

CONNECTIONS ORGANIZATION

(CONNECTIONS DAY SCHOOL, SOUTH CAMPUS,
NEW CONNECTIONS ACADEMY, CONNECTIONS ACADEMY EAST)



STUDENT & PARENT HANDBOOK

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MISSION STATEMENT

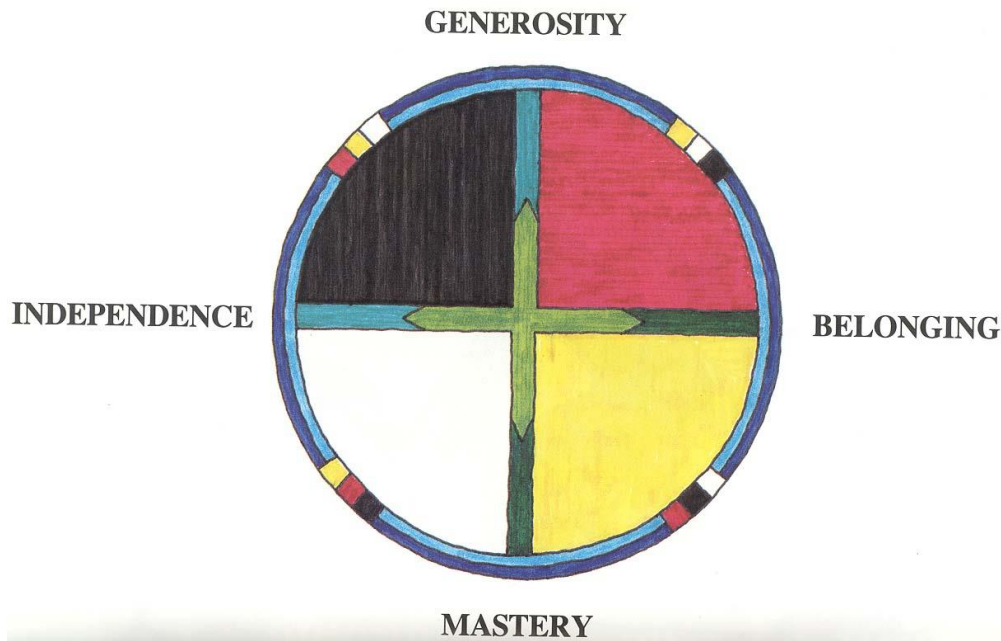
The mission of the Connections Organization Schools is to integrate school, family and community in order to provide the highest quality academic and therapeutic programs.

These programs are designed to enable students to become successful learners through a sense of belonging, mastery, generosity and independence.

PROMISE STATEMENT

- We promise to provide the highest quality, individualized, academic, therapeutic and behavioral services in a physically and emotionally safe school setting for all learners.
- We promise to provide highly committed, well-trained professionals who use data, collaboration and technology to promote best practices that yield success in school and life.
- We promise to provide a broad range of in-house, supportive and educational services within a multidisciplinary environment.
- We promise to collaborate consistently with families, outside providers, school districts and other community partners to ensure students' success.
- We promise to respect the dignity of students and families by maintaining privacy and confidentiality, following laws and regulations and abiding by ethical guidelines.
- We promise to promote acceptance and fairness, honor diversity and recognize the uniqueness and dignity of each student and family.

THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE



Anthropologists have long known that Native American tribes raised courageous, respectful children by instilling the values of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. At our schools, we agree that all people should work to develop these critical life skills throughout their lifetime. Therefore, the Circle of Courage informs all of our work with students, and is evident in the day-to-day functioning of our staff. *For more information about the Circle of Courage, please see our website.*

GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

The Connections Organization schools (Connections Day School, South Campus, New Connections Academy, and Connections Academy East) are a group of private therapeutic day schools, with the first founded in 1998. We serve children and adolescents, ages 6 – 21 who, because of significant special education needs (ED, BD, LD, OHI, AUT & CD), require an alternative school program that is both educational and therapeutic. By utilizing therapeutic, educational, family and community connections, we promote academic achievement, social/emotional well-being and personal growth.

