## The Learning Project's

# **Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan**

#### I. Introduction:

Bullying runs against the grain of all that The Learning Project stands for. Members of The Learning Project community are expected to behave with respect, civility, and kindness, and bullying violates each of these expectations. Bullying is a direct violation of the words and spirit of the school's Mission Statement, Statement of Philosophy, Guiding Principals, Statement on Diversity, and its policies prohibiting discrimination, harassment, and uncooperative conduct.

The Plan below is in response to a state mandate about bullying (Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010) and seeks to clarify, strengthen, and communicate long-standing Learning Project practice. It goes into effect after the public comment period and at the time it is submitted to the Department of Education. The Head of School is responsible for the implementation and administration of this Policy and Plan. Questions or comments about the Plan may be directed to the Head of School or to the Director of Academics.

## II. Anti-Bullying Policy

Bullying in any form or by any means (e.g., through the use of cybertechnologies or other electronic devices) by a student or by an adult member of the school community is prohibited and will not be tolerated. Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation about bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited and will not be tolerated. The School will investigate promptly all reports of bullying (including cyber-bullying) and retaliation. We will also continue to support our commitment to maintain a bully free and safe environment by using all assets of our school community, including curricula and program, staff development, and parent education to promote the goal of sustaining a caring, inclusive, respectful, and kind community.

The prohibition on bullying applies not only during school hours or at school functions, but also during non-school hours and at non-school related

locations if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school, infringes on the rights of a targeted student at school, materially and substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school, or damages the school's reputation.

It is important for all those working with children and young people to have a clear definition and understanding of what constitutes bullying. The characteristics of bullying are persistence over time, intentionality, hurtfulness (emotional or physical), and often an imbalance of power. It is not a simple matter to discern when teasing or persistent annoying conduct by a young child crosses a line and begins to acquire the hallmarks of bullying.

The Plan that is described below addresses the matter of bullying among students and is guided by the Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan document published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, August 2010. The Learning Project's long-standing work with Character Education, its prior knowledge about bullying and social-emotional development, its historical commitments to building a safe and inclusive learning environment for children, and its policies and procedures supporting those goals also influence the approach that is outlined below.

Massachusetts General Law c. 71 § 370 defines bullying as "the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- 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 himself/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."

<u>Hostile environment</u> is defined in M.G.L. as "a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education." And <u>retaliation</u> is defined as "any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

# III. Prevention Plan

Bullying prevention takes place within the culture and shared beliefs of the whole school. Although any perpetrators of bullying will face consequences, it is our belief that bullying is more likely to be prevented if a whole school embraces the notion that social-emotional skills and character development are equally as important as academic progress. When a family accepts a place at The Learning Project, this core belief is made very clear to them. All parents are expected to read the <u>Parent Handbook</u>, which contains a detailed outline of the school's approach, before they sign and return a contract. Below is the core set of beliefs and actions that form The Learning Project's Prevention Plan.

If the purpose of education is to promote knowledge *and* goodness, then the development of pro-social behavior is as important as the development of scholastic ability, and a pro-social behavior agenda—or character education—must be a paramount concern to the school and its faculty. There are many components to the school's Character Education program that have direct bearing on the prevention and control of bullying and its antecedents. These components may be modified over time, but their overall intent—that of promoting pro-social conduct—will remain constant. Components that are presently in place include the following:

- The messages about respect, civility and kindness are repeated in written communication, posted on the school's walls, and talked about in classrooms, at assemblies, and at parent meetings. The school makes clear in the <a href="Parent Handbook">Parent Handbook</a> that any form of teasing or bullying is not acceptable. The school will remind all members of the school community about its Anti-bullying Policy at the beginning of each school year, and a copy of the Policy will be in the Parent Handbook.
- The school has a Character Education program that is implemented in September of each year and followed by the whole school for the entire year. Each month focuses on a different virtue, with the virtues very much focused on civility, respect, kindness, acceptance of differences and how we treat others.
- The School has a Computer Use Policy, which addresses the matter of respectful use of computers, social networking, and cyberspace in general. All children in grades four, five, and six are required to read this policy annually, and to indicate their assent with their signatures.

