

YOUTH CONNECTION CHARTER SCHOOL – ANTI-BULLYING POLICY SY 2024-26

Board Approved 4/5/2024

Purpose

The Illinois General Assembly has found that a safe and civil school environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve. Bullying and biased-based behaviors cause physical, psychological, and emotional harm to students and interfere with their ability to learn and participate in school activities. Bullying has been linked to other forms of antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, shoplifting, skipping school, dropping out of school, fighting, using drugs and alcohol, and sexual harassment and violence. It is the goal of the Chicago Board of Education and Youth Connection Charter School (YCCS) to create a learning environment in all its school communities where students are protected from bullying, so they feel safe and supported in their efforts to succeed academically and develop emotionally into responsible, caring individuals.

YCCS asks every campus student, with the support of their parent(s), guardian(s), and the adults at school, to commit to the following principles, which will apply to everyone on school property and at school-related activities:

- I will not bully or intentionally harm others.
- I will try to help anyone I suspect is being bullied.
- I will work to include students who are left out.
- If someone is being bullied, I will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

Scope

Bullying is contrary to Illinois law and this policy is consistent with the local, and federal, Illinois School Code. This policy protects YCCS students against bullying and harassment based on actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin or immigration status, ancestry, physical appearance, socioeconomic status, academic status, pregnancy, parenting status, homelessness, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender-related identity or expression, childbirth, breastfeeding, and pregnancy-related medical conditions, genetic information unfavorable discharge from military service, political belief or affiliation, or based on a person's association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic. YCCS recognizes the vulnerability of students with actual or perceived disabilities and those who identify as or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Nothing in this policy is intended to infringe upon any expression protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Section 3 of Article 1 of the Illinois Constitution.

Bullying and harassment are prohibited:

- (1) During any school-sponsored or school-sanctioned program or activity.
- (2) In school, on school property, on school buses or other YCCS-provided transportation, and at designated locations for students to wait for buses and other YCCS-provided transportation ("bus stops").
- (3) Through the transmission of information from a YCCS computer or computer network, or other electronic school equipment.
- (4) When communicated through any electronic technology or personal electronic device while on school property, on school buses, or other YCCS-provided transportation at bus stops and at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities.
- (5) When it is conveyed that a threat will be carried out in a school setting, including threats made outside school hours with intent to carry them out during any school-related or sponsored program or activity or on YCCS-provided transportation.

- (6) When it is a Student Code of Conduct group 5 or 6 offense that occurs off campus but seriously disrupts any student's education.

Definitions:

"Bias-based Behavior" is any physical, verbal, nonverbal, or other act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a member or perceived member of a protected category within the school community that is of a discriminatory or harmful nature.

"Bullying" means any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students, and meets all the following criteria:

1. An observed or perceived imbalance of power exists between the person(s) engaging in the bullying behavior(s) and the targeted student(s); and/or student(s) were targeted based on prejudice or bias (as defined below).
2. The behaviors are severe or pervasive (repeated over time), or there is a high likelihood that behaviors will be repeated. While bullying is often characterized by repeated acts, sometimes a single incident constitutes bullying depending on the severity and if other elements of bullying are present.
3. The intent of the person(s) engaging in the behavior is to cause physical or emotional harm to the targeted student(s).
4. The behavior has or can be reasonably predicted to have one or more of the following effects:
 - (1) Placing the student in reasonable fear or harm to the student's person or property.
 - (2) Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health.
 - (3) Substantially interfering with the student's academic performance; or
 - (4) Substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities or privileges provided by a school.

Bullying may take various forms, including without limitations, one or more of the following: harassment, threats, intimidation, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, theft public humiliation, destruction of property, or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

Bullying behavior may also qualify as other inappropriate behaviors listed in the Discipline Policy. When deciding whether inappropriate behavior constitutes bullying. Administrators should consider the student's intent, the frequency or recurrence of inappropriate behavior, and whether there are power imbalances between the students involved. While bullying is often characterized by repeated acts, sometimes a single incident constitutes bullying depending on the student's intent and power imbalances.

