

## THE NEXT STEP PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

### Anti-Bullying Policy

The Next Step Public Charter School (TNS) recognizes that a school that is physically and emotionally safe and secure for all students promotes good citizenship, increases student attendance and engagement, and supports academic achievement. To protect the rights of all students for a safe and secure learning environment, TNS prohibits acts of bullying, harassment, and other forms of aggression and violence. Bullying or harassment, like other forms of aggressive and violent behaviors, interferes with both a school's ability to educate its students and a student's ability to learn. All administrators, faculty, staff, parents, volunteers, and students are expected to refuse to tolerate bullying and harassment and to demonstrate behavior that is respectful and civil.

A key responsibility of TNS is to provide services in a respectful and positive environment. The school has established this comprehensive bullying prevention policy. This policy protects the dignity and safety of the TNS community and describes prevention strategies to identify and prevent incidents by connecting youth to necessary services. TNS will promptly report and investigate all incidents of bullying, harassment, and intimidation and provide appropriate remedies for victims of an incident. For the purposes of including the whole and unique population of our school, the term "youth" or "student" includes those students beyond the age of 24 who are enrolled in the GED and/or ESL programs at TNS.

#### Definitions

The Next Step defines "**Bullying**" as:

Any severe, pervasive, or persistent act or conduct, whether physical, electronic, or verbal that:

May be based on a youth'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 of residence or business, or any other distinguishing characteristic, or on a youth's association with a person, or group with any person, with one or more of the actual or perceived forgoing characteristics; and shall be reasonably predicted to:

- Place the youth in reasonable fear of physical harm to his or her person or property;
- Cause a substantial detrimental effect on the youth's physical or mental health;
- Substantially interfere with the youth's academic performance or attendance; or
- Substantially interfere with the youth's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by an agency, education institution, or grantee.

A **target** is often a person who suffers from destructive acts, either emotionally or physically. Students who are the target of a bully experience negative emotions. Feelings of persecution prevail over feelings of safety and confidence. Fear, anger, frustration, and anxiety may lead to ongoing illness, mood swings, withdrawal from friends and family, an inability to concentrate, and loss of interest in school. If left unattended, the targeted student may develop attendance and/or discipline problems, fail at school altogether or, in the worst cases, they are suicidal or retaliatory and violent.

A **bystander** is a person who observes a conflict or unacceptable behavior. It might be something serious or minor, one-time or repeated, but the bystander knows that the behavior is destructive or likely to make a bad situation worse. Targets often perceive bystanders as being in collusion with bullies. Bystanders are very different from either targets or bullies mainly because they make a decision to stay on the outside of the situation. Whereas victims and bullies are directly involved, bystanders think that avoiding the conflict altogether is either the right move or the best thing for them personally.

**Sexual harassment** is a form of sex discrimination, which is prohibited by TNS. In addition, harassment based on any of the above-protected categories is prohibited. Discrimination in violation of the aforementioned laws will not be tolerated. Violators will be subject to disciplinary action.

Harassment is conduct that meets all of the following criteria:

- It is reasonably perceived as being dehumanizing, intimidating, hostile, humiliating, threatening, or otherwise likely to evoke fear of physical harm or emotional distress;
- It is directed at one or more students;
- It is conveyed through physical, verbal, technological, or emotional means;
- It substantially interferes with educational opportunities, benefits, or programs of one or more students;
- It adversely affects the ability of a student to participate in or benefit from the charter school's or public school's educational programs or activities because the conduct, as reasonably perceived by the student, is so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive as to have this effect; and,
- It is based on a student's actual or perceived distinguishing characteristic (see above), or is based on an association with another person who has or is perceived to have any of these characteristics.

## **Identification of Behavior Infractions and Implementation of Policy**

Title IX regulation requires schools to implement specific and continuing steps to protect students and others against discrimination on the basis of sex. Bullying and harassment also include forms of retaliation against individuals who report or cooperate in an investigation under this policy. Such behaviors are considered to be bullying or harassment whether they take place on or off school property, at any school-sponsored function, in a school vehicle, or at any time or place where a youth's imminent safety or overall well-being may be at issue.

The scope of this policy includes the prohibition of every form of bullying, harassment, and cyberbullying/harassment, whether in the classroom, on school premises, immediately adjacent to school premises, when a student is traveling to or from school (portal to portal), or at a school-sponsored event, whether or not held on school premises. Bullying or harassment, including cyberbullying/ harassment, that is not initiated at a location defined above is covered by this policy if the incident results in a potentially material or substantial disruption of the school learning environment for one or more students and/or the orderly day-to-day operations of any school or school program. The Public Charter School Board (PCSB) expects students to conduct themselves in a manner in keeping with their levels of development, maturity, and demonstrated capabilities with proper regard for the rights and welfare of other students, school staff, volunteers, and contractors.

