



Village Leadership Academy
Bullying Prevention Policy
15-016-182X-01

Bullying Prevention Policy

Village Leadership Academy finds that a safe, civil, and healthy school environment is necessary for all students to learn and achieve. Bullying, intimidation, and harassment causes physical, psychological, and emotional harm to students and interferes with a safe, civil, and healthy learning environment and students' ability to learn and participate in school activities, thus diminishing a school's ability to effectively educate. Preventing students from engaging in these disruptive behaviors and providing all students equal access to a safe, non-hostile learning environment is an essential school priority and goal. Additionally, bullying has been linked to other forms of antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, shoplifting, skipping, or dropping out of school, fighting, use of drugs/alcohol, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.

I. Scope

- A. Bullying is contrary to Illinois state law and the policy of Village Leadership Academy (VLA) and It Takes a Village Family of Schools. This policy protects VLA students against bullying and harassment which may take various forms, including without limitation 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.
- B. Nothing in this policy 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 Section 3 of Article I of the Illinois Constitution.
- C. This policy is based on the engagement of a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents/legal guardians. It Takes A Village Family of Schools Board or its designee will reevaluate this policy every two (2) years based on an assessment of its outcomes and effectiveness, including, but not limited to, factors such as the frequency of victimization; student, staff and family observations of safety at school; identification of areas of a school where bullying occurs; the types of bullying utilized; and bystander intervention or participation. The information developed will be made available on the school's website.
- D. This Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy is consistent with It Takes a Village Family of Schools Board and Village Leadership Academy.

II. Prohibition Against Bullying and Harassment

- A. Bullying on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin, 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, unfavorable discharge status from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic is prohibited.
- B. No student shall be subjected to bullying in each of the following situations:
 - 1. During any school-sponsored education program or activity;
 - 2. While in school, on school property, on school buses or other school vehicles, at designated school bus stops waiting for the school bus, or at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities;

3. Through the transmission of information from a school computer, a school computer network, or other similar electronic school equipment; or
4. Through the transmission of information from a computer that is accessed at a nonschool-related location, activity, function, or program or from the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by the School District or school if the bullying causes a substantial disruption to the educational process or orderly operation of a school. This paragraph (item #4) applies only in cases in which a school administrator or teacher receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred and does not require school personnel to staff or monitor any non-school related activity, function, or program. Bullying and harassment are prohibited in Village Leadership Academy.

III. Definitions

A. Definitions from Section 27-23.7 of the School Code (105 ILCS 5/27-23.7)

1. *Bullying* includes *cyber-bullying* and means 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:
 - a) Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;
 - b) Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;
 - c) Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; or
 - d) Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

Bullying, as defined in this subsection may take various forms, including without limitation 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.

2. *Cyber-bullying* means 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, photo-electronic 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*. *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.

3. *Harassment* means written, verbal, or physical conduct that adversely affects the ability of one or more students to participate in or benefit from the school's educational programs or activities because the conduct is so severe, persistent, or pervasive. This includes conduct that is based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender-related identity or expression, or unfavorable discharge from military service. This also includes association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics.
4. *Restorative measures* means a continuum of school-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, 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, (vi) reduce the likelihood of future disruption by balancing accountability with an understanding of students' behavioral health needs in order 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.
5. *School personnel* means persons employed by, on contract with, or who volunteer in a school district, charter school, or non-public, non-sectarian elementary or secondary school, including without limitation school and school district administrators, teachers, school guidance counselors, school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, school resource officers, and security guards.
6. *Retaliation* means any form of intimidation, reprisal including but not limited to the submission of knowingly false bullying allegations, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, 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.

IV. Preventing Bullying

- A. VLA administrative staff shall work to develop a safe, supportive school environment that prevents bullying through:
 1. Developing supportive school climate strategies, including clear expectations and share agreements to guide interactions between students, and between staff and students.
 2. 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.