Staff Members employ a variety of methods to help students make academic progress, and develop and/or improve their coping, problem-solving and social skills. By utilizing a combination of respect, humor, empathy, and kindness balanced with firmness (i.e., maintaining high expectations and ensuring that students adhere to rules, boundaries and limitations), Staff Members are able to establish and maintain supportive, nurturing relationships with our students. In turn, these relationships can help the students be more open to learning the life skills required for long-term success.

The students engage in an academically challenging curriculum, which emphasizes group instruction and hands-on activities. The Clinical/Therapeutic Staff utilize a skill-building/problem-solving approach as well as psychodynamic, family-systems, and narrative principles. In addition, the Lakota-Sioux Circle of Courage – which teaches the value of belonging, independence, generosity and mastery – is employed to help students develop these essential life skills. This multi-faceted approach works to assist the students in: overcoming issues at hand; practicing more successful behavioral alternatives; and exploring ways to re-write their negative life stories.

The goal is to work with students to build on their strengths and gifts, and be allies with them in their “fight” against the challenges and obstacles that get in the way of their success. The environment is based on a positive, nurturing model, where natural, logical consequences for behaviors are frequently utilized. Our philosophy avoids using restrictive and/or punitive methods of behavioral management and does not have a time-out room. Therapeutic holding (restraint) is only employed as a last resort, when a student is presenting as a danger to him/herself or others.

The founders of our programs, chose to base the mission of the schools on philosophical principles similar to those held at Counseling Connections – their multi-disciplinary group practice which specializes in the therapeutic needs of children, adolescents and families. The professionals at Counseling Connections have worked closely with the schools, courts, and social service agencies of Lake and Northern Cook Counties since 1983.

The Connections Organization schools offer a comprehensive array of support services, including:

- Small Group and Individualized Academic Instruction
- Individual, Group & Family Therapy and Crisis Intervention
- Psychiatric Consultation and Evaluation
- Individual and Group Art Therapy
- Music therapy
- Substance Abuse Evaluation and Individual & Group Therapy
- Occupational Therapy and Speech & Language Evaluations and Services
- Social/Emotional and Coping Skill Building
- A Comprehensive Behavioral Management Program
- Daily School Nurse Services
- Transition and Post-Graduation Preparation

A FRESH START

Our Staff believe that all students deserve a fresh start and an opportunity to learn and to be successful. Through the development of safe, supportive and nurturing relationships, our staff enable students to make academic, emotional and behavioral progress and learn the critical life and social skills necessary to find success in their lives.

While a primary goal is to help our students develop a clear sense of belonging, mastery, generosity and independence (the Circle of Courage); another goal is to boost each student's insight into, and understanding of, their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors:

- how they affect their interpersonal relationships
- how they support, or sabotage, their daily functioning and ability to meet their goals
- how they can better manage their thoughts, feelings and behavior to get their needs met in healthy ways and live the life they want

All struggles or setbacks that may arise during this process are seen as powerful opportunities for growth and learning.

Ultimately, students will get out of their school experience, what they put into their school experience...therefore, those who choose to engage in the program, are respectful of others, exhibit a positive attitude, and are willing to partner with Staff in their process of learning and growing, tend to experience the most success.

ADMISSION

Admission to the Connections Organization schools begins with an initial referral from the student's home school district or the special education cooperative that represents the district. These referrals go directly to the school of choice at which point the school Principal will review the student's records (including current IEP, most recent Multidisciplinary Conference Reports, Case Study Evaluation, psychiatric and psychological reports) and an "intake interview" will take place. Eligibility for the program will be determined and will be reported back to the referral source. Upon entrance to one of our programs the student will spend part of his/her first few days in the program in orientation.

