

## SAINT MARY'S ACADEMY POLICY ON BULLYING

Issued this day of March 2011

### INTRODUCTION

This policy supersedes all previous policies regarding bullying in Saint Mary's Academy.

Saint Mary's Academy (SMA) believes that it is the mission of the Academy to encourage all students to develop to their fullest potential within the Christ-centered, challenging, academic school community. SMA students learn acceptance and appreciation of others within a nurturing family environment fostered by a sincere love of God.

It is essential that a safe, positive and productive educational environment be established and maintained where students can achieve the highest academic standards and where no student shall be subjected to the interruption of their ability to learn by the disruption or violence of bullying, cyber bullying or retaliation. SMA finds that bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation is unacceptable behavior which interferes with the Academy's ability to educate its students in a safe and respectful environment.

Therefore, SMA recognizes the Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Springfield's Bully Prevention Policy in conjunction with and in addition to the Saint Mary's Academy Policy on Bullying Prevention. The SMA policy was formulated and based on a needs assessment of the current Academy student population as well as the Academy's Stakeholders – Administration-Principal, teachers and staff, and parents of Saint Mary's Academy Students. The Saint Mary's Academy Policy on Bullying Prevention will be reviewed bi-annually and included in the Conduct section of the Parent/ Student Handbook.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to educate the Stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and staff, principal) of Saint Mary's Academy (SMA) and the community associated with SMA about bullying, to promote safety, civility and respect among the Academy community and to offer to all stakeholders a means of immediate action to correct the problem of bullying when appropriate.

### POLICY

SMA prohibits conduct which may be interpreted as bullying or harassment as described in this policy. The Academy wishes to promote a safe positive and productive educational environment in conjunction with the Academy's Mission Statement. SMA believes that every individual is entitled to be treated with respect and to be free from bullying, harassment and retaliation. All members of the Academy community are expected to behave in a manner which demonstrates proper regard and consideration for the rights and welfare of others.

Because bystander support can reinforce bullying behavior the Academy will consider such acts (bystanding) **as bullying**. Staff and teachers at SMA are required to support individuals who are being bullied or harassed and report all incidents or suspected incidents to the Principal in a timely manner.

Students and parents are encouraged to support individuals who are being bullied or harassed and to report incidents to their teachers, school staff or the principal.

### **APPLIABILITY**

This bullying prevention policy applies to the entire SMA community including teachers, Principal, students, parents and Academy staff and volunteers. It includes conduct at the Academy and conduct in connection with Academy related travel, sporting events and/ or Academy sponsored events and programs. It also expands harassment to include the entire Academy community.

The Administration and staff of SMA expects that bullying within the SMA building on the grounds on the bus or attendance at an Academy sanctioned function will be prohibited. Actions determined to be in violation of this policy will be grounds for disciplinary action by the Principal up to and including suspension and expulsion for students and termination for employees.

The following types of behavior are considered inappropriate and will not be permitted at SMA. This list is not intended to be all inclusive:

Name calling –humiliation

Intimidation –including aggressive body language or gestures

Verbal, written or electronic abuse or threats

Physical abuse or threatened physical abuse

Aggressive or obscene language

Exclusion or isolation

Intrusion through interfering with personal possessions

Attack by rumor or gossip intended to demean or damage an individual's reputation

The Academy will promptly and reasonably investigate allegations of harassment including bullying and retaliation. The Principal will be responsible for handling all complaints by students, parents or SMA faculty and staff alleging harassment including bullying in a timely manner.

### **DEFINITIONS**

For the purposes of the Saint Mary's Academy Policy on Bullying Prevention the Academy will recognize the Diocese of Springfield School's Policy on Bullying Prevention definitions as well as the following definitions:

**Target:** will indicate any member of the SMA community to whom harassment, abuse or retaliation is directed or perpetrated

**Aggressor:** will indicate any member of the SMA community who engages in bullying or retaliation, by any means

**Bullying:** will indicate any member of the SMA community exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons - Bullying implies an imbalance of power or strength – the Target who is bullied has difficulty or the inability to defending themselves

SMA recognizes and accepts the Diocese of Springfield Catholic Schools Office definition of Bullying and additionally those included in the SMA Policy on Bully Prevention. SMA finds that the act of bullying consists of abusive conduct relative to acts, omission, or both, that a reasonable person would find hostile, based on the severity, nature and frequency of the conduct and without regard to the method of delivery such as verbal, written or electronic. Abusive conduct may include, but is not limited to: repeated infliction of verbal abuse, including the use of derogatory or unwanted remarks of sexual, religious or racial nature; insults and epithets; verbal, emotional or physical conduct of a threatening, intimidating or humiliating nature; social exclusion; spreading of rumors or falsehoods; the sabotage or undermining of an individual's work or performance; attempts to exploit an individual's known psychological or physical vulnerability; stalking and cyber stalking or physical acts of violence. A single act normally will not constitute abusive conduct but an especially severe and/or egregious act may meet the standard.

**Cyber Bullying:** For the purposes of the SMA Policy on Bully Prevention whenever the term Bullying is used it is to denote either Bullying or Cyber Bullying.

Cyber Bullying will indicate any member of the SMA community who bullies through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which includes but is not limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by telephone, wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo-electronic or photo-optical systems, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications.