3. Establish predictable responses and effective disciplinary practices that address root cause, teach skills, build empathy, and repair harm. Ensure all students, staff, and stakeholders know how VLA plans to respond to bullying and harassment.
- B. The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall post this policy on Village Leadership Academy's existing, publicly accessible Internet website. Additionally, it will be included in the student handbook and where applicable, posted where other policies, rules, and standards of conduct are currently posted in the school. The policy will be provided periodically throughout the school year to students and faculty and will be distributed annually to parents, guardians, students, and school personnel, including new employees when hired.

V. Policy Evaluation

- A. This policy is based on the engagement of a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents or guardians. Furthermore, the policy is consistent with the other policies of VLA and It Takes A Village Family of Schools.
- B. The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall assist It Takes A Village Family of Schools Board with its review and re-evaluation of this policy every two years to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of this policy and shall make any necessary and appropriate revisions. This evaluation process shall include, without limitation:
1. The frequency of victimization;
 2. Student, staff, and family observations of safety at school;
 3. Identification of areas of the school where bullying occurs;
 4. The types of bullying utilized; and
 5. Bystander intervention or participation.
- C. The evaluation process may use relevant data and information that It Takes A Village Family of Schools already collects for other purposes. The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students or designee must post the information developed as a result of the policy evaluation on the school website, or if a website is not available, the information must be provided to school administrators, Board members, school personnel, parents/legal guardians, and students.
- D. No later than September 30 of the subject year, the policy must be filed with the State Board of Education after being updated.

VI. Bullying Report Process & Response to Bullying Reports

- A. Responsibilities of VLA Employees and Contractors
1. All VLA employees and school personnel, including security officers, lunchroom staff and bus drivers, who witness incidents of bullying 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:
 - a) intervene immediately in a manner that is appropriate to the context and ensures the safety of all people involved;
 - b) report the incident of bullying or retaliation to the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students as soon as practicable, but within 24 hours, on the Discipline Referral Form;

and

- c) cooperate fully in any investigation of the incident and in implementing any safety plan established by the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students.

B. Responsibilities of Students, Parents, and Guardians

1. Students, parents, and school personnel are encouraged to immediately report bullying to a school administrator within 24 hours. Alternatively, reports may be made orally or in writing to the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students or bullying report manager.
2. No student who witnesses bullying may stand by or participate in the bullying, but must notify an adult at school and an adult at home as quickly as practicable.
3. Any parent or guardian who witnesses or is notified of bullying has an obligation to advise the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students as quickly as practicable.
4. Reports can be made to any VLA school personnel in person, by calling the VLA front desk at 1-312-675-0056, or by emailing dharris@vlacademy.org.
5. Anonymous reports will be accepted by the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students. However, formal disciplinary action cannot be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

C. Steps for Investigating Bullying Reports

1. **Ensure safety.** The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students 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 VLA Crisis Management Plan, including immediately notifying It Takes A Village Family of Schools Headquarters Office. Alleged behaviors targeted at sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression should be reported immediately to It Takes A Village Family of Schools Headquarters Office for assistance and support: (312) 868-0588.
2. **Notify parents/guardians of all involved students.** Upon receipt of a report of bullying, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students will investigate whether such reported act of bullying is within the permissible scope of its jurisdiction.

Consistent with federal and State laws and rules governing student privacy rights, the parents or guardians of all students involved in an alleged incident of bullying will be notified of such, along with threats, suggestions, or instances of self-harm determined to be the result of bullying, within 24 hours after the school's administration is made aware of the student's involvement in the incident. As appropriate, the school's administration shall also discuss the availability of social work services, counseling, school psychological services, other interventions, and restorative measures. The school shall make diligent efforts to notify a parent or legal guardian, utilizing all contact information the school has available or that can be reasonably obtained by the school within the 24-hour period.

Further, the administrator or report manager will promptly investigate and address the report of bullying by doing the following:

- a) Making all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within 10 school days after the date the report of the incident of bullying was received, taking into

consideration additional relevant information received during the course of the investigation about the reported incident of bullying.

