

Thacher Montessori

Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

Thacher Montessori School (“Thacher Montessori”) is committed to providing a physically and emotionally safe environment, free from all forms of bullying, for all students, staff and other constituents. Bullying affects not only those who are subjected to bullying (“targets”) but also those who participate in and/or witness such behavior. Because acts of bullying detract from the peace and security that are necessary for a healthy community and environment for learning, Thacher Montessori will not tolerate such acts.

Thacher Montessori prohibits all forms of bullying based on race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or disability. The civil rights of all community members are guaranteed by law. Those rights are of utmost importance and their protection is a priority for Thacher Montessori. The school also prohibits bullying of any members of the Thacher community for reasons unrelated to the above mentioned civil rights. Thacher Montessori will not tolerate retaliation against persons who take action in violation of this policy.

B. What is Bullying?

Bullying: Bullying is the repeated use by one or more students, or any member of the school staff, of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target’s property;
- (ii) places the target in reasonable fear of harm to him- or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- (iv) infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

For purposes of this policy, school staff includes, but is not limited to, any and all educators, administrators, school nurses, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals.

Cyber-bullying: Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes but is not limited to email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings. Cyber-bullying can include (but is not limited to) bullying through the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person, or knowingly impersonates another person as the author of posted content or messages and also includes bullying through the distribution of or posting on electronic media that may be accessed by others.

Retaliation: Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student or staff member who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

C. Scope of Plan

Thacher Montessori will support the Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan in all aspects of its activities, including its curricula, instructional programs, staff development, extracurricular activities and parental involvement.

The Plan applies to all sites and activities under the supervision and control of Thacher Montessori, or as required by law. Thacher prohibits bullying whether it takes place at school, at school-sponsored events, or on a school bus. The Plan applies to all students, school volunteers, visitors, parents and legal guardians of students whose conduct occurs on school premises or in school-related activities, including school-related transportation.

Bullying is also prohibited at any location, activity, function or program that is not school-related, or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by Thacher Montessori, if the act or acts in question create a hostile environment at school for the target, infringe on the rights of the target at school, or materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of the school. The Thacher Montessori Board of Trustees expects the Head of School to make clear to students and staff that bullying will not be tolerated and will be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including suspension and expulsion for students and termination for employees.

D. Plan's Development

The development of the Thacher Montessori Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan is a community effort. A task force of staff developed a plan after studying the plans recommendations from the Massachusetts Attorney General's office and other schools' tentative plans. After completing an initial draft in November of 2010, the Thacher Montessori staff and parent communities had an opportunity to review and add feedback to the plan before it was presented to the Thacher Montessori Board of Trustees for their review and approval. The Plan will be reviewed every two years.

E. Vulnerable Populations

Thacher Montessori School recognizes that certain students may be more vulnerable to become targets of bullying, harassment or teasing based on perceived characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical disability, sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The School will identify specific steps it will take to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment or teasing.

The School shall take the following specific steps to support vulnerable students and to provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies needed to prevent or respond to bullying or harassment.

1. Our Montessori curriculum places an emphasis on practicing and teaching respect, conflict resolution, and appreciation and honoring of differences.
 2. When placing students in classrooms we take care to avoid isolating vulnerable children.
 3. We are committed to being a consciously diverse community.
 - a. Our admissions staff is intentional about enrolling children from diverse backgrounds and family structure.
 - b. Multiage classrooms with children working at all levels are maintained to normalize diversity.
 - c. Families of vulnerable groups are encouraged to come in and share their family cultures.
 4. Adults at Thacher consciously work to prevent bullying.
 - a. Adults model cooperation and tolerance.
 - b. Adults respond to issues with a respectful learning approach rather than a punitive approach.
 - c. Our guides are trained observers who proactively recognize and address behavior that is inappropriate.
 - d. Adults are attentive to social interactions on the playground and address potential issues directly with the children involved.
 - e. Our individualized approach allows adults to bring conflict to the fore to be addressed for each and every child.
 - f. We address issues promptly and include parents in discussions early to make sure the awareness of problems extends beyond the classroom.
 - g. We teach 3-6 year olds to greet, have a dialogue, ask for help and use words to avoid conflict. We give them appropriate vocabulary so they can successfully interact with others.
 - h. Elementary and adolescent students use role-playing activities and/or community meetings to learn about conflict resolution.
 - i. Elementary students work together to write their classroom code of conduct at the start of each year.
- Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the appropriate staff member shall take all necessary steps to restore the target and/or community's sense of safety as necessary and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents.