CURRICULUM

Referred students are between the ages of 6 and 21, depending on the population of the specific Connections Organization school. Appropriate class groupings, with no more than a four year age span in any given room, are maintained at all times.

The Elementary and Junior High School curriculum emphasizes the acquisition of basic academic skills (Reading, Spelling, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies), and wellness (Physical Education and Health); as well as collaborating with the Therapists to give the students opportunities for social and emotional growth through therapeutically-relevant group activities, and individual meetings with their therapist.

The High School curriculum is designed to meet the graduation requirements of our student's various home high schools. The curriculum includes courses in English, History, Science, Consumer Economics, Mathematics, Work Study, Health and Physical Education. While classes are generally self-contained, we also use the concepts of team teaching, departmentalization and cooperative learning when appropriate. High school students are also given the opportunity for social and emotional growth through therapeutically relevant group activities, and individual meetings with their therapist.

The Life Skills and Transition Programs work with students supporting them in their process of preparing for independent or semi-independent living and employment. Students work on developing necessary functional skills through class work, practice and community experiences. These skills include: understanding social cues and body language; developing and maintaining relationships; money management; utilizing resources effectively; transportation within the community; time management; safety within the home and community; maintaining proper hygiene; cleaning and maintaining a household; preparing meals; seeking and gaining employment; and finding future educational opportunities.

In addition to our academic curriculum, other related services are offered that are indicated on our student's IEPs, such as: Individual and Group Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Psychiatric Consultation, School Nursing, etc.

THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Therapeutic services are an integral part of our programs. The Clinical Staff/Therapists are here to provide individual, group & family therapy, risk assessment and crisis intervention for each of our students.

Each student is assigned an individual therapist who will meet with him/her in a manner to best meet the student's needs while also meeting the requirements outlined in the student's IEP. Therapy sessions focus on a wide variety of issues, including: reason for referral; primary issues and concerns; level of self-awareness and insight; emotional and behavioral management skills; coping, problem-solving and self-soothing skills; communication and relationship skills, etc. Therapists also serve as the primary contact person for parents; and case managers who coordinate their work with outside service providers, such as: Therapists, Psychiatrists, DCFS Caseworkers, Probation Officers, SASS Workers, etc.

Therapists are available throughout the day for individual therapy sessions, and crisis management. If any staff member feels a student requires therapeutic support, or if a student requests to meet with his/her therapist, the therapist will be contacted, and s/he will pull the student for a session as soon as possible. Therapists collaborate with the teaching staff to identify appropriate times to pull students from their academic day for therapeutic services and support.

Therapists facilitate group therapy within the students' homerooms every day. These groups are focused on the development of social/emotional skills, life skills (Circle of Courage), coping & problem-solving skills and relaxation, self-soothing and stress-management skills. Students also have the opportunity for various specialty groups such as Art Therapy, Music Appreciation, Drug & Alcohol Education and Personal Management. There are also specialized pull-out groups for our students with specifically identified needs.

In order to support our students in their efforts to make, and sustain, progress in their lives, therapists offer, and strongly encourage, family therapy for our students, their parents/guardians, and if possible, siblings and extended family who live in the home.

In addition, there are monthly parent groups and activities in the evenings (schedule available on the school website), where collaboration and communication with staff and families is reinforced; and where guest speakers and educational programs are utilized to explore a variety of topics relevant to families. These topics include: behavioral management within the home, preparation for life transitions, understanding the experience of your special education student, encouraging social/emotional development, preventing and addressing drug and alcohol issues, multi-family art therapy, and much more.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Our “community” is based upon mutual respect, cooperation and generosity. Positive behaviors such as politeness, thoughtful listening, group participation, ignoring negative influences and remaining on task in the classroom are rewarded with incentives that are meaningful to each individual student. A primary goal is to allow students to understand what motivates their behavior and choices, and how these affects both their interpersonal relationships and opportunities for success. Students are encouraged and supported in learning new, more appropriate ways of behaving in order to get their needs met.