- Daily circle times in each classroom reinforce the core virtues, and the
  words used are displayed in the classrooms. Teachers use a common
  language when they are talking with the children about the virtues. The
  teachers actively recognize positive examples of the use of the core
  virtues, and encourage all children to do likewise with one another, and
  to expect ethical and kind conduct from their peers.
- The school has three annual programs, 'Justice & Equity,' 'Peace and Non-violent Conflict Resolution,' and 'Sexuality Education' which build upon the core virtues. The Justice & Equity program is taught each year to every grade over a six-week period in the winter. Peace and Non-violent Conflict Resolution begins during the first months of school, and is addressed throughout the year in All School Meetings and also in Little All School Meetings. The Sexuality Education Program is taught over a six-week period each spring to grades 1-6, and includes positive messages about the variety of family structures, and about the importance of tolerance and of non-discrimination around sexual orientation.
- Little All School Meetings provide all the children an opportunity to interact with children across the age spectrum. This helps to break down some of those barriers that can be related to differences of age, size, grade level and maturity.
- The School's many traditional All School special events (Performance Festivals, Trick or Treat for UNICEF, our Choral Concerts, Sports Days, Stuffed Animal Day, the Read-a-Thon, the Annual Picnic, and Graduation) underscore the centrality and value of community and remind children of the important principles and behaviors that hold the school together in harmony and joy.
- Sixth graders are part of the Advisory System. Each sixth grader has an advisor who meets with his/her advisees each week throughout the year. At these meetings the sixth graders talk about a variety of issues including friendship, getting along with others, getting along in a group, goal setting, problem solving, liking oneself and managing the final year of elementary school. Also covered are the issues of peer pressure, teasing and bullying, and the matter of 'bystander responsibility.' Particular attention is paid to giving students the language and courage to stand-up for themselves, or for someone else, in the face of teasing or bullying. It is also during these advisory meetings that cyber-bullying is re-explored, building upon fifth grade learning.

- Faculty understand the important role that they play in being positive
  role models of respectful behavior, and are expected to behave
  accordingly. Clear Guidelines for 'Professional Conduct' are included in
  the <u>Faculty Handbook</u> and the school's leadership makes sure that those
  standards are front and center and the point of reference if there are any
  interpersonal issues among adults in the school.
- Learning about bullying prevention is a key component of Professional Development for faculty. Attending workshops, as well as in-house discussions of topics such as, for example, 'Mean-girl behavior' or 'Why some children are teased' or 'Who is showing signs in your class of wanting to develop a clique?' are key to helping teachers develop an awareness of what goes on in classrooms and on the playground.
- Learning Project children are well supervised at all times. The children are everyone's responsibility and all faculty members—not just the child's Head Teacher—are expected to notice and to respond to what is happening between or among the children.
- All instances of teasing, name-calling, or disrespectful behavior that are noted by faculty are addressed. The children also have an opportunity among themselves each week to raise issues that are bothering them in 'Feedback' sessions in the classroom.
- A child who is being unkind to another student will have a talk with the Class Head teacher. If the behavior persists, the child will be sent to talk with the Head of School and/or the Director of Academics and the child's parents will be informed that there is a developing situation that needs concentrated attention. If it seems appropriate, the school will recommend that the child receive some outside professional counseling.

Teasing and bullying are points along a continuum, and prevention along with early intervention are keys to ensuring that teasing is seen as an unacceptable step along the path to bullying. The school's Character Education Program—in all the ways outlined above—is designed to develop in children the strength of character required to be a positive force for good in a classroom. The school's consistent attention to social and emotional growth helps very young children develop those habits of mind that enable them to see teasing and disrespect for what they are. It also helps them develop the language needed to confront teasing, and the courage and poise to speak up against teasing, including when someone *else* is the victim.

