

POLICY ON BULLYING PREVENTION

This Bullying Prevention Policy is created pursuant to and is in compliance with Section 22-110 of the *Illinois School Code* (105 ILCS 5/22-110). Connections Academy East serves a unique population of students with disabilities and, therefore, the policy set forth herein is tailored to address the needs of Connections Academy East's student population. Bullying causes physical, psychological, and emotional harm to students which interferes with a safe, civil, and healthy learning environment. 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.

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 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 at Connections Academy East. No student shall be subjected to bullying:

- 1) During any school-sponsored education program or activity;
- 2) While in school, on school property, on school buses or other school vehicles, 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 non-school 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 if the bullying causes a substantial disruption to the education process or orderly operation of the school. This item (4) applies only in cases in which the school administrator or teacher receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred and does **not** require the school to staff or monitor any non school-related activity, function or program.

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 under Section 3 of Article 1 of the Illinois Constitution.

DEFINITIONS

“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 the school.

Bullying, as defined in this policy, may take various forms, including without limitation one or more of the following: harassment, threats, intimidation, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, posting or distributing sexually explicit images, 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.

“Cyber-bullying” under this policy is defined as 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, photoelectronic 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 in this policy. "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 per this policy. Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, pursuant to Section 22-110 of the Illinois School Code, cyber bullying also includes the posting or distribution of an unauthorized digital replica by electronic means if the posting or distribution creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying per this policy.

“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.

“School personnel” means persons employed by, on contract with, or who volunteer in the school, including without limitation school administrators, teachers, school service providers (*e.g.*, school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses), cafeteria workers, custodians, bus

drivers, school resource officers, and/or security guards.

BULLYING REPORT PROCESS

Bullying is contrary to Illinois law and the policies of Connections Academy East.

Anyone, including staff members and parents/guardians, having knowledge of any incident(s) considered to be acts of bullying as defined in this policy are asked to promptly report the bullying to the Principal or Assistant Principal. A report may be made by phone, in person, by e-mail or in writing to the individual(s) named below who is/are responsible for receiving such reports. Anonymous reports may also be made in writing and provided to the address below, however, this shall not be construed to permit formal disciplinary action solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Mrs. Elaina Shannon, Principal & Founder
Connections Academy East
300 S. Waukegan Road
Lake Forest, IL 60045
E-mail address: eshannon@connectionsacademyeast.net
Phone: 224-544-5920 ext. 102

Ms. Melissa Mowder, Principal & Founder
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Lake Forest, IL 60045
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Phone: 224-544-5920 ext. 103

RESPONSE TO BULLYING REPORTS

Upon receipt of a report or bullying, Connections Academy East will investigate whether such reported act of bullying is within the permissible scope of its jurisdiction pursuant to this policy.

Consistent with federal and state laws and rules governing student privacy rights, as applicable to Connections Academy East, and the policies of Connections Academy East, the parents/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 above

named Administrator/Staff shall also discuss the need for interventions and availability of services, which may include social work services, counseling, school psychological services, other interventions, including community-based services, and restorative measures. Connections Academy East shall make diligent efforts to notify a parent/guardian, utilizing all contact information the school has available or that can be reasonably obtained by the school within the 24-hour period.

Connections Academy East serves a unique population of students with disabilities, for all students ages 6 to 21, and eligibility diagnosis of one or more of the following categories: Autism, Emotional Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Other Health Impairment, Speech Language Impairment, and Intellectually Disabled. Due to the nature of the population served by Connections Academy East and the possibility that certain acts may be manifestations of a student's disability rather than an intentional act of bullying, as part of determining whether a reported act of bullying is within the permissible scope of the school's jurisdiction, each reported instance of bullying will be reviewed and assessed for the need to investigate on a case-by-case basis and as determined to be appropriate by Connections Academy East's Connections Academy East Principal or Assistant Principal.