With guidance from staff members, students focus on and evaluate their behavior as being supportive or unsupportive of their individual goals, and desired outcomes in the areas of belonging, mastery, generosity, independence. Students utilize a daily point sheet to keep track of their progress in these areas. Earning points allows students to be eligible for additional privileges and to “spend” their points on various desired things and experiences. Students are therefore taught the relationship between maintaining positive behavior and receiving opportunities to earn more privileges and freedoms.

The behavior management policies are highly individualized, and use both anticipated and actual behavior problems as positive teaching opportunities. Inappropriate, negative behaviors are addressed as immediately as possible with “natural consequences”. These are individually tailored for each student, and reflective of his/her specific needs. What may look like two very similar incidents on the surface may have very different causes and emotional issues involved; therefore, they may call for different consequences and/or disciplinary actions. This variety of approaches is used to help the student learn the skills and behavior necessary to succeed.

When problematic behaviors arise during the school day, staff members will work with the student in identifying alternative ways in which this situation could have been handled. At times students may persist in disruptive disturbing behaviors. At that point, staff will make every effort to remove the immediate stressor from the situation. Staff use a progressive series of pre-teaching, verbal prompts and redirection, and breaks to provide students with opportunities to make better choices when problems do arise. Occasionally, when the concerning behavior persists, students may need to be removed from the peer group to visit the Behavioral Intervention Services (BIS) office. Once there, students are supported in the process of utilizing their coping skills to re-gain emotional and behavioral control, and then process through the situation with one of the Behavioral Intervention Specialists and the staff member who originally referred them to the office. The goal is to assist the student in getting back on task and into his/her classroom as quickly as smoothly as possible.

We do not endorse the use of time out rooms, mechanical restraint or harsh/punitive interventions. Staff do not engage in physical holding of a student as a consequence; these techniques are only used as a last resort to ensure the safety of students and staff. We believe that students can learn to act in safe and appropriate manner with the positive guidance of nurturing adults, who adhere to the clear rules, boundaries and expectations established within the school.

COMMUNICATION & CONSULTATION

Our organization believes that communication between all those involved with a student is crucial in ensuring success. Every student has an assigned teacher and a primary therapist. Teachers serve as case managers for the students in their homerooms and send home daily behavior report logs (or “home notes”) that indicate the student’s successes and areas of continued focus. These logs should be signed by the student’s parent/guardian, and returned the next school day. Phone calls and messages are always welcomed, as are any questions specific to a student’s academic functioning or educational programming.

The therapists at CDS also serve as case managers for their assigned students and families. Any student-specific questions or concerns can be directed to the student’s primary therapist (though all academic questions should be directed to the teacher). Therapists consistently work with parents/guardians to develop opportunities for students to be successful in school, at home, and within their communities. The clinical staff also provides monthly Parents Activities and Groups. In addition, students and parents/guardians will be asked to authorize contact with all outside service providers within the community (therapist, psychiatrist, caseworker, probation officer, SASS, etc.), which allows the therapist to provide the best, and most comprehensive, quality of care for your child.

By developing a collaborative family, school and community partnership, students are given the support, consistency, nurturing and structure they require to make better choices and experience success.

RULES, BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS

HOURS: School doors open at 8:40am. Classes are in session from 9:00am - 3:00pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and from 9:00am - 2:00pm on Thursdays to accommodate staff in-service training. Students are expected to remain in their classrooms, monitored by Staff, all day, unless otherwise directed.

TRANSPORTATION: All students are provided door-to-door transportation by their home school districts. School rules and expectations are in effect from the time a student enters his/her transportation in the morning, through the time s/he is dropped off at home. Our school staff work closely with the transportation companies, and have daily communication with the drivers to ensure that students are behaving appropriately and are adhering to all mandatory safety guidelines. Students must wear their seat belts at all times while on the bus or cab.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance is one of the biggest indicators of school success. Students who attend school regularly are naturally exposed to more than those who are routinely absent. Furthermore, absences can quickly add up. Our goal is to have every student present every day for every class. Our schools will do everything within our limited power to compel parents to get their child to school.