"Cyberbullying" means using information and communication technologies to bully. This definition does not include cyberbullying by means of technology that is not owned, leased, or used by the school district unless an administrator or teacher receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred. This policy does not require a district or school to staff or monitor any non-school-related activity, function, or program.

"Discrimination" is treating an individual less favorably because of their actual or perceived membership in one or more of the Protected Categories.

“Harassment” is any unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, visual, or physical conduct that is based on an individual’s actual or perceived membership in one or more of the Protected Categories, as defined in the Final New Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct And Retaliation Policy, that is persistent, pervasive, or severe and objectively offensive and unreasonably interferes with, limits, or denies an individual’s educational or employment access, benefits, or opportunities. Unwelcome conduct may include but is not limited to, bullying, intimidation, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets, or name-calling, assaults or threats, touching, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, messages sent via email, text or social media, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, conduct of a sexual nature, or any other sex-based conduct.

“Microaggressions” are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their actual or perceived Protected Category membership such as race, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Adapted from Wing Sue, Derald. "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," 2010).

“Protected Categories” are an individual’s actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender or sex (includes gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and pregnancy-related medical conditions), race or ethnicity, ethnic group identification, ancestry, nationality, national origin, religion, color, mental or physical disability, age (40 and above), immigration status, marital status, registered domestic partner status, genetic information, political belief or affiliation (not union-related), military status, unfavorable discharge from military service, or based on a person's association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics, or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law, ordinance, or regulation.

“Peer Conflict” means disagreements and oppositional interactions that are situational, immediate and developmentally appropriate. Conflicts arise when two or more students with relatively similar observed or perceived power have differences in opinion or perspectives. When school employees are aware of peer conflict, they are expected to guide students in developing new skills in social competency, learning personal boundaries and peaceably resolving conflict, and to model appropriate social interactions.

“Racial Discrimination” is any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, community, national or ethnic origin which has the impact of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, of a right to an equitable educational experience and fundamental freedoms in the social, economic, cultural, political, and linguistic aspects of school, school and district life (Adapted from United Nations, 2019).

“Retaliation” means any form of intimidation, or reprisal including but not limited to the submission of knowingly false bullying allegations, or harassment directed against a student, who reports bullying or provides information during an investigation, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying. Retaliation is prohibited and will result in the imposition of appropriate interventions/consequences according to this Policy.

“Restorative Practices” means a continuum of school-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline that: (i) are adapted to the particular needs of the school and community, (ii) contribute to maintaining school safety, (iii) protect the integrity of a positive and productive learning climate, (iv) teach students the personal and interpersonal skills they will need to be successful in school and society, (v) serve to build and restore relationships among students, families, schools and communities, and (vi) reduce the likelihood of future disruption by balancing accountability with an understanding of students’ behavioral health needs to keep students in school, and (vii) increase student accountability if the incident of bullying is based on religion, race, ethnicity, or any other category that is identified in the Illinois Human Rights Act.

Preventing Bullying

All YCCS principals and staff shall work to develop safe, supportive school environments that prevent bullying through:

- **Developing supportive school climate strategies**, including clear expectations and shared agreements to guide interactions between students, and between staff and students.
- **Teaching all students social and emotional skills** and establishing classroom and school-wide practices that promote relationship-building, including teaching all school stakeholders to speak out when they see or hear bullying, degrading language, and bias or prejudice.
- Establish predictable responses and **effective disciplinary practices** that address root causes, teach skills, build empathy, and repair harm. Ensure all students, staff, and stakeholders know how your school plans to respond to bullying and harassment.

Intervening to Address Bullying or Biased Behavior

Responsibilities of YCCS Employees and Contractors

All YCCS employees and contractors, including security officers, lunchroom staff and bus drivers, who witness incidents of bullying, bias-based or school violence or who possess reliable information that would lead a reasonable person to suspect that a person is a target of bullying must:

- (1) Intervene immediately in a manner that is appropriate to the context and ensure the safety of all people involved.
- (2) Report the incident of bullying/biased behavior or retaliation to the Principal/Designee as soon as practicable, but within 24 hours, on the YCCS Bullying Complaint Form (Attachment A);
- (3) Cooperate fully in any investigation of the incident and in implementing any safety plan established by the Principal/Designee.