The Next Step Public Charter School and PCSB believe that a comprehensive health education curriculum, within a coordinated school health framework, helps students attain knowledge and skills vital to school success, a productive workforce, and good citizenship. Critical skills include anticipating the consequences of choices, making informed decisions, communicating effectively, resolving conflicts, and developing cultural competency.

TNS recognizes that in order to have the maximum impact, it is critical to provide a minimum of annual training for school employees and volunteers who have significant contact with students on school policies and procedures regarding bullying and harassment. Training will provide school employees with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the necessary skills to fulfill them.

TNS believes that standards for student behavior must be set through interaction among the students, parents and guardians, staff, and community members of the school, producing an atmosphere that encourages students to grow in self-discipline and their ability to respect the rights of others. The development of this atmosphere requires respect for self and others, as well as for district and community property on the part of students, staff, parents, and community members.

TNS believes that the best discipline for aggressive behavior is designed to (1) support students in taking responsibility for their actions, (2) develop empathy, and respect for those different than themselves and (3) teach alternative ways to achieve the goals and the solve problems that motivated the aggressive behavior. Staff members who interact with students shall apply best practices designed to prevent discipline problems and encourage students' abilities to develop self-discipline and make better choices in the future.

Since bystander support of bullying and harassment can encourage these behaviors, TNS prohibits both active and passive support for acts of harassment or bullying. The staff should encourage students not to be part of the problem; not to pass on the rumors or derogatory messages; to walk away from these acts when they see them; to constructively attempt to stop them; to report them to the designated authority; and to reach out in friendship to the target. Periodic classroom meetings, Restorative Conferences, and/or Dialogue Circles should be conducted to teach bystanders how and when to respond to bullying and harassment incidents. Informal classroom discussions and activities designed to provide awareness and increase student connectedness promote a positive shift in peer norms that will support empowered bystanders. When bystanders do report or cooperate in an investigation, they must be protected from retaliation with the same type of procedures used to respond to bullying and harassment.

TNS requires its school administrators to develop and implement procedures that ensure both the appropriate consequences and remedial responses to a student or staff member who commits one or more acts of bullying and harassment. The following factors, at a minimum, shall be given full consideration by school administrators in the development of the procedures for determining appropriate consequences and remedial measures for each act of harassment or bullying.

#### **Factors for Determining Consequences:**

- Age, development, language, and maturity levels of the parties involved
  - Degree of harm (physical and/or emotional distress)
  - Surrounding circumstances
  - Nature and severity of the behavior(s)
  - Incidences of past or continuing pattern(s) of behavior
  - Relationship between the parties involved
  - The context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred
- Note: In order to ensure students' perception of fair and impartial treatment, a student's academic or athletic status is not a legitimate factor for determining consequences. Consequences must be perceived as fair and impartial.

## Factors for Determining Remedial Measures Personal:

- Life skill competencies
- Experiential deficiencies
- Social relationships
- Strengths
- Talents
- Traits
- Interests
- Hobbies
- Extra-curricular activities
- Classroom participation
- Academic performance
- School culture
- School climate and lack of connectedness
- Student-staff relationships and staff behavior toward the student
- Level of consistency in staff responses to bullying or harassing behaviors
- Level of consistency in application or severity of consequences given to students
- Staff-staff relationships witnessed by students
- General staff management of classrooms and other educational environments
- Staff's ability to prevent and de-escalate difficult or inflammatory situations
- Social-emotional and behavioral supports
- Social relationships
- Community activities
- Neighborhood culture
- Family situation

Consequences and appropriate remedial actions for a student or staff member who engages in one or more acts of bullying or harassment may range from Restorative Conferences and positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion, in the case of a student, or suspension or termination in the case of an employee, as set forth in the school's approved code of student conduct or employee handbook. School employees will also be held accountable for bullying or harassing behavior directed toward school employees, volunteers, parents, or students.

Consequences for a student who commits an act of bullying and harassment shall vary in method and severity according to the nature of the behavior, the developmental age of the student, and the student's history of problem behaviors and performance, and must be consistent with TNS's approved code of student conduct. Remedial measures shall

be designed to: correct the problem behavior; prevent another occurrence of the behavior; and protect the victim of the act. Effective discipline should employ a school-wide approach to adopt a rubric of bullying offenses and the associated consequences. The consequences and remedial measures may include but are not limited to:

- Admonishment
- Participation in a guided reflection process designed to teach alternative behavior (Dialogue Circle, class discussion, Restorative Conference, etc.)
- Temporary removal from the classroom

- Loss of privileges
- Referral to the Student Support Team (SST)
- Referral to disciplinarian
- Out-of-school suspension
- Legal action
- Expulsion or termination