In accordance with the Illinois Administrative Code 401.230 (a) 2, it is the Connections Organization's policy to notify both district and parent when a student has reached 5 and/or 10 consecutive days of absences (regardless of whether excused or unexcused) to keep all parties involved in the success of the student.

When a student is absent for 5 consecutive days, a notice will go out to parents and/or district explaining exactly why the student is not in school (hospitalized, truant, incarceration, other, etc.) with interventions that have been attempted by the school team.

When a student has reached 10 consecutive days, a notice will go out to parents and/or district explaining exactly why the student is not in school (hospitalized, truant, incarceration, other, etc.) with interventions that have been attempted by the team; as well as an updated meeting scheduled with district and parents to discuss additional supports to be put in place to get the student to return to school.

At Connections Schools, student attendance is a top priority and we will do everything possible to provide parents and district with supports on getting students to attend school regularly.

EXCUSED ABSENCES: In order for an absence to be considered Excused, a parent/guardian needs to call the Front Desk **prior to the beginning of the school day** on the day of any absence. If attendance becomes an issue, a doctor's written excuse may be required specifying the dates that the student's absences were excused, and the reason for absence.

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES: An absence will be considered Unexcused when the student is not in attendance, and the above protocol has not been adhered to. In addition, a parent/guardian can call to let us know that, because of their child's poor decision making, his/her absence will not be excused. The home school district will be notified of unexcused absences, and school district officials will initiate contact with truancy officials if the absences become a concern.

SUMMER TERM ATTENDANCE: Summer Term consists of 20 school days, and students are expected to be in attendance every day.

HOMEWORK: If a student does not complete his/her homework or class assignments by the due date, the student's point sheet will be addressed for not being prepared and teachers will make parents aware of all late and missing assignments on the student's homenote. Students are expected to complete homework according to their teachers' specifications. Staff are here to help problem-solve issues with homework completion in order to promote student success.

CHECK-IN: To ensure the safety of both students and staff, all students are searched prior to admittance into the school building. These searches are gender-specific (e.g., female staff search female students and vice versa) unless otherwise stipulated by a student's individual transgender policy. Searches generally include the use of a metal detecting wand, emptying of pockets, removal of outerwear and shoes, and examination of all belongings. Random searches may also be conducted at other times during the school day if deemed necessary by school staff or administration.

DRESS CODE: Students are expected to dress in such a way to bring pride to themselves and the school community:

- No short skirts or shorts – the length must be below the longest fingertip
- No leggings or yoga pants, unless the length of the shirt over them is below the longest fingertip
- No spaghetti straps or strapless tops – straps must be at least 1-2” thick
- No exposed undergarments (bras, underwear, boxers, etc.)
- No low pants – pants are expected to be worn at, or just below, the waist
- No midriff exposure (even when one sits, stretches, bends down, etc.) – shirts must cover the entire torso
- No transparent/“see through” clothing
- No overly-tight or low cut garments
- No facial piercings that can result in injury, such as lip rings, tongue piercings, open gauges, etc. (with the exception of a small, single, nose stud)
- Ear gauges must be plugged with full closure plugs (no open gauges, rings, etc.)
- No visible tattoos or hickies
- No torn clothing – with the exception of tears in pants that are below the length of the longest fingertip
- No hanging straps, buckles or chains on clothing
- No hooded sweatshirts, coats, scarves or bandanas
- No garments displaying alcohol/drug related advertising or implications; obscene or suggestive slogans; signs/colors/manner of wearing that could be gang related
- No hats
- No slippers or pajamas
- Students need appropriate shoes for P.E. (gym shoes can be left at school)
- Any clothing, piercings, make-up, jewelry, nail polish, etc. that is determined by staff to be disruptive to the educational process is prohibited.

