

## **FIT Academy**

### **514 BULLYING PROHIBITION POLICY**

#### **I. PURPOSE**

A safe and civil environment is needed for students to learn and attain high academic standards and to promote healthy human relationships. Bullying, like other violent or disruptive behavior, is conduct that interferes with a student's ability to learn and/or a teacher's ability to educate students in a safe environment. FIT Academy cannot monitor the activities of students at all times and eliminate all incidents of bullying between students, particularly when students are not under the direct supervision of school personnel. However, to the extent such conduct affects the educational environment of FIT Academy and the rights and welfare of its students and is within the control of FIT Academy in its normal operations, FIT Academy intends to prevent bullying and to take action to investigate, respond to, and to remediate and discipline for those acts of bullying which have not been successfully prevented. The purpose of this policy is to assist FIT Academy in its goal of preventing and responding to acts of bullying, intimidation, violence, reprisal, retaliation, and other similar disruptive and detrimental behavior.

#### **II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY**

- A. An act of bullying, by either an individual student or a group of students, is expressly prohibited on school premises, on FIT Academy property, at school functions or activities, or on school transportation. This policy applies not only to students who directly engage in an act of bullying but also to students who, by their indirect behavior, condone or support another student's act of bullying. This policy also applies to any student whose conduct at any time or in any place constitutes bullying or other prohibited conduct that interferes with or obstructs the mission or operations of FIT Academy or the safety or welfare of the student or other students, or materially and substantially interferes with a student's educational opportunities or performance or ability to participate in school functions or activities or receive school benefits, services, or privileges. This policy also applies to an act of cyberbullying regardless of whether such act is committed on or off FIT Academy property and/or with or without the use of FIT Academy resources.
- B. No teacher, administrator, volunteer, contractor, or other employee of FIT Academy shall permit, condone, or tolerate bullying.
- C. Apparent permission or consent by a student being bullied does not lessen or negate the prohibitions contained in this policy.
- D. Retaliation against a victim, good faith reporter, or a witness of bullying is prohibited.
- E. False accusations or reports of bullying against another student are prohibited.

- F. A person who engages in an act of bullying, reprisal, retaliation, or false reporting of bullying or permits, condones, or tolerates bullying shall be subject to discipline or other remedial responses for that act in accordance with FIT Academy's policies and procedures, including FIT Academy's Student Discipline Policy. FIT Academy may take into account the following factors:
1. The developmental ages and maturity levels of the parties involved;
  2. The levels of harm, surrounding circumstances, and nature of the behavior;
  3. Past incidences or past or continuing patterns of behavior;
  4. The relationship between the parties involved; and
  5. The context in which the alleged incidents occurred.
- G. Consequences for students who commit prohibited acts of bullying may range from remedial responses or positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension and/or expulsion. FIT Academy shall employ research-based developmentally appropriate best practices that include preventative and remedial measures and effective discipline for deterring violations of this policy, apply throughout FIT Academy, and foster student, parent, and community participation. Consequences for employees who permit, condone, or tolerate bullying or engage in an act of reprisal or intentional false reporting of bullying may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination or discharge. Consequences for other individuals engaging in prohibited acts of bullying may include, but not be limited to, exclusion from FIT Academy property and events.
- H. FIT Academy will act to investigate all complaints of bullying reported to FIT Academy and will discipline or take appropriate action against any student, teacher, administrator, volunteer, contractor, or other employee of FIT Academy who is found to have violated this policy.

### III. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this policy, the definitions included in this section apply.

- A. "Bullying" means intimidating, threatening, abusive, or harming conduct that is objectively offensive and:
1. an actual or perceived imbalance of power exists between the student engaging in the prohibited conduct and the target of the prohibited conduct, and the conduct is repeated or forms a pattern; or
  2. materially and substantially interferes with a student's educational opportunities or performance or ability to participate in school functions or activities or receive school benefits, services, or privileges. The term, "bullying," specifically includes cyberbullying as defined in this policy.
- B. "Cyberbullying" means bullying using technology or other electronic communication, including, but not limited to, a transfer of a sign, signal, writing, image, sound, or data,

including a post on a social network Internet website or forum, transmitted through a computer, cell phone, or other electronic device. The term applies to prohibited conduct which occurs on school premises, on FIT Academy property, at school functions or activities, on school transportation, or on school computers, networks, forums, and mailing lists, or off school premises to the extent that it substantially and materially disrupts student learning or the school environment.

