

Breakthrough Montessori Bullying Prevention Policy

Objectives and Purpose

A key responsibility of Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School (BMPCS) is to provide services in a respectful and positive environment. Acts of bullying, harassment and intimidation are an attack on our core values. Thus, to facilitate our mission we have established this comprehensive bullying prevention policy. This policy protects the dignity and safety of the BMPCS community and describes our strategies to identify and prevent incidents by connecting students to necessary services. We will promptly report and investigate all incidents of bullying, harassment and intimidation and provide appropriate remedies for victims of an incident.

Definitions

Breakthrough Montessori defines bullying as any severe, pervasive, or persistent act or conduct whether physical, electronic, or verbal that:

1. May be based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, intellectual ability, familial status, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, genetic information, disability, source of income, status as a victim of an intrafamily offense, place or residence or business, or any other distinguishing characteristic, or on a student's association with a person, or group with any person, with one or more of the actual or perceived foregoing characteristics; and
2. Can reasonably be predicted to:
 - a. Place the student in reasonable fear of physical harm to their person or property;
 - b. Cause a substantial detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health;
 - c. Substantially interfere with the student's academic performance or attendance; or
 - d. Substantially interfere with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by an agency, educational institution, or grantee.

Prohibition against Bullying

Acts of bullying, including cyberbullying, whether by student, volunteers or staff, are prohibited:

1. On Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School grounds and immediately adjacent property, at BMPCS sponsored events on and off BMPCS grounds, on any vehicle used for BMPCS business, at any transit stop at which student wait to be transported to BMPCS, or through the use of any electronic devices owned by the BMPCS, leased by the BMPCS or used for BMPCS.
2. At a location or function unrelated to the BMPCS, through the use of any electronic devices, including those not owned or leased by the BMPCS, if the acts of bullying or cyberbullying create a hostile environment at the agency for the victim or witnesses, infringe on their rights at the BMPCS, or materially and substantially disrupt the orderly operation of the BMPCS.

Retaliation against a student, volunteer or staff member who reports bullying, provides information about an act of bullying, or witnesses an act of bullying is also prohibited.

Prevention Leadership

Responsibility for the implementation and execution of this policy is vested with the Behavior Coach who shall have responsibility for:

1. Planning and organizing the prevention plan's professional development activities;
2. Designing and implementing the programming that Breakthrough uses to address bullying;
3. Receiving and recording incidents of bullying;
4. Responding to incidents of bullying and addressing the needs of victims and bullies;
5. Managing the data collaboration and collection process in cooperation with the District citywide prevention coordinator;
6. Coordinating community engagement efforts and;
7. Regularly reviewing and updating the policy and any procedures developed as part of it.

Policy Evaluation

BMPCS will annually review and update this policy with new prevention strategies developed after consultation with community stakeholders, continuing research on best practices in bullying prevention, and the agency's data collaboration with the citywide coordinator. Policy changes will be made to rectify gaps identified in the current prevention effort and to build on successful strategies. They will be further informed by whether or not BMPCS successfully met or is on track to meet performance goals described in its "prevention goals" section.

Primary Prevention Strategies

Create Positive Agency Atmosphere

Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School will establish a culture of respect and safety. As part of this commitment, BMPCS will incorporate bullying prevention messages and efforts into all aspects of its operations.

Community Education

Safe, positive environments are best supported by an active partnership between BMPCS and the community. This begins with our families. Accordingly, BMPCS will provide families regular bulletins, presentations and/or workshops to educate them on:

1. How parents and guardians can use activities at home to build on the bullying prevention lessons as exemplified by our Montessori ethic of care;
2. The dynamics of bullying and its impact on students;
3. Information about internet safety and cyberbullying;
4. BMPCS's legal and administrative responses to bullying;
5. Information on parent- and guardian-relevant sections of BMPCS's prevention policy.

Where possible BMPCS will coordinate education efforts with other District agencies to effect citywide community education and awareness.

Code of Conduct

BMPCS expects students in our school to behave in a way that supports BMPCS's objective to provide a safe and welcoming environment for other students, BMPCS staff, and community members. Students who are part of the BMPCS community are expected to:

1. Treat all members of the BMPCS community with respect;
2. Respect the property of BMPCS, its staff, and other students connected to BMPCS;

Training and Professional Development

BMPCS will provide to all guides, assistants, and staff members information on procedures for responding to and reporting an incident of bullying.

Staff assigned to BMPCS's bullying prevention team will receive additional training on how to provide immediate support for victims and witnesses during or after an incident and may obtain District citywide coordinator support to provide this training. This additional training will be provided regularly to BMPCS staff by the opening of the District academic school year immediately following the publication of this policy.