If a student is in violation of this dress code, s/he will be asked to turn clothing inside-out, change, or remove certain items if found to be inappropriate by any staff member.

FOOD: Students are not allowed to bring any food or drink items into the school building. This includes hard candy, gum, breath mints, etc. Students are provided with a nutritionally balanced, catered lunch and have access to fruit and snacks. Accommodations can be made based on dietary necessity, (e.g., diabetes). Students have access to water throughout the day.

MONEY & PERSONAL BELONGINGS: Students do not need to bring money to school. If there is a field trip, parents will receive advanced written notification. If deemed appropriate by the teacher, parents may send spending money in a sealed envelope with the child’s name and the amount enclosed, on the front. If a student chooses to bring money to school, they may not be in possession of more than \$10.00. Devices brought to school for use on transportation to and from school, must be used appropriately as indicated in the internet use/social media/communication policy.

These, along with any other non-school related belongings, will be kept in a locked coat room, in their individual cubby, and will be returned to students at the end of the day. Students cannot bring mobile phones to school or on transportation for any reason. Students who do not follow

these rules will be given one warning. Subsequent attempts to bring in excess money, unapproved devices, or items that are inappropriate for the school setting will result in these item(s) being confiscated and returned only to a parent or guardian. CDS does not allow students to trade, exchange or purchase belongings with/from other students.

LIVE ANIMALS: Students are not permitted to bring live animals to school without prior approval of the classroom teacher. Any animals brought to school without approval will be confiscated as soon as they are discovered and parents will be called to immediately pick up the animal.

CONTRABAND: In order to promote a safe school environment, students are searched on a daily basis upon their arrival. The following constitutes a list of items/possessions which students are not allowed to bring into school:

1. Weapons of any kind, or any instrument that could be construed as a weapon.
2. Cigarettes, lighters and/or matches. Smoking is prohibited on school grounds, including while a student is on his/her transportation to and from school.
3. Sack lunches or other food or beverage items. Organic, nutritionally balanced, hot lunch is provided by the school free of charge on a daily basis.
4. Students are allowed to bring a maximum of \$10 to school. Any amount over \$10 will be held by the front desk and returned at the end of the school day on the first offense. A subsequent incident will require a parent to come pick the money up from school.
5. Prescription Medications – prescription medication that needs to be taken at school must be accompanied by the appropriate consent form provided. This requires both parental and physician signatures.
6. Over-the-Counter-Medication - the provided form must also accompany any pain relievers, allergy medications, cold medications, etc., in order to be brought to school. Students are not allowed to carry these medications loose in their pockets, purses, etc. If any medications are found without the appropriate consent forms, disciplinary actions may occur.
 - For more information about bringing over-the-counter and prescription medications to school, please see the documents: “*HIPPA Law and Your Child’s Medications*” and page 2 of the “*Authorization for the Administration of Medication at School*”, both of which can be found on the school’s website, and must be reviewed and signed by the parent/guardian and student.

ALCOHOL OR DRUG POSSESSION AND/OR USE: Students are expected to be free from the effects of illicit drugs or alcohol use while in attendance. Students will refrain from bringing cigarettes, lighters, matches, tobacco products, vapes, e-cigarettes, pills, medications, and drugs or alcohol of any kind. If school personnel suspect that a student is under the influence, or in possession of an illegal substance or paraphernalia, the following options are available to our staff:

- Removal from the peer group
- Assessment of vital signs by nurse
- Assessment by school CAD/C
- Parental notification and possible request to pick up student from school
- Referral/transport to the nearest emergency room

- Police notification if necessary
- Referral for psychiatric treatment and/or hospitalization
- Referral for substance abuse evaluation/treatment
- Staffing with parents/guardians and home school district prior to re-entry