- C. “Immediately” means as soon as possible but in no event longer than 24 hours.
- D. “Intimidating, threatening, abusive, or harming conduct” means, but is not limited to, conduct that does the following:
1. Causes physical harm to a student or a student’s property or causes a student to be in reasonable fear of harm to person or property;
  2. Under Minnesota common law, violates a student’s reasonable expectation of privacy, defames a student, or constitutes intentional infliction of emotional distress against a student; or
  3. Is directed at any student or students, including those based on a person’s actual or perceived race, ethnicity, color, creed, religion, national origin, immigration status, sex, marital status, familial status, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, sexual orientation including gender identity and expression, academic status related to student performance, disability, or status with regard to public assistance, age, or any additional characteristic defined in the Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA). However, prohibited conduct need not be based on any particular characteristic defined in this paragraph or the MHRA.
- E. “On school premises, on FIT Academy property, at school functions or activities, or on school transportation” means all FIT Academy buildings, school grounds, and school property or property immediately adjacent to school grounds, school bus stops, school buses, school vehicles, school contracted vehicles, or any other vehicles approved for FIT Academy purposes, the area of entrance or departure from school grounds, premises, or events, and all school-related functions, school sponsored activities, events, or trips. FIT Academy property also may mean a student’s walking route to or from school for purposes of attending school or school-related functions, activities, or events. While prohibiting bullying at these locations and events, FIT Academy does not represent that it will provide supervision or assume liability at these locations and events.
- F. “Prohibited conduct” means bullying or cyberbullying as defined in this policy or retaliation or reprisal for asserting, alleging, reporting, or providing information about such conduct or knowingly making a false report about bullying.
- G. “Remedial response” means a measure to stop and correct prohibited conduct, prevent prohibited conduct from recurring, and protect, support, and intervene on behalf of a student who is the target or victim of prohibited conduct.
- H. “Student” means a student enrolled in a public school or a public charter school.

#### IV. REPORTING PROCEDURE

- A. Any person who believes he or she has been the target or victim of bullying or any person with knowledge or belief of conduct that may constitute bullying or prohibited conduct under this policy shall report the alleged acts immediately to an appropriate FIT Academy official designated under paragraph C of this policy. A person may report bullying anonymously. However, FIT Academy may not rely solely on an anonymous report to determine discipline or other remedial responses.
- B. FIT Academy encourages the reporting party or complainant to use the report form available from the principal or building supervisor of each building or available in FIT Academy office, but oral reports shall be considered complaints as well.
- C. The Superintendent, Principal, Family Liaison, or other designee (hereinafter the “building report taker”) is the person responsible for receiving reports of bullying or other prohibited conduct at the building level. Any person may report bullying or other prohibited conduct directly to FIT Academy designee. If the complaint involves the building report taker, the complaint shall be made or filed directly with the Superintendent by the reporting party or complainant. The building report taker shall ensure that this policy and its procedures, practices, consequences, and sanctions are fairly and fully implemented and shall serve as the primary contact on policy and procedural matters. The building report taker or a third party designated by FIT Academy shall be responsible for the investigation. The building report taker shall provide information about available community resources to the target or victim of the bullying or other prohibited conduct, the perpetrator, and other affected individuals as appropriate.
- D. A teacher, school administrator, volunteer, contractor, or other school employee shall be particularly alert to possible situations, circumstances, or events that might include bullying. Any such person who witnesses, observes, receives a report of, or has other knowledge or belief of conduct that may constitute bullying or other prohibited conduct shall make reasonable efforts to address and resolve the bullying or prohibited conduct and shall inform the building report taker immediately. FIT Academy personnel who fail to inform the building report taker of conduct that may constitute bullying or other prohibited conduct or who fail to make reasonable efforts to address and resolve the bullying or prohibited conduct in a timely manner may be subject to disciplinary action.
- E. Reports of bullying or other prohibited conduct are classified as private educational and/or personnel data and/or confidential investigative data and will not be disclosed except as permitted by law. The building report taker, in conjunction with the responsible authority, shall be responsible for keeping and regulating access to any report of bullying and the record of any resulting investigation.
- F. Submission of a good faith complaint or report of bullying or other prohibited conduct will not affect the complainant’s or reporter’s future employment, grades, work assignments, or educational or work environment.