Curriculum

An essential element of Montessori pedagogy is developing in each child and adult an approach towards other humans that implicitly and explicitly details appropriate personal interactions. Accordingly, the Montessori curriculum teaches:

1. Self-regulation (controlling impulses; focusing, sustaining and shifting attention; listening to and remembering information; empathy training);
2. Perspective-taking (appreciating similarities and differences; recognizing and identifying feelings of others; understanding that feelings can change and are complex);
3. Emotion management (recognizing and identifying one's own feelings; learning strategies for calming down strong emotions; managing stress/anxiety);
4. Problem-solving (learning a process for solving problems; goal setting);
5. Communication skills (being assertive; being respectful; negotiating and compromising);
6. Friendship skills (cooperation, including others, joining in with others).

Data Collection

Data Collaboration

Prior to each academic year, BMPCS, in collaboration with citywide coordinator will determine what data will most productively assist BMPCS in supporting an effective bullying prevention policy. Based on this feedback, BMPCS will determine a set of service and incident metrics to be collected by BMPCS. Efforts will be made to ensure consistent metrics and research products across years and to the extent possible, across agencies.

Incident Database

BMPCS will submit to the citywide coordinator a dataset of all incident and service measures designated in this policy. This data will not include any identifying information about the bully, victim, or witnesses.

The Behavior Coach will be responsible for ensuring the citywide coordinator has accurate information on incident and service measures. Given the sensitive nature of information contained in this database, only the Behavior Coach will have access to individualizing information in the database.

Incident Measures

BMPCS will collect the following pieces of information about reported incidents of bullying:

1. Name(s) of the victim, bully, and any witnesses
 - a. Reliable contact information for the victim, bully and any witnesses
2. Relevant attributes about the victim, bully and any witnesses including:
 - a. Any prior incidents involving either the victim or bully
 - b. Connection of the victim, bully, and any witnesses to the incident (i.e. are they students, staff, volunteers, etc.)
3. The nature of the bullying incident
 - a. Where the incident took place
 - b. What time the incident took place
 - c. What type(s) of bullying it was (physical, verbal, cyber, relational, etc.?)
 - d. What factors drove the incident of bullying (social status, personal appearance, race, sexual orientation, etc.)
 - e. What adult supervision was in place?
 - f. Context of the incident

BMPCS will only attempt to collect this information insofar as it does not jeopardize the safety of the victim and witness(es) and allows non-staff reports of bullying to be made anonymously.

Reporting to the Citywide Coordinator

BMPCS will provide a report of bullying prevention and incident metrics to the citywide coordinator every year. The BMPCS report will include all service and incident measures included in this policy.

BMPCS will take every possible measure to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all parties in an incident. To ensure confidentiality, reports provided to outside agencies will not include identifying information about the parties involved in an incident, and will report data only in the aggregate.

Secondary Prevention Strategies

Identifying At-Risk Groups

All staff at BMPCS will actively seek out students who are at risk of being victims or bullies to proactively remedy incidents of bullying before they occur. In determining whether a student is at risk of being a victim of aggression, staff will consider the following risk factors:

1. Individual factors
 - a. Cautious, sensitive, insecure personality
 - b. Difficulty asserting themselves among peers
 - c. Physical weakness, particularly in boys
2. Parental factors
 - a. Possible over-protective parents
3. Peer risk factors
 - a. Lack of close friends.

Risk factors for being a bully in an incident include:

1. Individual factors
 - a. Impulsive, hot-headed, dominant personality lacking empathy
 - b. Difficulty conforming to rules and low frustration tolerance
 - c. Positive attitudes toward violence
 - d. Gradually decreasing interest in school or academic achievement
2. Parental factors
 - a. Lack of parental warmth and involvement
 - b. Overly-permissive or excessively harsh discipline/physical punishment by parents
 - c. Lack of parental supervision
3. Peer risk factors
 - a. Friends/peers with positive attitudes towards violence
 - b. Exposure to models of bullying

Referral to Secondary Service for At-Risk Students

BMPCS staff who believe that a student is at risk of being a victim or bully will provide the information to the Behavior Coach who will provide the information to the appropriate child study team. When necessary, our child study teams will refer students to the appropriate services. Resources will be given directly to the student. If outside agencies are contacted, the student's and/or parent or guardian's written consent must first be obtained.

Referral to service as part of a secondary prevention measure is not a disciplinary action and will never be noted on a student's record as such. At the time of a referral, the Behavior Coach will inform the student's parents or guardian about referring student to services, reasons they are referring the student, the type of service deemed necessary.

Controlling At-Risk Areas

If a location on BMPCS premises is identified by BMPCS's data collection efforts as being particularly prone to hosting incidents of bullying, the Behavior Coach will take steps to improve the safety and security of that location for BMPCS student. These steps will include:

1. Reducing student traffic to these areas by altering schedules or activities;
2. Reducing the number of student of different ages or activity groups in an at-risk area by altering schedules or activities;
3. Increasing supervision in these areas, and training supervising staff in the identification of bullying behaviors particularly common in that place.

