

# POLARIS

CHARTER ACADEMY

WHERE LEARNING HAS NO BOUNDARIES

## POLARIS BULLYING AND BIAS-BASED BEHAVIORS PREVENTION POLICY

*This policy was approved by the Polaris Board of Directors on August 26, 2024.*

*This policy was reviewed by the Polaris Board of Directors on December 15, 2025*

### Purpose

The Illinois General Assembly has found that a safe and civil school environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve. Bullying and Bias-based behaviors are directly contrary to this and can cause physical, psychological, and emotional harm to students and interferes with their ability to learn and participate in school activities. It is the goal of the Polaris Charter Academy to create learning environments where all students feel safe and supported, are protected from bullying and Bias-based harm, and are able to succeed academically as well as develop socially and emotionally into responsible, caring individuals.

Polaris Charter Academy asks every Chicago student, with the support of his/her parent(s), guardian(s) and the adults at school, to commit to the following principles, which will apply to everyone on school property and at school-related activities:

- I will not bully or intentionally harm others.
- I will try to help anyone I suspect is being bullied or harmed.
- I will work to include students who are left out.
- If someone is being bullied or harmed, I will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

### Preventing Bullying and Bias-based Behaviors

Polaris Charter Academy administration and staff shall work to develop safe and supportive school environments that prevent bullying and Bias-based behaviors through:

- Developing supportive school climate strategies, including clear expectations and share agreements to guide interactions between students, and between staff and students.
- Teaching all students social and emotional skills and establish 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.
- Establishing 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 your school plans to respond to bullying and harassment.
- Committing to welcoming and inclusive practices that center belonging, affirm cultural differences, and address and support the transformation of Bias-based harm.

### PCA Anti-Bullying Policy

Everyone has a right to feel safe and secure at school. Polaris Charter Academy intentionally strives to create an inclusive environment where all members of our community feel welcome to be themselves regardless of 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.

All members of the Polaris community, students, parents and staff, commit to upholding the standards of the school community. Polaris Charter Academy staff will work to maintain an environment that is free from bullying at all times and during all school related functions and activities.

Bullying 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.

Bullying behaviors may also qualify as other inappropriate behaviors listed in the PCA Student Code of Conduct. When deciding whether inappropriate behavior constitutes bullying, administrators will consider the student's intent, the frequency or recurrence of the inappropriate behavior, and whether there are power imbalances between the students

involved. While bullying is often characterized by repeated acts, sometimes a single incident constitutes bullying depending on the student's intent and power imbalances.

Bullying and Bias-based behaviors are prohibited and are considered a violation of the CPS Student Code of Conduct and subject to discipline:

- 1) during any school-sponsored or school-sanctioned program or activity;
- 2) in school, on school property, on school buses and at designated locations for students to wait for buses and other Board-provided transportation;
- 3) through the transmission of information from a CPS computer or computer network, or other electronic school equipment;
- 4) when communicated through any electronic technology or personal electronic device while on school property, on school buses or other school sanctioned transportation, and at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities;
- 5) when it is conveyed that a threat will be carried out in a school setting, including threats made outside school hours with intent to carry them out during any school-related or sponsored program or activity or on school sanctioned transportation;
- 6) when it is a Student Code of Conduct ("SCC") Group 5 or 6 behavior that occurs off campus but most seriously disrupts any student's education.

## Definitions

**"Bias-based Behavior"** is any physical, verbal, nonverbal, or other act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a member or perceived member of a protected category within the school community that is of a discriminatory or harmful nature.

**"Bullying"** means any physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students, and meets all of the following criteria. Note: if the behavior or part of the behavior is Bias-based or targeted at a member of a protected category please see the responding to Bias-based behaviors guidelines.

- 1) An observed or perceived imbalance of power exists between the person(s) engaging in the bullying behavior(s) and the targeted student(s).
- 2) The behaviors are severe or pervasive (repeated over time), or there is a high likelihood that behaviors will be repeated. While bullying is often characterized by repeated acts, sometimes a single incident constitutes bullying depending on the severity and if other elements of bullying are present.
- 3) The intent of the person(s) engaging in the behavior is to cause physical or emotional harm to the targeted student(s).
- 4) The behavior has or can be reasonably predicted to have one or more of the following effects:
  - a) placing the student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or property;
  - b) causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health;
  - c) substantially interfering with the student's academic performance; or
  - d) substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school

Bullying 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. Knowingly making false accusations of bullying will be investigated and will be treated as bullying behavior that is subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

**“Cyberbullying”** means using information and communication technologies to bully. This definition includes cyberbullying by means of technology that is not owned, leased, or used by the school district when an administrator or teacher receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred. This policy does not require a district or school to staff or monitor any non-school-related activity, function, or program.

**“Discrimination”** is treating an individual less favorably because of their actual or perceived membership in one or more of the Protected Categories.