- G. FIT Academy will respect the privacy of the complainant(s), the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed, and the witnesses as much as possible, consistent with FIT Academy's obligation to investigate, take appropriate action, and comply with any legal disclosure obligations.

## **V. FIT ACADEMY ACTION**

- A. Within three school days of the receipt of a complaint or report of bullying or other prohibited conduct, FIT Academy shall undertake or authorize an investigation by the building report taker or a third party designated by FIT Academy.
- B. The building report taker or other appropriate FIT Academy officials may take immediate steps, at their discretion, to protect the target or victim of the bullying or other prohibited conduct, the complainant, the reporter, and students or others, pending completion of an investigation of the bullying or other prohibited conduct, consistent with applicable law.
- C. The alleged perpetrator of the bullying or other prohibited conduct shall be allowed the opportunity to present a defense during the investigation or prior to the imposition of discipline or other remedial responses.
- D. Upon completion of an investigation that determines that bullying or other prohibited conduct has occurred, FIT Academy will take appropriate action. Such action may include, but is not limited to, warning, suspension, exclusion, expulsion, transfer, remediation, termination, or discharge. Disciplinary consequences will be sufficiently severe to try to deter violations and to appropriately discipline prohibited conduct. Remedial responses to the bullying or other prohibited conduct shall be tailored to the particular incident and nature of the conduct and shall take into account the factors specified in Section II.F. of this policy. FIT Academy action taken for violation of this policy will be consistent with the requirements of applicable collective bargaining agreements; applicable statutory authority, including the Minnesota Pupil Fair Dismissal Act; the student discipline policy (Policy 506) and other applicable FIT Academy policies; and applicable regulations.
- E. FIT Academy is not authorized to disclose to a victim private educational or personnel data regarding an alleged perpetrator who is a student or employee of FIT Academy. School officials will notify the parent(s) or guardian(s) of students who are targets of bullying or other prohibited conduct and the parent(s) or guardian(s) of alleged perpetrators of bullying or other prohibited conduct who have been involved in a reported and confirmed bullying incident of the remedial or disciplinary action taken, to the extent permitted by law.
- F. In order to prevent or respond to bullying or other prohibited conduct committed by or directed against a child with a disability, FIT Academy shall, when determined appropriate by the child's individualized education program (IEP) team or Section 504 team, allow the child's IEP or Section 504 plan to be drafted to address the skills and

proficiencies the child needs as a result of the child's disability to allow the child to respond to or not to engage in bullying or other prohibited conduct.

## **VI. RETALIATION OR REPRISAL**

FIT Academy will discipline or take appropriate action against any student, teacher, administrator, volunteer, contractor, or other employee of FIT Academy who commits an act of reprisal or who retaliates against any person who asserts, alleges, or makes a good faith report of alleged bullying or prohibited conduct, who provides information about bullying or prohibited conduct, who testifies, assists, or participates in an investigation of alleged bullying or prohibited conduct, or who testifies, assists, or participates in a proceeding or hearing relating to such bullying or prohibited conduct. Retaliation includes, but is not limited to, any form of intimidation, reprisal, harassment, or intentional disparate treatment. Disciplinary consequences will be sufficiently severe to deter violations and to appropriately discipline the individual(s) who engaged in the prohibited conduct. Remedial responses to the prohibited conduct shall be tailored to the particular incident and nature of the conduct and shall take into account the factors specified in Section II.F. of this policy.