### **Options of Remedial Measures Strategies for Individual Behavioral Change:**

- Framing the aggressive behavior as a failed attempt to solve a real problem or reach a goal. The adult(s) assists the misbehaving student in finding a better way to solve the problem or meet the goal. (SST meeting, meeting with case manager and/or counselor, etc.)
- Restitution and restoration
- Transformative conferencing/restorative justice practices
- Supervised peer support group
- Corrective instruction or other relevant learning or service experience
- Supportive discipline to increase accountability for the bullying offense
- Supportive interventions, including participation of a Student Support team, peer or staff mediation, etc.
- Behavioral assessment or evaluation
- Behavioral management plan, with benchmarks that are closely monitored
- Involvement of school disciplinarian
- Student counseling
- Parent conferences
- Student treatment
- Student Therapy

### **Strategies for Environmental Change (Classroom, School Building, or School Board):**

- Activities or strategies designed to help the student who engaged in bullying or harassment reflect on the offending behavior, maintaining an emotionally neutral and strength-based approach
- School and community surveys or other strategies for determining the conditions contributing to harassment, intimidation, or bullying
- Change process to improve school culture
- School climate improvement/improvement in conditions for learning and instructional pedagogy (incorporation of brain-compatible strategies)
- Adoption of research-based, systemic bullying prevention programs
- Modifications of schedules
- Adjustments in hallway traffic
- Modifications in student routes or patterns traveling to and from school

- Increased supervision and targeted use of monitors (e.g., hallway, cafeteria, area surrounding school grounds)
- General professional development programs for certificated and non-certificated staff
- Professional development plans for staff in key disciplinary roles
- Disciplinary action for school staff who contributed to the problem
- Parent conferences
- Referral to family counseling
- Increased involvement of parent-teacher organizations
- Increased involvement of community-based organizations
- Increased opportunities for parent input and engagement in school initiatives and activities
- Development of a general bullying/harassment response plan
- Peer support groups
- Increase communication with and involvement of law enforcement (e.g., school resource officer, juvenile officer)
- Engage in community awareness events and planning sessions

### **Safeguards to Prevent Retaliation**

TNS has set forth the expectation that faculty, staff, interns, and volunteers in both day and night school programs report incidents of bullying directly to officials in each program identified to be responsible for receiving complaints alleging violations of this policy: Yocaira Perez, Bilingual Case Manager at 202-489-2872

Youth, parents, guardians, visitors, officials from other schools in the area, and community members are encouraged to report any incidents of bullying that they witness or become aware of. Although anonymous reports of bullying are permitted and investigated just as fully as those that are identified, action cannot be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Reports of bullying may be made to [yperez@nextsteppcs.org](mailto:yperez@nextsteppcs.org); 3047 15th Street, NW Washington, DC 20009, Department of Student Support Service.

TNS requires the principal and/or the principal's designee to be responsible for determining whether an alleged act constitutes a violation of this policy. In so doing, these individuals shall conduct a prompt, thorough, and complete investigation of each alleged incident. The investigation is to be completed within three (3) school days after a report or complaint is made. If under the age of 18, the parents/guardians of the students involved shall receive written notice from the school on the outcome of the investigation (in compliance with current privacy laws and regulations).

Reports may be made anonymously, but formal disciplinary action may not be based solely on the basis of an anonymous report. TNS requires the principal and/or the principal's designee to be responsible for determining whether an alleged act constitutes a violation of this policy. In so doing, the principal and/or the principal's designee shall conduct a prompt, thorough, and

complete investigation of each alleged incident. The investigation is to be completed within three (3) school days after a report or complaint is made. If under the age of 18, the parents of the students involved shall receive written notice from the school on the outcome of the investigation (in compliance with current privacy laws and regulations). All reports on instances of bullying and/or harassment must be recorded by the school for annual data review.

TNS prohibits reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying or harassment or cooperates in an investigation. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who engages in reprisal or retaliation shall be determined by the administrator after consideration of the nature, severity, and circumstances of the act.

TNS prohibits any person from falsely accusing another as a means of bullying or harassment. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person found to have falsely accused another as a means of bullying or harassment may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion.

Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a school employee found to have falsely accused another, as a means of bullying or harassment, shall be in accordance with school policies, procedures, and agreements.

TNS requires school officials to annually disseminate the policy to all school staff, students, and parents, along with a statement explaining that it applies to all applicable acts of harassment and bullying that occur on school property, at school-sponsored functions, or on school bus. The chief school administrator shall develop an annual process for discussing the school district policy on harassment and bullying with students and staff.

## **Appeal Process**

The school shall incorporate information regarding the policy against harassment or bullying into each school employee training program and handbook.

- An appeals process for the person accused of bullying, a target of bullying, and anyone who is not satisfied with the outcome of the initial investigation.
- Such party who is not satisfied with the outcome of the initial investigation may appeal to the designated higher-level authority
- Appeals must be made within 30 days of the conclusion of the initial investigation
- The secondary investigation shall be completed within 30 days of receipt of an appeal, unless:
  - Circumstances require additional time to complete a thorough investigation
  - The higher-level authority sets forth those circumstances in writing
  - The additional time is not to exceed 15 days
- Those filing an appeal shall be informed of the right to seek further redress under the Human Rights Act.