Physical conduct including assault, unwanted touching, intentionally blocking normal movement or interfering with work or school based on any of the protected characteristics listed above.
- Retaliation for reporting or threatening to report harassment.
- Differential or preferential treatment based on any of the protected characteristics listed above.

**Bullying** is defined as any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or by means of an electronic act. Bullying includes one or more acts committed by a student or group of students that may constitute hate violence, or creates an intimidating and/or hostile educational environment, directed toward one or more students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

- Placing a reasonable student <sup>2</sup>or students in fear of harm to that student's or those students' person or property.
- Causing a reasonable student to experience a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health.
- Causing a reasonable student to experience a substantial interference with the student's academic performance.
- Causing a reasonable student to experience a substantial interference with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by BSS.

**Cyberbullying** is an electronic act that includes the transmission of harassing communication, direct threats, or other harmful texts, sounds, video or images on the Internet, social media, or other technologies using a telephone, computer, or any wireless communication device. Cyberbullying also includes breaking into another person's electronic account and assuming that person's identity in order to damage that person's reputation.

**Electronic act** means the creation or transmission originated on or off the schoolsite, by means of an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, wireless telephone, or other wireless communication device, computer, or pager, of a communication, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

- A message, text, sound, video, or image.
- A post on a social network Internet Web site including, but not limited to:
  - Posting to or creating a burn page. A "burn page" means an Internet Web site created for the purpose of having one or more of the effects as listed in the definition of "bullying," above.
  - Creating a credible impersonation of another actual student for the purpose of having one or more of the effects listed in the definition of "bullying," above. "Credible impersonation" means to knowingly and without consent impersonate a student for the purpose of bullying the student and such that another student would reasonably believe, or has reasonably believed, that the student was or is the student who was impersonated.
  - Creating a false profile for the purpose of having one or more of the effects listed in the definition of "bullying," above. "False profile" means a profile of a fictitious

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<sup>2</sup> "Reasonable student" is defined as a student, including, but not limited to, a student with exceptional needs, who exercises average care, skill and judgement in conduct for a person of the student's age, or for a person of the student's age with the student's exceptional needs.

student or a profile using the likeness or attributes of an actual student other than the student who created the false profile.

- An act of “Cyber sexual bullying” including, but not limited to:
  - The dissemination of, or the solicitation or incitement to disseminate, a photograph or other visual recording by a student to another student or to school personnel by means of an electronic act that has or can be reasonably predicted to have one or more of the effects described in definition of “bullying,” above. A photograph or other visual recording, as described above, shall include the depiction of a nude, semi-nude, or sexually explicit photograph or other visual recording of a minor where the minor is identifiable from the photograph, visual recording, or other electronic act.
  - “Cyber sexual bullying” does not include a depiction, portrayal, or image that has any serious literary, artistic, educational, political, or scientific value or that involves athletic events or school-sanctioned activities.
- Notwithstanding the definitions of “bullying” and “electronic act” above, an electronic act shall not constitute pervasive conduct solely on the basis that it has been transmitted on the Internet or is currently posted on the Internet.

## **Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Procedures**

BSS has adopted the following procedures for preventing acts of bullying, including cyberbullying.

### **Cyberbullying Prevention Procedures**

BSS advises students:

- To never share passwords, personal data, or private photos online.
- To think about what they are doing carefully before posting and by emphasizing that comments cannot be retracted once they are posted.
- That personal information revealed on social media can be shared with anyone including parents, teachers, administrators, and potential employers. Students should never reveal information that would make them uncomfortable if the world had access to it.
- To consider how it would feel receiving such comments before making comments about others online.

BSS informs its employees, students, and parents/guardians of BSS’s policies regarding the use of technology in and out of the classroom. BSS encourages parents/guardians to discuss these policies with their children to ensure their children understand and comply with such policies.

### **Education**

BSS employees cannot always be present when bullying incidents occur, so educating students about bullying is a key prevention technique to limit bullying from happening. BSS advises students that hateful and/or demeaning behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable in our society and at BSS and encourages students to practice compassion and respect each other.

BSS educates students to accept all student peers regardless of protected characteristics (including but not limited to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identification, physical or cognitive disabilities, race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status) and about the negative impact of bullying other students based on protected characteristics.

BSS’s bullying prevention education also discusses the differences between appropriate and

inappropriate behaviors and includes sample situations to help students learn and practice appropriate behavior and to develop techniques and strategies to respond in a non-aggressive way to bullying-type behaviors. Students will also develop confidence and learn how to advocate for themselves and others, and when to go to an adult for help.

BSS informs BSS employees, students, and parents/guardians of this Policy and encourages parents/guardians to discuss this Policy with their children to ensure their children understand and comply with this Policy.

### **Professional Development**

BSS annually makes available the online training module developed by the California Department of Education pursuant Education Code section 32283.5(a) to its certificated employees and all other BSS employees who have regular interaction with students .

BSS informs certificated employees about the common signs that a student is a target of bullying including:

- Physical cuts or injuries
- Lost or broken personal items
- Fear of going to school/practice/games
- Loss of interest in school, activities, or friends
- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Anxious/sick/nervous behavior or distracted appearance
- Self-destructiveness or displays of odd behavior
- Decreased self-esteem

BSS also informs certificated employees about the groups of students determined by BSS and available research to be at elevated risk for bullying and provides its certificated employees with information on existing school and community resources related to the support of these groups. These groups include but are not limited to:

- Students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth (“LGBTQ”) and those youth perceived as LGBTQ; and
- Students with physical or learning disabilities.