BMPCS will take measures to address an at-risk location no more than one month after receiving information on the presence of such an area on BMPCS premises.

Secondary Services for At-Risk Student

Secondary services provided to at-risk student are not designed to punish and will not be reported on BMPCS records as such. Rather, the objective of secondary services is to support at-risk student and address risk behaviors before they become serious safety or disciplinary issues. To this end, remedial

measures will be tailored to the student receiving them to build on student strengths while addressing skills and behavior deficits.

When considering what remedial services should be offered to a student, child study teams will take into account: life skill competencies and deficiencies, extracurricular and academic strengths and weaknesses, available peer and home support networks, and personal traits. Based on these attributes and information from resource mapping, child study teams will determine the appropriate remedial services. If BMPCS does not have access to services appropriate to a student's needs, the team will refer the student to an outside agency who can address these needs rather than substituting other services that BMPCS can provide.

Resources will be given directly to students. If outside agencies are contacted, the student's and/or parent or guardian's written consent will first be obtained. In all cases of remedial action, BMPCS will take all possible steps to actively involve the student's parents or guardians in the skill-building process, as long as the student's written assent is obtained.

Tertiary Prevention Strategies

Reporting Incidents of Bullying or Retaliation

BMPCS expects all staff members and volunteers to report incidents of bullying or retaliation they witness or are made aware of. Staff members should immediately report all such incidents to the Behavior Coach who will create a written report of a bullying incident and include the incident in BMPCS reports of bullying incidents to the citywide coordinator.

Students, parents, guardians, and community members are encouraged by BMPCS to report any incidents of bullying that they witness or become aware of. Reports of bullying may be made to the Breakthrough Montessori Behavior Coach, Alison Jones.

Reports of bullying by students, parents, guardians and community members may be made anonymously, but disciplinary action cannot be taken by BMPCS solely on the basis of an anonymous report, though such a report may trigger an investigation that will provide actionable information. All oral reports received as part of this process will be transcribed into writing and included in BMPCS's bullying database.

BMPCS will ensure that there are reporting materials available in a wide variety of languages and that information about reporting is communicated to students connected to BMPCS in an age appropriate manner. Information on how to report incidents of bullying will also be included as appropriate in BMPCS mailings to students and their families. The Behavior Coach is available to assist in reporting incidents of bullying.

Reports of bullying not received by the Behavior Coach will be transmitted to him/her within one day of their receipt or creation by the staff member who reported the initial incident.

Investigating Incidents of Bullying

Prior to the investigation of an incident, the Behavior Coach will take steps to ensure the safety of the alleged victim referenced in a reported bullying incident. These steps will be designed to restore a sense of safety to the victim and to protect them from further incidents if necessary. Examples of such steps taken include designating a staff member to serve as that alleged victim's "safe" person, altering the alleged bully's/bullies' seating or schedule to reduce access to the alleged victim or creating a safety plan in consultation with the alleged victim. Once an investigation is concluded, further steps will be taken as needed to assure the continued safety of the victim from additional incidents of bullying or retaliation.

Once a report of bullying has been received by an agency, the following groups will be notified as needed by the Behavior Coach, so long as, in the absence of legal imperative, the parent or guardian's written consent is obtained prior to notification.

Parents and guardians: BMPCS will notify the parents or guardians of victims, bullies, and if appropriate, witnesses to an incident of bullying behavior about the nature of the incident and the procedures and steps in place for responding to it. The Behavior Coach will determine if parents or guardians should be informed prior to or after the investigation of an incident.

Law enforcement agencies: If BMPCS determines that the reported incident may involve criminal activity or the basis for criminal charges, information about the incident must be conveyed to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. As part of making this determination the Behavior Coach may wish to consult with either a law enforcement officer or legal counsel. Law enforcement shall only be contacted if all other available remedies have been exhausted.

BMPCS will notify these groups of incidents of bullying only to the extent allowed by law. Notification will be undertaken solely to ensure that services are provided to victims and bullies and to protect victims from further or sustained victimization. BMPCS will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of those who report bullying incidents.

The Behavior Coach is responsible for investigating reports of bullying. An investigation of an incident will be initiated no more than one day after the Behavior Coach receives a report of bullying and will conclude no later than 30 days after the receipt of such a report. As part of the investigation the Behavior Coach will interview any involved or relevant parties including alleged victims, bullies, witnesses, staff, parents or guardians.