**“Harassment”** is any unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, visual, or physical conduct that is based on an individual’s actual or perceived membership in one or more of the Protected Categories, as defined in the Final New Comprehensive NonDiscrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct And Retaliation Policy, that is persistent, pervasive, or severe and objectively offensive and unreasonably interferes with, limits, or denies an individual’s educational or employment access, benefits, or opportunities. Unwelcome conduct may include, but is not limited to, bullying, intimidation, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name calling, assaults or threats, touching, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, messages sent via email, text or social media, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, conduct of a sexual nature, or any other sex-based conduct.

**“Microaggressions”** are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their actual or perceived Protected Category membership such as race, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Adapted from Wing Sue, Derald. "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," 2010).

**“Protected Categories”** are an individual’s actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender or sex (includes gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and pregnancy related medical conditions), race or ethnicity, ethnic group identification, ancestry, nationality, national origin, religion, color, mental or physical disability, age (40 and above), immigration status, marital status, registered domestic partner status, genetic information, political belief or affiliation (not union related), military status, unfavorable discharge from military service, or on the basis of a person’s association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics, or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law, ordinance, or regulation.

**“Racial Discrimination”** is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, community, national or ethnic origin which has the impact of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, of a right to an equitable educational experience and fundamental freedoms in the social, economic, cultural, political, and linguistic aspects of school, school and district life (Adapted from United Nations, 2019).

**“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 and the PCA Student Code of Conduct.

**“Peer Conflict”** means disagreements and oppositional interactions that are situational, immediate and developmentally appropriate. When school employees are aware of peer conflict, they are expected to guide students in developing new skills in social competency, learning personal boundaries and peaceably resolving conflict, and to model appropriate social interactions. These interventions are designed to prevent Peer Conflict from escalating to Bullying.

## **Preventing Bullying and Bias-based Behaviors**

Administration and staff shall work to develop safe and supportive school environments that prevent bullying and Bias-based behaviors through:

- Developing supportive school climate strategies, including clear expectations and share agreements to guide interactions between students, and between staff and students.
- Teaching all students social and emotional skills and establish 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.

## **Responsibilities of Students, Parents and Guardians**

No Polaris 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. Any parent or guardian who witnesses or is notified of bullying has an obligation to advise the Principal/Designee as quickly as practicable. Anonymous reports will be accepted by the Principal/Designee. No disciplinary action will be taken on the sole basis of an anonymous report.

## **Steps for Investigating Bullying Reports**

1. The Principal shall select a designee, knowledgeable about bullying prevention and intervention, to perform the investigation.
2. Investigation of a bullying incident shall be initiated within five school days of receipt of a report and completed within 10 school days, unless the Principal grants in writing an additional 5-day extension due to extenuating circumstances. The Principal/ Designee shall document the extension in the investigation report and shall notify the parties involved.

The investigation shall include:

1. Ensuring safety. The Principal or their designee 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 CPS Crisis Manual, including immediately notifying the CPS Student Safety Center.. Alleged behaviors targeted at sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression should be reported immediately to the Office of Student Protections and Title IX for assistance and support: (773) 535-4400.
2. Notifying parents/guardians of all involved students. Within one school day of receipt of a bullying report, the Principal/Designee shall report to the parent/ legal guardian of all involved students, via telephone, personal conference and/or in writing, the occurrence of any alleged incident of bullying, and shall document these notifications in the District student information system.
  - a. Notifications should be made privately to students directly involved and their parent/legal guardians.
  - b. Additionally, when incidents have a larger impact on the school community, the Principall/Designee shall provide clear communication to students, staff and parents to re-inforce school-wide expectations and a climate of respect and inclusion.
3. Identifying the perpetrator(s), target(s) and bystander(s), as well as any adult who witnessed the incident or may have reliable information about it.
4. Conducting an individual interview in a private setting with the alleged perpetrator and target. The alleged perpetrator and target will not be interviewed together or in public. Individual interviews shall also be conducted in private with student and adult bystanders.
5. Determining how often the conduct occurred, any past incident or continuing pattern of behavior, and whether the target's education was affected.
6. 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.
7. When appropriate, preparing a Misconduct Report identifying his/her recommendation for individual consequences.
8. Comprehensively documenting the details of the investigation.
9. When the investigation is complete, the Principal/Designee shall ensure the investigation report is attached to the misconduct report.

**Notification**

On the same day the investigation is initiated, the Principal/Designee will report to the parent/legal guardian of all involved students, via telephone, personal conference and/or in writing, the occurrence of any alleged incident of bullying, and shall document these notifications in the Polaris Incident Report. When the investigation is complete, the Principal/Designee shall notify 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 /Designee 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.

If the investigation results in the imposition of consequences, the Principal/ Designee may advise the parent/legal guardian of students other than the perpetrator that the PCA Student Code of Conduct was followed. S/he may not advise them of the specific consequence imposed, as that would violate the confidentiality of school-record information required by law.