BSS encourages its employees to demonstrate effective problem-solving, anger management, and self-confidence skills for BSS's students.

## **Complaint Procedures**

### **Scope of the Complaint Procedures**

BSS will comply with its Uniform Complaint Procedures (“UCP”) policy when investigating and responding to complaints alleging unlawful harassment, discrimination, intimidation or bullying against a protected group or on the basis of a person's association with a person or group with one or more of the protected characteristics set forth in the UCP that:

- Are written and signed;
- Filed by an individual who alleges that they have personally suffered unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying, or by one who believes any specific class of individuals has been subjected to discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying based on a protected characteristic, or by a duly authorized representative who alleges that an individual student has been subjected to discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying; and

- Submitted to the BSS UCP Compliance Officer not later than six (6) months from the date the alleged unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying occurred, or the date the complainant first obtained knowledge of the facts of the alleged discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying.

BSS will comply with its Title IX Policy when investigating and responding to complaints alleging sex discrimination, including sex-based harassment, in its education program or activity, as applicable.

The following procedures shall be utilized for complaints of misconduct prohibited by this Policy that do not fall within the scope of BSS's Title IX Policy or comply with the writing, timeline, or other formal filing requirements of the UCP. A copy of BSS's Title IX Policy and UCP is available on the Bright Star Schools website.

### **Submitting a Report or Complaint**

All staff are expected to provide appropriate supervision to enforce standards of conduct and, if they observe or become aware of misconduct prohibited by this Policy, to intervene when safe to do so, call for assistance, and report such incidents. The Board requires staff to follow the procedures in this Policy for reporting alleged acts of misconduct prohibited by this Policy.

Reports and complaints of misconduct prohibited by this Policy shall be submitted to the UCP Compliance Officer (or the Chair of the Board or designee if the complaint is against the Lead Executive Officer / CEO) as soon as possible after the incidents giving rise to the report or complaint.

Complaints regarding such misconduct may also be made to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Civil law remedies, including, but not limited to, injunctions, restraining orders, or other remedies or orders may also be available to complainants.

While submission of a written report is not required, and BSS will investigate and respond to all oral and written reports of misconduct prohibited by this Policy, the reporting party is encouraged to submit a written report. Reports may be made anonymously, but formal disciplinary action cannot be based solely on an anonymous report.

Students are expected to report all incidents of misconduct prohibited by this Policy and other verbal or physical abuses. Any student who feels they are a target of such behavior should immediately contact a teacher, counselor, the UCP Compliance Officer, a staff person or a family member so that the student can get assistance in resolving the issue in a manner that is consistent with this Policy.

BSS acknowledges and respects every individual's right to privacy. All reports and complaints shall be investigated in a manner that protects the confidentiality of the parties and the integrity of the process to the greatest extent possible. This includes keeping the identity of the reporter and/or complainant confidential, as appropriate, except to the extent necessary to comply with applicable law, carry out the investigation and/or to resolve the issue, as determined by BSS on a case-by-case basis.

BSS prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual who files a report or complaint, testifies, assists, participates, or refuses to participate in any investigation or proceeding related to misconduct prohibited by this Policy. Such participation or lack of participation shall not in any way affect the status, grades, or work assignments of the individual. Individuals alleging

retaliation in violation of this Policy may file a grievance using the procedures set forth in this Policy.

### **Investigation and Response**

Upon receipt of a report or complaint of misconduct prohibited by this Policy, the UCP Compliance Officer or designee will promptly initiate an investigation. In most cases, a thorough investigation will take no more than twenty-five (25) school days. If the UCP Compliance Officer (or administrative designee) determines that an investigation will take longer than twenty-five (25) school days and needs to be delayed or extended due to good cause, the Coordinator (or administrative designee) will inform the complainant of the reasons for the delay or extension and provide an approximate date when the investigation will be complete.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the UCP Compliance Officer or designee will, to the extent possible with respect to confidentiality laws, provide the complainant with information about the investigation and resolution of the incident/situation. However, the UCP Compliance Officer or designee will not reveal confidential information related to other students or employees.

If the complaint is against the Lead Executive Officer / CEO, a non-employee Board member who is not the Board Chair or a parent/guardian of a student at BSS will conduct a fact-finding investigation and provide the complainant with information about the investigation and resolution of the incident/situation.

### **Consequences**

Students or employees who engage in misconduct prohibited by this Policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from BSS or termination of employment.

### **Right of Appeal**

Should a complainant find BSS's resolution unsatisfactory, for complaints within the scope of this Policy, the complainant may, within five (5) business days of notice of BSS's decision or resolution, submit a written appeal to the Chair of the BSS Board, who will serve as the decisionmaker for the appeal or designate a decisionmaker for the appeal. The decisionmaker for the appeal will notify the complainant of the final decision.

## **HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, DISCRIMINATION & BULLYING COMPLAINT FORM**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Alleged Incident(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person(s) you have a complaint against: \_\_\_\_\_

List any witnesses that were present: \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the incident(s) occur? \_\_\_\_\_

Please describe the events or conduct that are the basis of your complaint by providing as much factual

detail as possible (i.e., specific statements and conduct; what, if any, physical contact was involved; any verbal statements etc.) (Attach additional pages, if needed):

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**I hereby authorize BSS to disclose the information I have provided as it finds necessary in pursuing its investigation. I hereby certify that the information I have provided in this complaint is true and correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief. I further understand that providing false information in this regard could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination or expulsion from BSS.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Complainant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

**To be completed by BSS:**

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up Meeting with Complainant held on: \_\_\_\_\_  
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