Target Interview & Support - In responding to a report or other evidence of bullying or retaliation, staff members should follow the following steps:

- a) Interview the target first, then the alleged aggressor.
- b) The staff member conducting the interview should not meet with the target, or ask to meet with the target, in the alleged aggressor's presence. The staff member should emphasize that the target will not be mentioned to the aggressor and will not be part of the discipline.
- c) Dealing with the alleged aggressor(s) is the role of the adult, not the target.
- d) Mediation should not be used for resolving bullying situations.

When interviewing a target involved with an incident, staff members should:

- a) affirm the target's feelings:
Example: "I can see/hear that you are feeling..."
- b) affirm the target took the right action by reporting his or her side of the story;
Example: "I'm glad you told me. It is very helpful to know your side of the story."
- c) ask the target what s/he has already attempted to do to stop the aggression;
- d) make it clear that the aggression was not his/her fault;
- e) think carefully before giving advice, as often times the targets have already tried and failed to stop this aggression by the strategies staff members usually suggest (e.g., walk away or tell aggressor to stop);
- f) remind the target to always report aggression;
- g) brainstorm solution with him/her after identifying what has and has not worked in the past. (Note: Even solutions that seem obvious to adults may not be apparent to children, such as merely avoiding the bully); and
- h) recruit targets' peers to befriend isolated targets. Do this carefully and deliberately (that is, approach the target's peers who will be sympathetic and ask them directly to befriend the target; even temporarily, this can be a big help).

Witness Interview & Support - When interviewing students who are witnesses to bullying, staff members should:

- a) affirm the witness took the right action by reporting all information he/she has about the situation;
Example: "I'm glad you told me. This information may help us find a solution."
- b) ask the witness if something has already been attempted to stop this situation;
- c) gain an understanding of the witness's feelings;
Example: Does the witness feel fear, empathy, or any other emotions?
- d) if appropriate, brainstorm with the witnesses ways to make him or her feel safe;
- e) remind the witness or informant to always report aggression; and
- f) let the witness know you will do everything you can to help solve the problem.

Accused Interview & Support - When interviewing the student who is accused of bullying, staff members should:

- a) Identify the problem and diffuse reporting responsibility;
Example: "I have been hearing that..." or "I have an Incident Report that states...". Alternatively, own reporting responsibility or attribute it to another adult (example: "I am disturbed by what I have been seeing..." or "Ms. X saw you...")
- b) Focus more generally on the alleged aggressor's behavior rather than on the particular incident;
Example: "I have a report here that you are calling kids names," rather than "I have a report that you called Susie Smith a bad name."
- c) Provide incentives for honesty;
Example: If the alleged aggressor denies any wrongdoing, tell him that if he tells the truth about the incident, you can mention his honesty when calling his parents.
- d) Proceed differently depending on whether or not the student who is accused of being the aggressor admits any wrongdoing.
(1) If the student denies any wrongdoing, consider the following tactics:

- i. Tell the student if there is any corroborating evidence or witnesses, but do not mention the target or the witnesses by name (unless they are adults), if possible.
 - ii. If there is NO corroboration and the student continues to deny the allegations, tell the student that you hope he or she is right. Explain that you and the other adults in school will be keeping a close eye on the situation. *The critical element here is that the children know there will be a response to the report even if there appears to be no immediate disciplinary action.*
 - iii. If the student denies the allegation, regardless of whether or not there is corroboration, conduct an investigation. Staff should tell the alleged aggressor that you will talk to him/her some more about this matter, but do not mention that you may be talking to other students, as this may result in the alleged aggressor threatening them as well.
- (2) If the student admits the behavior but minimizes his or her actions, respond by firmly asserting that s/he may feel it is “no big deal” but that the school and the community think that such behaviors are indeed a big deal.
- (3) If the child finally admits wrongdoing after initially denying it, acknowledge the difficulty out of denial.

Disciplinary Measures & Counseling - While allegations of bullying, harassment, or retaliation may be made anonymously, no disciplinary action shall be taken against the accused solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Once it is deemed that the alleged action is considered “bullying,” Thacher Montessori will respond in a manner appropriate to the aggressor’s age and/or developmental awareness, including but not limited to taking any of the following actions:

- immediate removal from other students;
- development with aggressor’s parents (and possibly with aggressor) of a plan of action to help the child modify his/her behavior and protect the safety of others;
- suspension;
- expulsion; and/or
- report to the local police.

Any student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be disciplined.

Counseling, or referrals to appropriate services, may be provided to students who have been bullied, or who have perpetrated bullying, and their family members.

† The Head of School will notify the local law enforcement agency if at any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, there is reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the alleged aggressor.

Prompt Notification to Parents and School - The Head of School will promptly notify the parents of both the target and the alleged aggressor in a manner consistent with state and federal law, and inform the parents of any action taken to prevent further bullying or retaliation.