#### IV. Intervention Plan

Any student who is the target of bullying is strongly encouraged to tell an adult at school or at home. If the 'victim' tells a Head Teacher or Intern or other member of the school faculty or staff, the Head Teacher or Intern or other member of the faculty or staff is required to report the matter to the Head of School or the Director of Academics. If a parent is aware of a bullying situation, that parent is strongly encouraged to report the situation to the Head of School or Director of Academics. Any faculty member or staff member who witnesses or knows about what appears to be bullying is required to report the matter to the Head of School or the Director of Academics. A member of the faculty or staff may not make reports anonymously nor make promises of confidentiality to a student or parent who informs him/her of a bullying situation. Any threats of retaliation must be reported to the Head of School and/or the Director of Academics at once.

Anonymous reports of bullying from a parent or a student or other party are discouraged because they are more difficult to investigate. All potential reporters of bullying should know that the school takes seriously the policy against retaliation and that while a full investigation of any report may make strict confidentiality impossible, the school will release information only on a need-to-know basis. Still, it is acknowledged that an anonymous report might be made and that an anonymous report could be better than no report at all.

All reports will be recorded in writing.

When a report of bullying or retaliation is received, The Head of School and/or The Director of Academics of School will take immediate steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target or to protect the alleged target from further incidents. If protection is warranted for the person(s) making the report, similar steps will be taken. This initial 'assessment of need' will also inform the decision about whether to proceed with a full investigation. If the reported incident involves a student or students from another school, and if the initial 'assessment of need' suggests that a full investigation is warranted, the Head of School and/or Director of Academics will promptly notify by telephone or in person the principal or other designee of the other school(s) so that appropriate action can be taken.

Upon determining that there are grounds for a full investigation, the Head and/or Director of Academics will notify the parents of the child being targeted and the parents of the alleged aggressor. This further investigation will be conducted in an impartial and fair manner, and will be done by the Head and/or Director of Academics, or their designee. A written record of that investigation will be maintained and, to the extent practical, confidence will be maintained. The full investigation may include interviews with the person who made the complaint, with the student who was the target of the alleged bullying or retaliation, with the student/students against whom the complaint was made, and with any students, faculty, staff or other persons who may have relevant information about the alleged incident. There may also be consultations with outside professionals as deemed appropriate by the Head or Director of Academics.

When the investigation is complete, the Head of School and/or the Director of Academics will determine whether and to what extent the allegation of bullying or retaliation has been substantiated. If it is determined that the Policy has been violated, the Head of School, in consultation with the Director of Academics, will determine what disciplinary action and/or other remedial action is appropriate and how it will be implemented. If the Head of School and/or the Director of Academics has a reasonable basis to believe that a crime may have been committed or a child has been subject to abuse or neglect of the type reportable under Section 51A of Massachusetts law, law enforcement or another appropriate government agency will be notified.

The Head of School and the Director of Academics will meet separately with all parties, including parents or guardians, so that all parties may be informed of the investigation and any actions taken. As deemed appropriate, the School may also meet together with the students involved. The meetings with parties, separately or together, will focus on preventing a repetition of the incident and/or retaliation against others and on the goal of restoring mutual respect and confidence.

Having done all that it can to assure the safety of the victim and of the community, including follow-up monitoring of the victim and 'check-ins' with the victim and the victim's parents, the School will also work to promote new understanding and behaviors in the attitudes and behavior of the aggressor. This work may include disciplinary action and/or other remedial action, and possibly a requirement that there be outside counseling. Whatever the course of action, it will be viewed first and foremost as an opportunity for the necessary personal growth and change indicated by the bullying behavior.

# V. Summary

This policy responds to new Massachusetts mandates regarding bullying by encouraging students and parents to speak up about bullying; by requiring that faculty and staff report incidents of bullying; by emphasizing the importance of prevention strategies; and by outlining the steps the school will take to protect and care for a victim, conduct an investigation, prevent repetition, and change the mindset and behavior of the aggressor. The policy builds on expectations about conduct and a multitude of practices developed at the school over the decades to promote good character and healthy social development.

The development of a community where civility, respect and kindness prevail requires the good will, caring attention and hard work of all of its members. None of us can be a passive by-stander. Adults, particularly, must model for children the pro-active steps that are necessary to confront a bully; otherwise, children conclude that 'nothing can be done.' The success of this Policy depends on every person in our community standing up for what is right and taking action when action is required.