

BULLYING PREVENTION

Bullying has a harmful social, physical, psychological and academic impact on bullies, victims and bystanders. Bullying at Rocketship is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated. “Bullying” includes discrimination; harassment; intimidation; and bullying based on disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, or perceived characteristics. In addition, Rocketship prohibits retaliation against people who report incidents of bullying.

Rocketship’s **Bullying Prevention Policy** addresses definitions of bullying and harassment; prohibitions against bullying; requirements for reporting incidences of bullying; procedures for investigating incidents; and sanctions, remedies, and appeals. *Please see the Appendix for a copy of this policy.*

BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

Bullying has a harmful social, physical, psychological and academic impact on bullies, victims and bystanders. In response to increasing public awareness of childhood bullying and the adverse health effects associated with it, nearly all states and the District of Columbia have enacted anti-bullying legislation requiring schools to have policies that address and prevent bullying. Rocketship’s policy has been written in accordance with the relevant DC laws and regulations. It addresses definitions of bullying and harassment; prohibitions against bullying; requirements for reporting incidences of bullying; procedures for investigating incidents; and sanctions, remedies, and appeals.

I. Definitions

In accordance with DC Code § 2-1535.03(b)(1), “bullying” is defined 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 or 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 foregoing characteristics; and
- Can reasonably be predicted to:
 - Place the youth in reasonable fear of physical harm to their 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, educational institution, or grantee.

“Cyberbullying” includes the transmission of harassing communications, direct threats, or other harmful texts, sounds, or images on the Internet, social media, or other technologies using a telephone, computer, or any wireless communication device. “Cyberbullying” also includes breaking into another

person's electronic account and assuming that person's identity in order to damage that person's reputation.

II. Prohibitions Against Bullying

Acts of bullying, including cyberbullying, whether by youth, volunteers, or staff, are prohibited:

- On Rocketship grounds and immediately adjacent property, at Rocketship -sponsored or related events on and off Rocketship grounds, on any vehicle used for Rocketship business, at any transit stop at which youth wait to be transported to Rocketship business, or through the use of any electronic devices owned by Rocketship, leased by Rocketship, or used for Rocketship business; and
- At a location or function unrelated to Rocketship, through the use of any electronic devices, including those not owned or leased by Rocketship, if the acts of bullying or cyberbullying create a hostile environment at the agency for the victim or witnesses, infringe on their rights at Rocketship, or materially and substantially disrupt the orderly operation of Rocketship.

Retaliation against a youth, volunteer or staff member who reports bullying, provides information about an act of bullying, or witnesses an act of bullying is also prohibited. (DC Code § 2-1535.03(b)(2-3;9))

III. Reporting Incidents of Bullying or Retaliation

In accordance with DC Code § 2-1535.03(1)(6), Rocketship expects all staff members and volunteers to report incidents of bullying or retaliation they witness or are made aware of. \ Staff members should immediately report all such incidents to the Principal, who will create a written report of a bullying incident.

Youth, parents, guardians, and community members are encouraged by Rocketship to report any incidents of bullying that they witness or become aware of. Reports of bullying may be made to the school Principal, or through an anonymous drop box at the front office of the campus.

Reports of bullying by youth, parents, guardians and community members may be made anonymously, but disciplinary action cannot be taken by Rocketship solely on the basis of an anonymous report, though such a report may trigger an investigation that will provide actionable information. All oral reports received as part of this process will be transcribed into writing and included in Rocketship's bullying database, further described below.

Rocketship will ensure that there are reporting materials available in a wide variety of languages and that information about reporting is communicated to youth connected to Rocketship in an age appropriate manner. Information on how to report incidents of bullying will also be included as appropriate in Rocketship mailings to youth and their families. The school Principal is available to assist in reporting incidents of bullying.

Reports of bullying not received by the Principal will be transmitted to the Principal within one day of their receipt or creation by the staff member who reported the initial incident.

IV. Data Collection

All Rocketship schools in DC will collect the following pieces of information about reported incidents of bullying and provide aggregate data annually as determined by the Mayor pursuant to DC Code § 2-1535.07(a)).

- Name(s) of the victim, bully, and any witnesses
 - Reliable contact information for the victim, bully and any witnesses

- Relevant attributes about the victim, bully and any witnesses including:
 - Any prior incidents involving either the victim or bully
 - Connection of the victim, bully, and any witnesses to the incident (i.e. are they students, staff, volunteers, etc.)

- The nature of the bullying incident
 - Where the incident took place
 - What time the incident took place
 - What type(s) of bullying it was (physical, verbal, cyber, relational, etc.?)
 - What factors drove the incident of bullying (social status, personal appearance, race, sexual orientation, etc.)
 - What adult supervision was in place
 - Context of the incident

Rocketship will only attempt to collect this information insofar as it does not jeopardize the safety of the victim and witness(es) and allows non-staff reports of bullying to be made anonymously.

V. Investigating Incidents of Bullying

In accordance with DC Code § 2-1535.03(1)(7), prior to the investigation of an incident, the school Principal will take steps to ensure the safety of the alleged victim referenced in a reported bullying incident. These steps will be designed to restore a sense of safety to the victim and to protect them from further incidents if necessary. Examples of such steps taken include designating a staff member to serve as that alleged victim's "safe" person, altering the alleged bully/bullies' seating or schedule to reduce access to the alleged victim or creating a safety plan in consultation with the alleged victim. Once an investigation is concluded, further steps will be taken as needed to assure the continued safety of the victim from additional incidents of bullying or retaliation.