Cyber Bullying shall also for the purposes of the SMA Policy include but not limited to the creation of a web page, twitter, Youtube video, or any social networking account, video or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or knowingly impersonates another person as the author of a posted content or message if the impersonation creates any of the conditions in the definition of bullying.

Cyber Bullying shall also include the distribution or posting of material by electronic means to one or more persons if this distribution or posting meets any of the conditions in the definition of bullying.

**Hostile environment:** will indicate that bullying has caused the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insults sufficiently severe or pervasive as to alter or limit the ability of the Target to perform their designated tasks in the Academy setting.

**Plan:** will indicate the SMA's steps to intervene and prevent bullying

**Retaliation:** will indicate any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment directed against a member of the SMA community who reports an alleged bullying event, witnesses bullying or provides information during an investigation of bullying

School Grounds: will indicate any property of the SMA community which houses a school building or facility that is used by SMA for a school sponsored activity, function, program, instruction or training

Staff: will indicate any educators, faculty, administrators, school nurse, counselors, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, extracurricular activity directors, support staff, paraprofessionals, after school and before school program directors at SMA

## **PROHIBITATION OF BULLYING**

Bullying will be prohibited on the grounds of SMA or anywhere on property used or leased by SMA, or on property adjacent to SMA; at any SMA sponsored activity, function or program on or off SMA grounds; on any bus associated with SMA or carrying SMA community members; or in any vehicle associated with SMA or with any form of technology or electronics owned, leased or used by the SMA community.

Bullying will also be prohibited at any location, activity, function or program that is not SMA related or through the use of technology or electronic devices not owned, leased or used by SMA community members if the act or act in question infringes on the rights of the Target or disrupts the orderly process of education or creates a hostile environment at SMA for the Target.

Retaliation against any person, who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of an alleged bullying event, or who witnesses or who has reliable information about an alleged bullying event shall be prohibited at SMA.

To prevent bullying SMA will formulate and institute a Bullying Prevention Plan. The SMA Plan will be the responsibility of the Principal together with a consultative body representative of the SMA stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, staff and support personal, local law enforcement). The SMA plan will include:

A statement prohibiting bullying

Procedures for reporting bullying events for SMA students, parents and staff

A procedure for the anonymous reporting with the proviso that no disciplinary action will be taken against the reporter solely on the basis of the report

Description of response and investigation procedures

Procedure to promptly notify parents of a Target or an Aggressor of any alleged acts of bullying or retaliation, actions taken, law enforcement notifications

Procedure to address false accusations of bullying or retaliation

A list of disciplinary actions that may be taken against an aggressor for bullying including procedure for reporting alleged bullying incident to local law enforcement

Procedures to provide support and protection to the Target

## **EDUCATION, TRAINING AND PREVENTION**

The SMA Bullying Prevention Policy and Plan will be available on the Academy's website. Relevant sections of the SMA Bully Prevention Policy and Plan will be printed in the SMA Parent/ Student Handbook each academic year, and distributed to all families, students and parents of SMA. Families, students and parents are asked to review the entire handbook particularly the Bully Prevention Policy and Plan and sign off that they have read and agree to abide by the Handbook Policies. SMA will work to keep parents and guardians informed regarding the SMA Bullying Prevention Curriculum. Together with the faculty and staff of SMA, parents and guardians will work to reinforce the SMA Policy and Plan, to support understanding of bullying and cyber bullying and to work to keep students safe online.

All faculty and staff of SMA will be notified of the SMA Bully Prevention Policy and Plan at the beginning of each academic year. Sections of the SMA Bully Prevention Policy and Plan relevant to staff duties will be distributed to all SMA faculty and staff each academic year. The SMA faculty and Staff will work within the academic year with students to educate with regards to the subject of bullying. Educational trainings related to the SMA Bullying Prevention Policy and Plan offering will be available during the academic year for faculty and staff of SMA. These trainings could include bully prevention strategies, interventions to stop bullying, recent research on bullying risks and internet safety related to cyberbullying.

## **DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

Violations of this policy are subject to disciplinary action in accordance with SMA policies and procedures within the Parent/Student Handbook.

## **PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING**

Normal channels of reporting alleged bullying events will be used in accordance with the Parent/Student Handbook. Investigations of complaints of bullying will be done expeditiously and with the highest level of confidentiality.

### **Reporting Violations by Students**

Complaints of bullying should be reported immediately to the Principal of Saint Mary's Academy. Complaints will be investigated and reviewed by the Principal in a timely manner. Alleged student conduct violations stemming from complaints will be processed in accordance with the student conduct procedures outlined in the Parent/Student Handbook. Questions regarding the reporting of alleged violations of this policy may be directed to the Principal of Saint Mary's Academy.

Any member of the SMA staff who witness or become aware of an event of bullying or retaliation shall immediately report to the Principal of SMA

## **MINIMUM REQUIRED ACTIONS**

If following report and investigation of a bullying incident the Principal determines that bullying or retaliation has occurred the following actions taken:

Parents of the aggressor will be notified

Parents of the target will be notified regarding the incident and the actions taken to prevent any further bullying or retaliation

Appropriate disciplinary actions as determined by the Principal

Report to local law enforcement if the Principal believes criminal charges will be pursued

## **REVIEW**

This document will be reviewed and updated at least every two years by the Principal. The Principal will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Bullying Prevention Plan. Should related legislation become law this policy will be reviewed and revised in accordance with federal and state law.