

POLICY ON BULLYING PREVENTION

This Bullying Prevention Policy is created pursuant to and is in compliance with Section 27-23.7 of the Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/27-23.7). Virtual Connections Academy serves a unique population of students with disabilities and, therefore, the policy set forth herein is tailored to address the needs of Virtual Connections Academy's student population.

Bullying on the basis 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, unfavorable discharge from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic is prohibited at Virtual Connections Academy. No student shall be subjected to bullying:

- 1) During any school-sponsored education program or activity;
- 2) While in school, on school property, on school buses or other school vehicles, or at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities;
- 3) Through the transmission of information from a school computer, a school computer network, or other similar electronic school equipment; or
- 4) Through the transmission of information from a computer that is accessed at a nonschool-related location, activity, function, or program or from the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by the school if the bullying causes a substantial disruption to the education process or orderly operation of the school. This item (4) applies only in cases in which the school administrator or teacher receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred and does not require the school to staff or monitor any nonschool-related activity, function or program.

“Bullying” includes “cyber-bullying” and means any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

- A) Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;
- B) Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;
- C) Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; or
- D) Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or

benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by the 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. This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

"Cyber-bullying" under this policy is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic system, photoelectronic system, or photo-optical system, including without limitation electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. "Cyber-bullying" includes the creation of a webpage or weblog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages if the creation or impersonation creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this policy. "Cyber-bullying" also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons if the distribution or posting creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying per this policy.

Bullying is contrary to Illinois law and the policies of Virtual Connections Academy.

Anyone, including staff members and parents/guardians, having knowledge of any incident(s) considered to be acts of bullying as defined in this policy are asked to promptly report the bullying to the Principal. A report may be made by phone, in person, by e-mail or in writing to the individual(s) named below who is/are responsible for receiving such reports. Anonymous reports may also be made in writing and provided to the address below, however, this shall not be construed to permit formal disciplinary action solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Ms. Margaret Doyle, Principal
Virtual Connections Academy
865 E. Wilmette Road
Palatine, IL
mdoyle@virtualconnectionsacademy.net
Phone: 630-707-5108

Consistent with federal and state laws and rules governing student privacy rights, as applicable to Virtual Connections Academy, and the policies of Virtual Connections Academy, the above-named Administrator/Staff member, or his/her designee, will promptly inform the parents/guardians of all students involved in the alleged incident of bullying and discuss, as appropriate, the need for interventions and availability of services, which may include social

work services, counseling, school psychological services, other interventions, including community-based services, and restorative measures.

Virtual Connections Academy serves a unique population of students with disabilities, for all students ages 6 to 21, and eligibility diagnosis of one or more of the following categories: Emotional Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Speech Language Impairment, Intellectually Disabled, Other Health Impairment, Autism, or Traumatic Brain Injury. Due to the nature of the population served by Virtual Connections Academy and the possibility that certain acts may be manifestations of a student's disability rather than an intentional act of bullying, as part of determining whether a reported act of bullying is within the permissible scope of the school's jurisdiction, each reported instance of bullying will be reviewed and assessed for the need to investigate on a case-by-case basis and as determined to be appropriate by Virtual Connections Academy's Principal.

If determined to be appropriate for investigation and within the school's jurisdiction, Virtual Connections Academy will comply with the following procedure for promptly investigating and addressing reports of bullying:

- Virtual Connections Academy will make all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within 10 school days after the date the report of the incident of bullying was received and taking into consideration additional relevant information received during the course of the investigation about the reported incident of bullying.
- Any reports of bullying will be kept confidential to the extent possible given the need to investigate the reported claim.
- School support personnel and other staff members with relevant knowledge, experience and training on bullying prevention, as deemed appropriate, may be involved in the investigation process.
- As soon as possible after a report is received, the Principal, or his/her designee, will be notified of the report of the incident(s) of bullying.
- Consistent with the federal and state laws, as applicable to Virtual Connections Academy, and the policies governing student privacy rights and confidentiality, parents/guardians of the students who are parties to the investigation may be provided relevant information regarding the investigation, as deemed appropriate by the Principal, or his/her designee, and an opportunity to meet with the Principal, or his/her designee, to discuss the investigation, the findings of the investigation, and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying, as deemed appropriate.

Interventions that may be taken to address findings of incidents of bullying in the school, include, but are not limited to: school social work services, restorative measures, social-emotional skill building, counseling, school psychological services, and community-based

services. Any student who is determined, after an investigation, to have engaged in an intentional act of bullying will be subject to disciplinary consequences as deemed appropriate and consistent with the school's disciplinary policies, and/or the disciplinary policies of the student's referring school district, as applicable and deemed appropriate. Virtual Connections Academy is a nonpublic, therapeutic school and an agent of Illinois placing school districts, as such, Virtual Connections Academy may share information regarding incidents of bullying with the referring school district(s) of those students involved in a bullying incident, and an individualized education program ("IEP") meeting may be convened to discuss the impact, if any, on the student's current educational program, placement, supports and services. Additional services that are available within the referring school district and community, such as counseling, support services, and other programs, should be discussed directly with the student's referring school district by the parent/guardian.

Reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying per this policy is a violation of this policy and strictly prohibited. Anyone engaging in retaliation or reprisal against any person who reports an act of bullying may face consequences and appropriate remedial action as deemed necessary by Virtual Connections Academy and consistent with the school's disciplinary policies. Appropriate consequences and remedial action, which are consistent with the school's disciplinary policies, may also be taken against a person found to have falsely accused another of bullying as a means of retaliation or as a means of bullying.

Please also note the following related to the development, notification and publication, and evaluation of this policy:

- This policy is based on engagement with a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents/guardians.
- This policy can be found on the school's existing website, is included in the student handbook, and, where the school's other policies, rules, and standards of conduct are currently posted. A copy of this policy may also be requested from Mrs. Elaina Shannon.
- This policy will also be distributed annually to parents/guardians, students, and school personnel, including new employees when hired.
- Virtual Connections Academy will periodically engage in the process of reviewing and re-evaluating this policy to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of this policy that includes, but may not be limited to, collecting and assessing the following information:
 - 1) the frequency of victimization;
 - 2) student, staff, and family observations of safety at a school;
 - 3) identification of areas of the school where bullying occurs;
 - 4) the types of bullying utilized; and

5) bystander intervention or participation.

Virtual Connections Academy may use relevant data it already collects for other purposes in the policy evaluation. The information developed or collected as a result of the policy evaluation will be made available on the school's website or otherwise will be provided to Virtual Connections Academy's board, if applicable, administrators, school personnel, parents/guardians, and students.

This policy is consistent with Virtual Connections Academy's policies.