- b) Involving appropriate school support personnel and other staff persons with knowledge, experience, and training on bullying prevention, as deemed appropriate, in the investigation process.
 - c) Notifying the principal, school administrator, or his/her designee of the report of the incident of bullying as soon as possible after the report is received (if the principal or administrator is not the person who received the report.)
 - d) Consistent with federal and State laws and rules governing student privacy rights, providing parents and guardians of the students who are parties to the investigation information about the investigation and an opportunity to meet with the principal or school administrator or his or her designee to discuss the investigation, its findings, and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying.
 - e) The principal, administrator, or his/her designee may implement interventions to address reports of bullying. This includes, but is not limited to, school social worker services, restorative measures, social-emotional skill building, counseling, school psychological services, and community-based services. Additionally, the principal, administrator, or his/her designee shall provide the victim with information regarding services that are available within the district and community, such as counseling, support services, and other programs.
 - f) Further, when incidents have a larger impact on the school community, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students 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/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students will document the allegation in the VLA student information system as a general incident report and document all notifications made.
4. **Conduct an investigation.** The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students, who is knowledgeable about bullying prevention and intervention, shall perform the investigation. For guidance, contact It Takes A Village Family of Schools Headquarters Office at (312) 868-0588.
- a) Investigation of reported bullying shall be initiated within 5 school days of receipt of a report, documented within the incident report in the VLA student information system, and completed within 10 school days, unless the Principal grants in writing an additional 5-day extension due to extenuating circumstances.
 - b) The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall document the extension in the investigation report and shall notify the parties involved. The investigation shall include:
 - (1) Identifying all involved parties, including the student(s) alleged to have engaged in the bullying behaviors, alleged target(s) and bystander(s), as

well as any adult who witnessed the incident or may have reliable information about it.

- (2) 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.
- (3) Determining how often the conduct occurred, any past incident or continuing pattern of behavior, and the impact of the behaviors on the targeted student's education.
- (4) Assessing the individual and school-wide effects of the incident relating to safety and assigning school staff to create and implement a safety plan that will restore a sense of safety for the target and other students who have been impacted.

5. **Make a determination whether allegations of bullying are substantiated or not and document determination.** The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students 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 Student Code of Conduct (SCC). When the investigation is complete, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall ensure the investigation and findings (whether the report of bullying is substantiated or not substantiated) are documented in the VLA student information system. If the investigation determines a student engaged in bullying behaviors and/or other inappropriate behaviors listed in the SCC, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall prepare a Misconduct Report.
 - a) A reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying **is prohibited**. Such reprisal or retaliation will be treated as *bullying* for the purpose of determining appropriate consequences.
 - b) No person will be subject to consequences for making a good-faith report of bullying. However, making a false accusation of bullying or providing knowingly false information as a means of retaliation or as a means of bullying is prohibited and will be treated as *bullying* for the purpose of determining appropriate consequences.
6. **Notify all involved parties of the outcome of the investigation.** Within one day of making a determination, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall notify, in writing, the parents/legal guardians of all students involved 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/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students to discuss the investigation, the findings of the investigation, 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.
 - a) When communicating incidents of bullying to the targeted student's parent/ legal guardian, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students 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/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students 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.

- b) If the investigation determines a student engaged in bullying behaviors, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall provide the Misconduct Report to the parent/ legal guardians of the student who engaged in the behaviors. The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students may advise the parent/legal guardian of other involved students that the Student Code of Conduct was followed. S/he may not advise them of specific consequences imposed, as that would violate the confidentiality of school-record information required by law.

D. Determining an Appropriate Response

1. The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall use interventions to address bullying, that may include, but are not limited to, school social work services, restorative measures, social-emotional skill building, counseling, school psychological services, and community-based services.
2. The goal of the response is to ensure the targeted student feels safe and welcome, and the student engaging in bullying behaviors understands the harm they caused and changes their behavior.

a) Identify school risk factors and ensure a universal strategy for school climate improvement and social and emotional development. Assess and address any issues in supervision, expectations, relationship-building, and emotional learning.

b) Support the targeted student. Assign school staff to create and implement a plan that will restore a sense of safety for the targeted student and other students who have been impacted. Determine any other interventions that may be appropriate.