## **VII. TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

- A. FIT Academy shall discuss this policy with school personnel and volunteers and provide appropriate training to FIT Academy personnel regarding this policy. FIT Academy shall establish a training cycle for school personnel to occur during a period not to exceed every three school years. Newly employed school personnel must receive the training within the first year of their employment with FIT Academy. FIT Academy or a school administrator may accelerate the training cycle or provide additional training based on a particular need or circumstance. This policy shall be included in employee handbooks and training materials.
- B. FIT Academy shall require ongoing professional development, consistent with Minn. Stat. § 122A.60, to build the skills of all school personnel who regularly interact with students to identify, prevent, and appropriately address bullying and other prohibited conduct. Such professional development includes, but is not limited to, the following:
  - 1. Developmentally appropriate strategies both to prevent and to immediately and effectively intervene to stop prohibited conduct;
  - 2. The complex dynamics affecting a perpetrator, target, and witnesses to prohibited conduct;
  - 3. Research on prohibited conduct, including specific categories of students at risk for perpetrating or being the target or victim of bullying or other prohibited conduct in school;
  - 4. The incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
  - 5. Internet safety and cyberbullying.
- C. FIT Academy annually will provide education and information to students regarding bullying, including information regarding this FIT Academy policy prohibiting bullying,

the harmful effects of bullying, and other applicable initiatives to prevent bullying and other prohibited conduct.

- D. The administration of FIT Academy is directed to implement programs and other initiatives to prevent bullying, to respond to bullying in a manner that does not stigmatize the target or victim, and to make resources or referrals to resources available to targets or victims of bullying.
- E. The administration is encouraged to provide developmentally appropriate instruction and is directed to review programmatic instruction to determine if adjustments are necessary to help students identify and prevent or reduce bullying and other prohibited conduct, to value diversity in school and society, to develop and improve students' knowledge and skills for solving problems, managing conflict, engaging in civil discourse, and recognizing, responding to, and reporting bullying or other prohibited conduct, and to make effective prevention and intervention programs available to students. The administration must establish strategies for creating a positive school climate and use evidence-based social-emotional learning to prevent and reduce discrimination and other improper conduct. The administration is encouraged, to the extent practicable, to take such actions as it may deem appropriate to accomplish the following:
  - 1. Engage all students in creating a safe and supportive school environment;
  - 2. Partner with parents and other community members to develop and implement prevention and intervention programs;
  - 3. Engage all students and adults in integrating education, intervention, and other remedial responses into the school environment;
  - 4. Train student bystanders to intervene in and report incidents of bullying and other prohibited conduct to the schools' primary contact person;
  - 5. Teach students to advocate for themselves and others;
  - 6. Prevent inappropriate referrals to special education of students who may engage in bullying or other prohibited conduct; and
  - 7. Foster student collaborations that, in turn, foster a safe and supportive school climate.
- F. FIT Academy may implement violence prevention and character development education programs to prevent or reduce policy violations. Such programs may offer instruction on character education including, but not limited to, character qualities such as attentiveness, truthfulness, respect for authority, diligence, gratefulness, self-discipline, patience, forgiveness, respect for others, peacemaking, and resourcefulness.
- G. FIT Academy shall inform affected students and their parents of rights they may have under state and federal data practices laws to obtain access to data related to an incident and their right to contest the accuracy or completeness of the data. FIT Academy may accomplish this requirement by inclusion of all or applicable parts of its protection and privacy of pupil records Policy 515 in the student handbook.

## VIII. NOTICE

- A. FIT Academy will give annual notice of this policy and provide a copy to students, parents or guardians, and staff.
- B. This policy or a summary thereof must be conspicuously posted in the administrative offices of FIT Academy.
- C. This policy must be given to each school employee and independent contractor who regularly interacts with students at the time of initial employment with FIT Academy.
- D. Notice of the rights and responsibilities of students and their parents under this policy must be included in the Student Discipline Policy 506 distributed to parents at the beginning of each school year.
- E. This policy shall be available to all parents and other school community members in an electronic format in the language appearing on FIT Academy's or a school's website.
- F. FIT Academy shall provide an electronic copy of its most recently amended policy to the Commissioner of Education.

#### **IX. POLICY REVIEW**

To the extent practicable, the board of principals shall, on a cycle consistent with other FIT Academy policies, review and revise this policy. The policy shall be made consistent with Minn. Stat. § 121A.031 and other applicable law. Revisions shall be made in consultation with students, parents, and community organizations.