Responsibilities of Students, Parents, and Guardians

No student who witnesses bullying or biased behavior may stand by or participate in the bullying but must notify an adult at school and adult at home as quickly as practical. Any parent or guardian who witnesses or is notified of bullying must advise the Principal/Designee as quickly as practical. Reports can be made to any YCCS employee or contractor in person, by completing attachment A and submitting it to the Principal/Designee, or by calling the YCCS offices at (312)328-0799. Anonymous reports will be accepted by the Principal/Designee and YCCS. No disciplinary action will be taken on the sole basis of an anonymous report.

Reporting Bullying/Bias-Based Behavior

School-based staff who witness or become aware of must report any instances of Bullying/Bias-based behaviors to the principal who must complete a Report Form and answer the question regarding Bullying harm.

Students who experience or witness Bullying behaviors are to report these to a school-based staff member or call M. Franco at the YCCS offices at (312) 328-0799. Alternatively, students can also make reports directly to the Office of Student Protections and Title IX in the following ways:

- Online: Complete and submit a complaint form located at cps.edu/osp
- Via Email: Submit complaints to civilrights@cps.edu.
- Via Telephone: Submit complaints to 773-535-4400.
- In Person or By Mail: Submit complaints directly to OSP in person or via USPS mail to 110 N. Paulina St., Chicago, 60612.

C. Steps for Investigating Bullying Reports

1. **Ensure safety.** The Principal or his/her designee will provide immediate support to any targeted student(s) to ensure safety. If there are overt or implied risks of safety, follow the steps in the CPS Crisis Manual, including immediately notifying the CPS Student Safety Center and the YCCS office. Alleged behaviors targeted at sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression should be reported immediately to YCCS and to the Office of Student Protections and Title IX for assistance and support at the OSP Hotline: (773) 535-4400.
2. **Notify parents/guardians of all involved students.** Within one school day of receipt of a bullying report, the Principal/Designee shall report to the parent/legal guardian of all involved students, via telephone, personal conference and/or in writing, the occurrence of any alleged incident of bullying, and shall document these notifications in the PowerSchool system.
 - a) Notifications should be made privately to students directly involved and their parents/legal guardians.
 - b) Additionally, when incidents have a larger impact on the school community, the Principal/Designee shall provide clear communication to students, staff and parents to reinforce school-wide expectations and a climate of respect and inclusion.
3. **Document all allegations of bullying.** Within two school days of receiving a report of bullying, the Principal/Designee will document the allegation in the PowerSchool student information system as a general incident report and document all notifications made.
4. **Conduct an investigation.** The principal and/or a designee, who is knowledgeable about bullying prevention and intervention, shall perform the investigation. Investigation of reported bullying shall be initiated within 5 school days of receipt of a report, documented within the incident report in the PowerSchool student information system, and completed within 10 school days

The investigation shall include:

- a. Identifying all involved parties, including the student(s) alleged to have engaged in bullying behaviors, alleged target(s), and bystander(s), as well as any adult who witnessed the incident or may have reliable information about it.
- b. Conducting an individual interview in a private setting with all involved parties. The alleged target should never be interviewed in public or with the student(s) alleged to have engaged in bullying.
- c. Determining how often the conduct occurred, any past incident or continuing pattern of behavior, and whether the target's education was affected.
- d. Assessing the individual and school-wide effects of the incident relating to safety.
5. **When the investigation is complete,** the Principal/Designee shall consider whether the four elements of the bullying definition are met or if all four elements of bullying are not present, whether the behavior qualifies as another inappropriate behavior listed in the SCC. When the investigation is complete, the Principal/Designee shall ensure the investigation and findings (whether the report of bullying is substantiated or not substantiated) are documented in the YCCS PowerSchool student information system. If the investigation determines a student engaged in bullying behaviors and/or other inappropriate behaviors listed in the SCC, the Principal/Designee shall prepare a Misconduct Report.