- (1) If the targeted student has a disability, 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 with the support of Chicago Public Schools (CPS). For example, if the student's disability affects social skill development or makes the student vulnerable to bullying, the Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall ask the student's IEP Team to consider whether the IEP should include provisions to reduce vulnerability to bullying.

c) Determine interventions and/or consequences that address the root cause of the students' bullying behaviors. Consider the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of problem behaviors and performance. Follow the Student Code of Conduct and identify opportunities to teach, build empathy, and repair harm. While suspensions may be necessary in some cases to ensure the safety of the targeted student, keep in mind that suspending or expelling students who bully does not reduce bullying behavior.

- (1) If the student who engaged in bullying behavior is a student with a disability, the school shall convene the IEP Team to determine if additional supports and services are needed to address the inappropriate

behavior and develop the student's social and emotional skills. The team may also consider examining the environment in which the bullying occurred to determine if changes to the environment are warranted. For example, the IEP Team should consider a behavior intervention plan for the student or review a current behavior intervention plan and revise if necessary. The Principal/Assistant Principal/Dean of Students shall comply with the CPS Procedural Safeguards for Discipline of Students with Disabilities/ Impairments when considering interventions and consequences for students with disabilities.

- d) For incidents that impact the larger school community, provide opportunities in safe, structured environments for affected students, staff, and/or parents/legal guardians to speak about the incident, its impact, and what is needed to repair the harm.**

E. What Not To Do

1. Solicit an apology from the student who engaged in bullying to the targeted student or mandate a public apology, use peace circles, victim/offender conferences, or any form of mediation that puts the student who engaged in bullying in contact with the targeted student in an immediate attempt to resolve the bullying. Restorative measures may be helpful to repair relationships between the student who engaged in bullying and targeted student, but only if used after other interventions have balanced the power differential between the perpetrator and target.
2. Dismiss bullying as typical student behavior or assume it is not serious.

VII. Appeal

- A. Any party who is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation may appeal to Human Resources at ITAV Family of Schools Headquarters Office (312-868-0588), within 15 calendar days of notification of the Principal's decision. ITAV Family of Schools Human Resources shall render a final determination in accordance with the timeline and procedures set out in the anti-bullying appeal guidelines established by ITAV Family of Schools. ITAV Family of Schools Human Resources may return the incident to the Chief Executive Officer, Principal, or their designees for further investigation or reconsideration of the consequence(s), direct the imposition of other consequence(s), or deny the appeal. ITAV Family of Schools Human Resources shall notify the party requesting the appeal and the Principal that its decision is final and shall document that notification on the Discipline Referral Form and Incident Report in the VLA student information system.

VIII. Consequences for VLA Employees and Contractors

- A. When it is determined that an employee or contractor was aware that bullying 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, making reference to any applicable collective bargaining agreement. Remedies for offending contractors should be imposed according to their VLA/ITAV Family of Schools Board contracts.

IX. Notice and Dissemination of Requirements

- A. Principals shall follow the requirements established by It Takes a Village Family of Schools for posting this Anti-Bullying Policy on the school's website and in the school building in addition to disseminating and presenting this Policy to school staff as part of pre-school-year professional development.

X. Training and Professional Development

A. Staff

1. Professional development will be offered to build the skills of all Village Leadership Academy employees, contractors, and volunteers to implement this Policy. The content of such professional development shall include, but not be limited to:
 - a) Developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent incidents of bullying and to intervene immediately and effectively to stop them;
 - b) Information about the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, target, and witness to the bullying;
 - c) 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
 - d) Information about Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

B. Student Internet Safety Education

1. In accordance with the It Takes A Village Family of Schools Internet Safety Policy, Village Leadership Academy shall incorporate into the school curriculum a component on Internet safety to be taught at least once each school year to all students. The Principal shall determine the scope and duration of this unit of instruction and topics covered. At a minimum, the unit of instruction shall address: (a) safety on the Internet; (b) appropriate behavior while online, on social networking Web sites, 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. VLA shall satisfy the documentation requirements established by the Chief Executive Officer of It Takes A Village Family of Schools or designee to ensure compliance with this curricular requirement.

XI. References

- A. [105 ILCS 5/27-23.7](#) - Bullying Prevention
- B. 23 Illinois Administrative Code § 1.295

Date of Adoption: 08/26/23

Date of Most Recent Review/Re-evaluation: 08/15/24