THREATS OR ACTIONS THAT RESULT IN PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL HARM TO OTHERS:

Students are expected to consistently demonstrate respect for others. The Connections Organization schools intends to provide a safe, nurturing, comfortable environment for all students and staff members. If a situation arises in which a student becomes threatening, is verbally cruel, harassing, sexually inappropriate and/or becomes physically aggressive in any way the following options are available:

- Immediate one to one behavioral and therapeutic intervention
- Removal from peer group
- Counseling for others involved in the situation
- Peer mediation
- Parental notification and possible request to pick up student from school
- Police notification if necessary
- Removal from school
- Restitution activities for damage of property
- Staffing with school district and parents
- Assessment for psychiatric treatment/hospitalization

GANG BEHAVIOR: Students may not wear, possess, distribute, sell, draw or display anything that could be interpreted as a gang sign or symbol. Students may not communicate gang representation verbally, or non-verbally with gestures, handshakes, etc. Students may not solicit others for gang membership through any means.

ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY FOR INTERNET ACCESS

The use of the Internet shall correlate with the curriculum adopted by your Connections Organization school. A responsible user may use the Internet to research classroom projects, send electronic mail (e-mail), and explore other computer systems. However, with such great potential for education also comes potential for abuse. It is the purpose of this policy to ensure that this valuable resource be used in an appropriate manner.

The school takes precautions, through staff supervision and computer settings, to prevent access to materials that may be defamatory, inaccurate, offensive, or otherwise inappropriate in the school setting. Because information on the Internet appears, disappears, and changes it is not always possible to predict or control what students may locate. While it is possible to select some resources that will be more easily available to students, school officials cannot completely control the Internet environment. Although computers with Internet access are in supervised areas, parents and staff members are responsible for setting and conveying the standards that students should follow.

Student Regulations

1. Our primary purpose in offering the Internet connection is educational. Access to the Internet at school must be for educational purposes and correlate with the educational objectives of the classroom.
2. All students must have parent/guardian permission to access the internet while at school.
3. The use of the school Internet is a privilege, not a right, and inappropriate use will result in being denied this privilege. Senior Staff members will make decisions regarding whether or not a use has violated this policy and may deny, revoke, or suspend access at any time.
4. Users are responsible for actions and activities involving the internet. The following are examples of unacceptable uses of the internet (however, this is not an exhaustive list):
 - a. Illegal distribution of software (pirating – which is a federal offense)
 - b. Using the internet for private, financial, or commercial gain, illegal activity, and/or advertising
 - c. Wastefully using resources, such as file space/memory
 - d. Gaining unauthorized access to resources or entities
 - e. Invading the privacy of individuals
 - f. Using another's account or password with or without permission
 - g. Posting material authored or created by another without consent
 - h. Posting anonymous messages
 - i. Accessing, submitting, posting, publishing or displaying any defamatory, inaccurate, abusive, obscene, profane, sexually explicit, threatening, racially offensive, harassing, or illegal material
 - j. Using the internet while access privileges are suspended or revoked
 - k. Degrading or disrupting equipment or system performance
 - l. Vandalism (defined as any malicious attempt to harm or destroy equipment, data or another user, the internet itself, or any other network. This includes, but is not limited to, the uploading or creation of computer viruses)
5. Users are expected to abide by the generally accepted rules of network etiquette. These include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Be polite. Do not be abusive in your messages to others
 - b. Use appropriate language. No swearing or vulgarities
 - c. DO NOT reveal any personal information (addresses, telephone number, pictures, etc)
 - d. Recognize that e-mail is not private and people who operate the system have access to all mail and messages
 - e. Do not use the internet in a way that disrupts its use by others
6. School disciplinary action or legal consequences may result from violating acceptable use of internet access

Should a student commit any violation, access privileges will be suspended or revoked. School disciplinary and/or appropriate legal action may be taken depending on the violation or inappropriate use. School Staff do their best to monitor and educate students about appropriate and safe use of the internet.