Thacher Montessori recognizes that sharing the outcome of incidents of bullying and/or retaliation is critical to maintaining a school climate where students and parents/guardians feel able to report such behaviors. Thacher Montessori will strive to provide sufficient information to the Thacher Montessori community after an incident of bullying to ensure that the matter is being appropriately handled.

Safety and Security - Thacher Montessori cares about the safety and security of its students. In the event that bullying takes place, the staff will closely monitor the behaviors of the alleged aggressor to ensure the target’s safety, including if necessary moving the aggressor to another classroom and ensuring that the aggressor and target do not have recess at the same time. A designated staff member will have responsibility to assess the situation regularly and report to the Head of School on a weekly basis. These actions are in addition to the steps listed above under *Disciplinary Measures and Counseling*.

II. REPORTING BULLYING, RESPONSES TO BULLYING & DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

Students, staff, parents, guardians, and others are encouraged to report bullying or retaliation to any Thacher Montessori lead guide, specialist, or administrator. Reports of bullying may be made anonymously. No disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Any members of the school staff must immediately report any instance of bullying or retaliation that he or she has witnessed, or of which he or she becomes aware, to the Head of School, including by completing the Bully/Peer Aggression Report Form **(attached hereto)[1]** and submitting it to the Head of School. The Head of School will be responsible for handling all complaints by students alleging bullying or retaliation. The Head of School will promptly and reasonably investigate all allegations of bullying or retaliation. Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, who provides information during an investigation of bullying, or who is a witness to or has reliable information about bullying, is prohibited.

II. EDUCATION ON BULLYING

A. Staff

Thacher Montessori shall provide annual professional development to all school staff members to build skills to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying and to implement the bullying prevention and intervention plan. The content of such professional development shall include, but not be limited to:

1. developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents;
2. developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
3. information regarding the complex interactions and power differential that can take place between and among the target, aggressor and any witness;
4. research findings on bullying;
5. information on the incidence and nature of cyber-bullying; and
6. internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

The school staff shall receive annual written notice of the Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan in the staff handbook.

B. Parents/Guardians

Thacher Montessori is more than a school; it is a community. As such, it is the policy of Thacher Montessori to encourage and expect parents and guardians to share information with the school that could be useful to identify, better understand and/or address any types of bullying or retaliatory behavior that may impact any part of the school community. Collaboration with parents and guardians increases the school's capacity to prevent and respond to bullying.

Thacher Montessori shall provide information to parents on the school's philosophy and the Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan at various times throughout the year, including during the first tour of the school, at annual fall orientation meetings, in the Family Handbook, and at parent education seminars. Parents will also receive written or oral notice from teachers if their child is involved in any behavior that is not consistent with expected behavior as outlined in the Family Handbook. Such information will reinforce the curriculum at home and support the School's Plan, the dynamics of bullying; and online safety and cyberbullying.

C. Students

Thacher Montessori recognizes that students may engage in bullying without understanding the effects of such behavior. Therefore, evidence-based, age-appropriate bullying prevention shall be included in the lessons and guidance students receive in each classroom.

At the beginning of each school year, students in every classroom shall participate in developing the classroom rules of behavior. Relevant sections of the Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan shall be presented and discussed with students. On-going education on Bullying Prevention & Intervention and retaliation shall be provided thereafter as necessary.

D. Website

The Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan will be posted on the school's website.

III. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BULLYING PREVENTION & INTERVENTION PLAN

The Head of School of Thacher Montessori is responsible for implementation and oversight of the Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan.

IV. PROCEDURES FOR ADOPTING AND REVIEWING BULLYING PREVENTION & INTERVENTION PLAN

Prior to the adoption of the Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan, Thacher Montessori will consult with teachers, school staff, administrators, students, parents and guardians. All families of Thacher Montessori will receive notice of and an opportunity to comment on the Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan. The Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan will be reviewed every two years.

Thacher Montessori School reserves the right to respond to each instance of bullying on a case-by-case basis that is consistent with the Plan.

**[1] Thacher Montessori School
Bully/Peer Aggression Report Form**

Reporter:	
Date and time of incident:	
Location of incident:	
Who reported incident:	
Children involved:	
Witnesses:	
Describe incident or concerns in detail. Be sure to include: What happened? What action was taken? What was the outcome? Any further information or concerns	
To your knowledge has this occurred before?	YES NO
Were there immediate safety or transportation needs?	Needs: Action taken:
Parent (of target) contacted Parent (of accused) contacted	Date: Phone #: Date: Phone #:
Head of school signature	

Please submit completed form to the head of school immediately