

## Anti-Bullying Policy

The German International School Washington, D.C. believes that all students and staff are entitled to a safe and respectful school environment. The school does not condone bullying in any form (including cyber bullying) and will take appropriate action, according to its disciplinary policy, against such forms of misconduct.

### Definition

Although there is no universal definition of bullying, it is widely agreed upon that:

Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior in which an individual or a group intentionally and repeatedly causes another person or group injury or discomfort. Bullying often involves an imbalance of power and can take the form of physical contact or violence, verbal attacks or insults, or more subtle actions like ostracizing and/or psychological violence. The bullied individual typically has trouble defending him or herself from the one-sided aggression and does nothing to “cause” the bullying.

This definition includes three important components:

1. Bullying is intentional aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions.
2. Bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time, not isolated incidents.
3. Bullying involves a real or perceived imbalance of power or strength.

We believe that creating a safe and supportive environment consists of prevention, intervention/remediation, and consequences. Furthermore, our school has included the following educational components to enhance our students’ conflict resolution skills, increase their compassion and understanding for one another, and strengthen their school community.

### Prevention, Intervention and Remediation at the GISW include but are not limited to:

- The Responsive Classroom approach in the elementary school, which focuses daily on social emotional learning and development. Homeroom teachers provide ample time to discuss

social emotional and developmental topics with students (for example, in the morning circle and after recesses). Staff also regularly includes social emotional and behavior topics in class units.

- Social Skills training class (parallel to the computer course) in grades 3 and 4 with the school counselor. This training focuses on topics such as empathy, bullying, conflict resolution, diversity, perspective taking, problem solving, dealing with difficult feelings, peer pressure, friendship etc.
- Access to the elementary counseling library for students, teacher and parents. Books on a variety of social-emotional topics, including bullying, are available.
- “Klassenrat” (in the elementary school and WeiSchu) and “Grundschulrat” in the elementary school in which students are empowered to discuss topics relevant to them and to work as a group to support one another and/or to explore solutions.
- The introduction of the prevention program run by the school’s prevention coordinator now engages the students in social emotional learning classes regularly. This replaced the former outsourced act.now program that provided social skills trainings.
- Staff professional development occurs annually and often includes topics related to social emotional development and behavior of students. Furthermore, staff has access to professional development trainings on a variety of topics related to behavior through the Fobizz and Vector Solutions platform.
- Availability of counselors in the elementary school and WeiSchu to assist students individually or in groups. Counselors can provide a place for students to discuss issues they are facing within themselves or with others and get support with conflict resolution and problem solving. The counselors focus on building empathy and understanding and help the students hone their interpersonal skills while providing a safe and supportive environment to do so.
- Recent development of a “Schutzkonzept” by the DEIB project group to further outline and describe the available policies and procedures for ensuring a safe and respectful school environment for the entire school community.
- Collaborative approach with parents to help students who are exhibiting bullying behaviors learn more socially acceptable behavior and improve their social skills.
- Remedial measures designed to correct the bullying behavior, prevent another occurrence, and protect the victim (such as informing parents, and pedagogical or disciplinary consequences as outlined in the disciplinary policy).
- Victim is supported by school staff as appropriate and needed.
- Disseminating information to other staff regarding bullying incidents to further raise awareness, heighten alertness in class and recess, and aid in making victim feel safer.
- If needed, utilizing community health and mental health resources for those students involved in bullying behaviors as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses whose mental or physical health, safety, or academic performance has been impacted.

**Reporting Acts of Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation:**

Reports of incidences of bullying can be made by students or parents to any staff member. Reports should be made promptly so that action can be taken as quickly as possible.

- If a student reports to a staff member that he/she is currently the victim of bullying the staff member will respond quickly and appropriately to investigate and intervene.
- If a student expresses a desire to discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member, the staff member will make an effort to provide the student with a practical, safe, private, and age-appropriate way of doing so.
- Staff member will inform other team members (teachers, supervisors, afternoon program, administration etc) as necessary.
- If a parent suspects their child may be the victim of bullying they may contact their child's class teacher and/or the administration or counselor, so that the school may follow up appropriately.

**Investigating reports of Bullying:**

*Note: Although the school does not minimize any student's experience with inappropriate behavior, it is important to distinguish between rude behavior (inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else), mean behavior (purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone a limited number of times, but stopping once addressed), and bullying (intentional aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that does not stop, with a possible power imbalance).*

*It is important to take the age of the students into account, because children of a young age still have underdeveloped impulse control, and their social-emotional development is not yet complete. Young children often react to provocation without thinking carefully and still need support in developing proper constructive conflict resolution strategies.*

1. School administrators or the administrative designee determine whether bullying actually occurred. They should take steps to verify who committed the act of bullying, whether others played a role, and gather additional context as needed. In cases of suspected cyberbullying, staff and/or administration may confiscate and search a student's iPad (school property).
2. Neither victim nor witnesses should be promised confidentiality at the onset of an investigation. It cannot be predicted what will be discovered or if a hearing may result from the ultimate outcome of the investigation. Efforts should be made to increase the confidence and trust of the victim and any witnesses. They will be informed that any information discussed and recorded will be confined to "need to know" status and that measures will be taken to make them feel as comfortable and secure as much as possible.

3. If an investigation determines that there is evidence of bullying, parents of the involved students will be informed, and appropriate action will be taken in accordance with the school's disciplinary policy. In general, pedagogical consequences precede disciplinary actions. Due to confidentiality, the school generally can only share specific information about an incident with parents as it pertains to their own child. We do not discuss incidents or consequences with other parents.
4. School administrators and staff will apply consequences and/or remedial actions consistent with the German International School's disciplinary policy using the range of listed actions and consequences in that policy.

**Consequences:**

Consequences and remedial actions for students exhibiting bullying behavior or for students engaged in reprisal or retaliation, and for students found to have made false accusations should be consistently and fairly applied after the school has determined that such an offense has occurred.

The determination of age-appropriate consequences will be based on the school's existing disciplinary policy and in accordance with existing disciplinary procedures in the context of age, circumstances, and any prior disciplinary history.

**References**

Annotated Code of Maryland, Education, 2008.

Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), Title 13A State Board of Education.

Delaware's Model Bully Prevention Policy, Title 14, Section 4112D, Delaware Code Annotated.

DRAFT – *Towards A Maryland's Model Bully Prevention Policy*, Jorge Srabstein, MD and Members of the Coalition for the Prevention of Bullying and Related Health Risks, September, 2008.

*Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007*, U.S. Department of Education NCES 2008-021, U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs NCJ 219553.

Maryland State Department of Education (2005), Safe Schools Reporting Act, Directions for Students and Parents Completing Bullying/Harassment Referral Form.

Maryland State Department of Education (2008), Suspensions, Expulsions, and Health Related Exclusions Maryland Public Schools, 2007-2008, MSDE-DPA 11/08.

Maryland Youth Risk Behavioral Survey, Maryland State Department of Education,

September, 2008.

New Jersey's Model Policy and Guidelines for Prohibiting Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying on School Property, At School-Sponsored Functions and On School Buses, New Jersey Administrative Code §6A:16-7.9.

The Broward County Public Schools Anti-Bullying Policy ADOPTED: 7/22/08, 6/15/10

*Is it Rude, Is it Mean, or is it Bullying?*, Signe Whitson, L.S.W. Psychology Today, 2012

**Signature Box**

Printed Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_