The Behavior Coach will provide confidentiality as far as possible to relevant parties as part of the investigation, and inform all relevant parties that retaliation for reporting acts of bullying is prohibited. Written records of the investigation process should be maintained and may be included in the prevention database to generate a more accurate picture of bullying behaviors at BMPCS. Where necessary, provisions will be made to include the advice of legal counsel.

In investigating an incident of bullying, the Behavior Coach will seek to ensure that the reported incident is one of victimization, a sign of bullying, rather than of conflict. Thus, when investigating a reported

incident, the Behavior Coach will attempt to determine, through interviewing the victim, what mechanisms the victim had and has access to for halting the incident that occurred, and preventing future such instances. If the victim reports a few or no mechanisms for ending the incident or constructively dealing with future instances, that information will serve as compelling, though not conclusive evidence that the reported incident was an incident of bullying.

The Behavior Coach is charged with making determinations as to whether a reported incident constitutes a case of bullying. These determinations will be made in consideration of the totality of the facts and the circumstances surrounding the incident. If the Behavior Coach determines that an incident of bullying has occurred, they should take the response steps enumerated in BMPCS's tertiary prevention plan to prevent the recurrence of an incident and restore the safety of a victim.

If the Behavior Coach determines that additional support is needed to conduct a thorough and equitable investigation they will contact the citywide prevention coordinator.

Sanctions and Remedies for Bullying

Sanctions

BMPCS recognizes that for sanctions to be an effective component of a bullying prevention plan, they must be applied consistently, fairly, and equitably. To this end, BMPCS shall ensure that staff follow these guidelines as closely as possible, while allowing for flexibility to adapt sanctions to individual contexts. Furthermore, to ensure equity in applying sanctions, measures will be applied on a graduated basis determined by the nature of the offense, the disciplinary history of the student involved, and the age and developmental status of the student involved. Responses to incidents of bullying may include, but are not limited to:

- Reprimand
- Deprivation of BMPCS privileges
- Bans on participating in optional BMPCS activities
- Ban or suspension from BMPCS facilities

Sanctions will be applied within one day of the determination that an incident of bullying has occurred, unless an appeal of the incident by the bully has been received in that time as described in the Appeals section of this policy. To ensure that single incidents of bullying do not become recurring problems, BMPCS will always refer victims and bullies involved in an incident to services in addition to imposing sanctions on bullies.

BMPCS does not endorse the use of punitive strategies associated with "zero-tolerance" policies when applying sanctions to an incident of bullying.

BMPCS shall communicate to the student in contact with BMPCS, the consequences that the student can expect for participating in bullying behavior.

Referral to Services

BMPCS response to an active incident of bullying will always include the referral of both victim(s) and bully/bullies to remedial services. If an investigation determines that a student was involved in an incident of bullying as a bully, victim, or witness the Behavior Coach will refer them to the appropriate services based on the BMPCS's resource mapping effort.

At the time of a referral the Behavior Coach will inform the student's parents or guardian about referring the student to services with the student's assent if they have not already been informed as part of the investigation and determination process. The Behavior Coach will also explain the reasons they are referring a student, the type of service they are referring the student to and the reason they think that particular service(s) will meet the student's needs. Resources will be given directly to the student. If outside agencies are contacted, the student's and/or parent or guardian's written consent must first be obtained. If parents or guardians do not consent to contact outside services then such services will only be applied to bullies in conjunction with any sanctions applied.

Services for Bullies, Victims and Witnesses

Remedial services to which students are referred are not designed to be punitive and will never be noted on a student's BMPCS records as such.

Remedial services provided to the bully are designed to correct the thinking patterns, behaviors, and skill deficiencies that led to the incident, turning a bullying incident into a teachable moment.

Remedial services provided to the victim and witnesses are designed to restore students' sense of safety and to empower them to address bullying incidents in a constructive and non-violent manner.

Remedial services are designed to help student build the skills to participate safely and constructively in BMPCS and will be tailored to student based on: life skill competencies and deficiencies, extracurricular and academic strengths and weaknesses, available peer and home support networks, mental and behavioral health concerns, and personal traits. Based on these attributes and information from resource mapping indicating what BMPCS resources are best suited to address these deficiencies, the Behavior Coach will determine the appropriate remedial services. Services will be provided to the student no later than one month after an incident of bullying is confirmed by the Behavior Coach.

Appeals

Parties dissatisfied by the outcome of a bullying investigation may appeal the determination of the Behavior Coach to the BMPCS Principal. This appeal should be submitted no later than 30 days after the initial determination. Upon receipt of an appeal, the Principal must conduct a secondary investigation within 30 days of the receipt of an appeal. The 30 days may be extended by up to an additional 15 days if the Principal sets forth in writing the reasons why more time is needed to conduct an investigation. Additionally, upon the receipt of an appeal, the Principal must inform the party making the submission of their ability to seek additional redress under the DC Human Rights Act.