6. Notify all involved parties of the outcome of the investigation. Within one day of making a determination, the Principal/Designee shall notify in writing the parent/legal guardian of all involved students of the outcome of the investigation. Parents/legal guardians of the students who are parties to the investigation may request a personal conference with the Principal/Designee to discuss the investigation, the findings, the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying, and any resources available in or outside the school to help the students address the underlying reasons for the bullying. Consistent with federal and state laws and rules governing student privacy rights, the Principal/Designee shall promptly inform the parent/guardian of all students involved in the alleged incident of bullying and discuss, as appropriate, the availability of social work services, counseling, school psychological services, other interventions, and restorative measures. The Principal/Designee shall document each of these notifications to parent(s)/guardian(s).

When communicating incidents of bullying to the target's parent/guardian, the Principal/Designee should consider whether the student may want to keep certain information confidential. For example, if a student is bullied after coming out as gay; the Principal/Designee shall not disclose the student's sexual orientation to the parent/guardian without the student's permission unless there is a legitimate, school-related reason for doing so.

If the target is a student with a disability that affects social skill development or makes the student vulnerable to bullying, the school shall convene the IEP Team to determine whether additional or different special education or related services are needed to address the student's individual needs and revise the IEP accordingly. For example, the IEP Team should consider a behavior intervention plan for the student or review and revise an existing plan if necessary.

In cases where the student engaging in bullying behavior has a disability, the Principal/Designee shall ask the student's IEP Team to consider whether the IEP should include provisions to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying. The IEP Team should also determine if additional support and services are needed to address the inappropriate behavior and examine the environment in which the bullying occurred to determine if changes are warranted. The Principal/Designee shall comply with the Procedural Safeguards for Discipline of Students with Disabilities/Impairments when considering interventions and consequences for students with disabilities.

Assigning Interventions and/or Consequences

Many Peer Conflicts can be resolved immediately and do not require reporting or creation of a Misconduct or Incident Report. If, however, a conflict is ongoing and meets the definition of bullying, the investigation procedures in this policy must be followed.

Schools must respond 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 problem behavior and performance. Appropriate responses and consequences are outlined in the Student Code of Conduct. Schools should avoid using punitive discipline (detention, suspensions, and expulsions) if any other method or consequence can be used with fidelity. Contact Youth Connection Charter School for more information about the appropriate and legal consequences of student misconduct.

When an investigation determines that bullying occurred, the Principal/Designee shall explain the consequences in a non-hostile manner and shall impose any consequence immediately and consistently. The Principal/Designee shall keep communicating and working with all parties involved until the situation is resolved. Some key indicators of resolution include:

- The perpetrator is no longer bullying and is interacting civilly with the target.
- The target reports feeling safe and interacting civilly with the perpetrator.
- School staff notice an increase in positive behavior and social-emotional competency in the perpetrator and/or the target.
- School staff noticed a more positive climate in the areas where bullying incidents were high.

What Not to Do:

- Solicit an apology from the perpetrator to the target, use peace circles, victim/offender conferences, or any form of mediation that puts the perpetrator and target in contact with one another in an immediate attempt to resolve the bullying. Restorative approaches may be helpful but only if used after the interventions have balanced the power differential between the perpetrator and target.
- Dismiss bullying as typical student behavior or assume it is not serious.

Referrals

Interventions with bullies should not focus on feelings but on changing thinking. The Principal/Designee shall refer students who bully to positive-behavior small-group interventions (for anger management, trauma, or social skills), social work, counseling, or school psychological services within the community and/or school, if possible, to reinforce the behavioral expectation they violated and increase their social-emotional competency.

The targets of bullying need protection from bullies but may also need support and help in changing their own behavior. The Principal/Designee shall ask a school mental health professional to refer these students to individual or group therapy where they can openly express their feelings about their bullying experience, social-skills training and/or groups where they can practice assertiveness and coping mechanisms, or social work, counseling or school psychological services available within the school.