If determined to be appropriate for investigation and within the school's jurisdiction, Connections Academy East will comply with the following procedure for promptly investigating and addressing the report(s) of bullying:

- Connections Academy East will make all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within 10 school days after the date the report of the incident of bullying was received and taking into consideration additional relevant information received during the course of the investigation about the reported incident of bullying.
- Any reports of bullying will be kept confidential to the extent possible given the need to investigate the reported claim.
- School support personnel and other staff members with relevant knowledge, experience and training on bullying prevention, as deemed appropriate, may be involved in the investigation process.
- As soon as possible after a report is received, the Principal or Assistant Principal, or his/her designee, will be notified of the report of the incident(s) of bullying.
- Consistent with the federal and state laws, as applicable to Connections Academy East, and the policies governing student privacy rights and confidentiality, parents/guardians of the students who are parties to the investigation may be provided relevant information regarding the investigation, as deemed appropriate by the Principal or Assistant Principal, or his/her designee, and an opportunity to meet with the Principal or Assistant Principal, or his/her designee, to discuss the investigation, the findings of the investigation, and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying, as deemed appropriate.

Connections Academy East may implement interventions to address reports of bullying. Interventions that may be taken to address findings of incidents of bullying in the school, include, but are not limited to: school social work services, restorative measures, social-emotional skill building, counseling, school psychological services, and community-based services. Any student who is determined, after an investigation, to have engaged in an intentional act of bullying will be subject to disciplinary consequences as deemed appropriate and consistent with the school's disciplinary policies, and/or the disciplinary policies of the student's referring school district, as applicable and deemed appropriate.

Connections Academy East is a nonpublic, therapeutic school and an agent of Illinois placing school districts, as such, Connections Academy East may share information regarding incidents of bullying with the referring school district(s) of those students involved in a bullying incident, and an individualized education program (“IEP”) meeting may be convened to discuss the impact, if any, on the student’s current educational program, placement, supports and services. Additional services that are available within the referring school district and community, such as counseling, support services, and other programs, should be discussed directly with the student’s referring school district by the parent/guardian.

Reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying per this policy is a violation of this policy and strictly prohibited. Such reprisal or retaliation will be treated as bullying for the purpose of determining appropriate consequences and anyone engaging in retaliation or reprisal against any person who reports an act of bullying may face consequences and appropriate remedial action as deemed necessary by Connections Academy East and consistent with the school’s disciplinary policies. No person will be subject to consequences for making a good-faith report of bullying. Appropriate consequences and remedial action, which are consistent with the school’s disciplinary policies, may also be taken against a person found to have falsely accused another of bullying as a means of retaliation or as a means of bullying.

POLICY EVALUATION

Please also note the following related to the development, notification and publication, and evaluation of this policy:

- This policy is based on engagement with a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents/guardians.
- This policy is consistent with the other policies of Connections Academy East.
- This policy can be found on the school's existing, publicly accessible website, is included in the student handbook, and, where the school’s other policies, rules, and standards of conduct are currently posted. A copy of this policy may also be requested from the Principal or Assistant Principal.
- This policy will also be provided periodically throughout the school year to students and faculty and distributed annually to parents/guardians, students, and school personnel, including new employees when hired.
- Connections Academy East will engage in the process of reviewing and re-evaluating this policy every two years to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of this policy and shall make any necessary and appropriate revisions. This review process includes, but may not be limited to, collecting and assessing the following information:
 - 1) the frequency of victimization;
 - 2) student, staff, and family observations of safety at a school;
 - 3) identification of areas of the school where bullying occurs;

- 4) the types of bullying utilized; and
- 5) bystander intervention or participation.

Connections Academy East may use relevant data and information it already collects for other purposes in the policy evaluation. The information developed or collected as a result of the policy evaluation will be made available on the school's website or otherwise will be provided to Connections Academy East's board, if applicable, administrators, school personnel, parents/guardians, and students.

- No later than September 30th of the subject year, the policy must be filed with the State Board of Education after being updated.

Date of Adoption: 07/01/2026

Date of Most Recent Review/Reevaluation: 07/01/2026