Once a report of bullying has been received by the school, the following groups will be notified as needed by the Principal so long as, in the absence of legal imperative, the parent or guardian's written consent is obtained prior to notification.

- Parents and guardians: Rocketship will notify the parents or guardians of victims, bullies, and if appropriate, witnesses to an incident of bullying behavior about the nature of the incident and the procedures and steps in place for responding to it. The school Principal will determine if parents or guardians should be informed prior to or after the investigation of an incident.

- Law enforcement agencies: If Rocketship determines that the reported incident may involve criminal activity or the basis for criminal charges, information about the incident must be conveyed to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. As part of making this determination, the Principal may wish to consult with either a law enforcement officer or legal

counsel. Law enforcement shall only be contacted if all other available remedies have been exhausted.

Rocketship will notify these groups of incidents of bullying only to the extent allowed by law. Notification will be undertaken solely to ensure that services are provided to victims and bullies and to protect victims from further or sustained victimization. Rocketship will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of those who report bullying incidents.

The school Principal is responsible for investigating reports of bullying. An investigation of an incident will be initiated no more than one day after the Principal receives a report of bullying and will conclude no later than 30 days after the receipt of such a report. As part of the investigation, the Principal will interview any involved or relevant parties including alleged victims, bullies, witnesses, staff, parents or guardians.

The school Principal will provide confidentiality as far as possible to relevant parties as part of the investigation, and inform all relevant parties that retaliation for reporting acts of bullying is prohibited. Written records of the investigation process should be maintained and may be included in the bullying database to generate a more accurate picture of bullying behaviors at Rocketship. Where necessary, provisions will be made to include the advice of legal counsel.

In investigating an incident of bullying, the Principal will seek to ensure that the reported incident is one of victimization, a sign of bullying, rather than of conflict. Thus when investigating a reported incident the Principal will attempt to determine, through interviewing the victim, what mechanisms the victim had and has access to for halting the incident that occurred, and preventing future such instances. If the victim reports a few or no mechanisms for ending the incident or constructively dealing with future instances, that information will serve as compelling, though not conclusive evidence that the reported incident was an incident of bullying.

The Principal is charged with making determinations as to whether a reported incident constitutes a case of bullying. These determinations will be made in consideration of the totality of the facts and the circumstances surrounding the incident. If the Principal determines that an incident of bullying has occurred, they should take response steps to prevent the recurrence of an incident and restore the safety of a victim.

If the Principal determines that additional support is needed to conduct a thorough and equitable investigation they will contact the citywide prevention coordinator.

VI. Sanctions

Rocketship Education recognizes that for sanctions to be an effective component of a bullying prevention plan, they must be applied consistently, fairly, and equitably. To this end, Rocketship Education shall ensure that staff follow these guidelines as closely as possible, while allowing for flexibility to adapt sanctions to individual contexts. (DC Code § 2-1535.03(b)(5)). Furthermore, to ensure equitability in applying sanctions, measures will be applied on a graduated basis determined by the nature of the offense, the disciplinary history of the youth involved, and the age and developmental status of the youth involved. Responses to incidents of bullying may include, but are not limited to:

- Reprimand
- Deprivation of Rocketship privileges
- Bans on participating in optional Rocketship activities

- Deprivation of Rocketship services
- Suspension or expulsion, in accordance with Rocketship's [Suspension and Expulsion Policy](#)

Sanctions will be applied within one day of the determination that an incident of bullying has occurred, unless an appeal of the incident by the bully has been received in that time as described in the Appeals section of this policy. To ensure that single incidents of bullying do not become recurring problems, Rocketship will always refer victims and bullies involved in an incident to services in addition to imposing sanctions on bullies.

Rocketship does not endorse the use of punitive strategies associated with “zero-tolerance” policies when applying sanctions to an incident of bullying.

Rocketship shall communicate to youth in contact with Rocketship, the consequences that youth can expect for participating in bullying behavior.

VII. Appeals

Pursuant to DC Code § 2-1535.03(b)(8); § 2-1535.04, parties dissatisfied by the outcome of a bullying investigation may appeal the determination to Rocketship's Vice President of Schools. This appeal should be submitted no later than 30 days after the initial determination. Upon receipt of an appeal, the Vice President of Schools must conduct a secondary investigation within 30 days of the receipt of an appeal. This 30 days may be extended up to an additional 15 days if the Vice President of Schools sets forth in writing the reasons why more time is needed to conduct an investigation. Additionally, upon the receipt of an appeal, the Vice President of Schools must inform the party making the submission of their ability to seek additional redress under the DC Human Rights Act.

VIII. Publication and Contact Information

In accordance with DC Code § 2-1535.03(f), this policy will be made available on Rocketship's website. The policy, and age appropriate versions thereof, will be distributed to youth and parents of youth in contact with Rocketship annually, and Rocketship will emphasize that the policy applies to participation in functions sponsored by Rocketship.

The Principal of each Rocketship campus is responsible for coordinating Rocketship's bullying prevention efforts. All questions, comments and concerns about the bullying policy and Rocketship prevention efforts should be able to be directed to the campus Principal.