Appeal

Any party who is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation may appeal to the Office of Student Protections and Title IX (OSP) within 15 calendar days of the notification of the principal's decision. OSP can be reached at 773-535-4400. OSP shall render a final determination in accordance with the timeline and procedures set out in the anti-bullying appeal guidelines established by OSP. OSP/YCCS may return the incident to the principal or designee for further investigation or reconsideration of the consequence(s), direct the imposition of other consequence(s), or deny the appeal. OSP shall notify the party requesting the appeal and the principal that its decision is final and shall document that notification in PowerSchool.

Consequences for YCCS Employees and Contractors

When it is determined that an employee or contractor was aware that bullying and Bias-based and discriminatory behavior was taking place but failed to report it, the employee/contractor will be considered to have violated this policy. The principal shall consider employee discipline for such violations in accordance with the YCCS Employee Discipline and Due Process Policy. Remedies concerning contractors will be in accordance with their contracts.

Notice and Dissemination of Requirements

Principals shall follow the requirements established by YCCS for posting this Anti-Bullying Policy on the school's website and in the school building. Additionally, principals shall disseminate and present this policy to the school staff as part of professional development prior to the start of the school year.

Training and Professional Development

On-going professional development will be offered to teachers, administrators, board members, school resource officers and staff on adverse consequences of school exclusion and justice-system involvement, classroom management, culturally responsive discipline and development of appropriate disciplinary methods that promote positive school climate.

Professional development will be offered to build the skills of all Campus personnel as well as YCCS/Contractors and volunteers to implement this policy. The Content of such professional development shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) Developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent incidents of bullying and to intervene immediately and effectively to stop them as well as effective interventions when bullying occurs;
- (2) Information about the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, target, and witness to the bullying.
- (3) Research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk, and any specific interventions that may be particularly effective for addressing bias-based bullying; and
- (4) Information about internet safety issues as they relate to cyber bullying.

Student Internet Safety Education

In accordance with YCCS' Internet Safety Policy, each campus shall incorporate into the school curriculum a component on Internet safety to be taught at least once each school year to all students. The Chief Office of Teaching and Learning or designee shall determine the scope and duration of this unit of instruction and the topics covered. At a minimum, the unit of instruction shall address: (a) safety on the internet; (b) appropriate behavior while online, on social networking Websites, and in chat rooms; and (c) cyberbullying awareness and response. The age-appropriate unit of instruction may be incorporated into the current courses of study regularly taught.

Distribution & Review

This policy shall be posted on the Youth Connection Charter School website and included in the student handbook, and, where applicable, posted where other policies, rules, and standards of conduct are currently posted. The policy also must be distributed annually to parents/guardians, students, and school personnel, including new employees when hired, and must also be provided periodically throughout the school year to students and faculty. YCCS shall review and re-evaluate this policy and make necessary and appropriate revisions every two years and file the updated policy with the Illinois State Board of Education. The policy must be based on the engagement of a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents/guardians. The principals/designees shall assist with the evaluation and assessment of this policy's outcomes and effectiveness. This process shall include, without limitation:

- The frequency of victimization
- Student, staff, and family observations of safety at a school
- Identification of areas of a school where bullying occurs
- The types of bullying utilized
- Bystander intervention or participation

The evaluation process may include the use of relevant data and information that the school already collects for other purposes. The relevant information must be provided to school administrators, board members, school personnel, parents/guardians, and students.

This policy is consistent with the policies of the school board, charter school, or non-public, non-sectarian elementary or secondary school.

**Attachment A
Form for Reporting Bullying and Retaliation**

NOTE: The reporter may remain anonymous, but no discipline will be imposed based solely upon an anonymous report.

Please submit this report to the principal or any school staff member. You may also fax your report to Youth Connection Charter School at (312) 328-0971 or email to: mfranco@yccs.org

Victim or Target Information

Campus: _____

Name(s) of Victim/Target:

Reporting information (*Optional for students/parents/guardians)

Name & Title of Person Reporting _____

Relationship to Victim/Target: _____

Phone: _____ Email Address: _____

Incident Information

Name(s) of students engaging in bullying behaviors OR Description (if name(s) unknown):

Location of incident: _____

Date and time of incident: _____

Approximate dates, time, and frequency of prior incident(s) _____

Describe what happened and who was present in as much detail as possible (required information)

Date of submission: _____