STUDENT ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSIBLE AND ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

Introduction

The Connections Organization (Connections Day School, South Campus, New Connections Academy, and Connections Academy East) recognizes the growing use of social media by both staff, parents, and students. We respect that there are both potential benefits and potential problems that can arise from widespread access to web-based technology. To help us navigate this quickly changing trend in user generated social connectivity we have created guidelines for our schools as 'Best Practices' for electronic social media usage. Please read the following thoroughly to understand our required guidelines and expectations for student conduct with regard to personal social media usage.

Netiquette

- Students should always use the internet, network resources and online sites in a courteous and respectful manner.
- Students should use good judgment and follow the schools Code of Conduct.
- Students should also recognize that among the valuable content online there is always unverified, incorrect or inappropriate content. Users should only use trusted sources when conducting research via internet.
- Students should remember not to post anything online that they wouldn't want parents, teachers, or future colleges or employers to see. Once something is online it is 'out there' to be shared and spread in ways you never intended.

Personal Safety

- Students should never share personal information, including phone number, address, birthday, social security number, financial information over the internet without adult permission.
- Students should recognize that communicating over the internet brings with it privacy and associated risks and they should carefully safeguard the personal information of themselves and others.
- Students should never agree to meet someone they meet online in real life without parental permission

Cyber-Bullying

- Cyber-bullying will not be tolerated.
- Do Not engage in cruel behavior. Harassing, disrespecting, impersonating, outing, tricking, excluding, and cyber-stalking are all examples of cyber-bullying.
- Engaging in online behaviors that are intended to harm another person will result in disciplinary action. In some cases Cyber-bullying may be a crime.
- Remember that your activities can be monitored and retained.

Social Media

- The Connections Organization schools do not permit staff to accept or request friend or contact requests from any current or former students on any social network site (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc).

- It is school policy that students do not communicate with staff through instant messaging, texting, twitter, wall postings or similar media.
- Furthermore, the Connections Organization does not allow staff to accept invitations to follow information current or former students post on their personal sites, blogs, etc.

Electronic Communication

- The Connections Organization does not permit the use of e-mail for contact with students unless it is initiated by staff from their school e-mail address for a specific school related reason. Any electronic communication with students will have a guardian and school administrator cc'd on the e-mail.
- The Connections Organization does not allow the use of e-mail for “therapeutic” interactions that should be more appropriately confined to the therapy office visit.
- The Connections Organization does not allow the use of text messaging between current or former students and staff.
- E-mail messages sent or received on the school’s e-mail system and Internet searches on the school equipment are property of the school and subject to search at any time.
- Search of Cell Phone Content – Senior Staff have the right to search student cell phones if and when there is reason to believe content of cell phone would confirm potential harm to the cell phone owner or someone else or would cause significant disruption to the school and its academic functions.

Use of School Equipment and Internet

- The computers and software that are utilized by students are owned by the school and are intended to be used for academic purposes only.
- Students are expected to follow the Acceptable Use of Internet guidelines outlined in the Parent/Student Handbook.
- VIOLATIONS of the these internet and social media use policies may have disciplinary repercussions including:
 - Suspension of network, technology, or computer privileges
 - Notification to parents
 - Detention or suspension from school and school related activities
 - Legal action and/or prosecution

Use of personal electronic devices:

- Students’ electronic devices are collected and held for the student when the student is checked into the building.
- Students are expected to follow the rules of their respective Connections Organization school regarding what devices are allowed in the building.
- All devices must be turned off when in the building (not just turned to silent).
- Devices may not be shared or lent to other students.
- No pictures or videos may be taken of students or staff with these devices.
- Students assume all responsibility of their own devices. The school is not liable for any personal electronic devices brought from home.
- These expectations are also applicable to use of devices on students’ transportation to and from school.

Acceptable Use. Students will:

- use school technologies only for school related activities and research
- follow the same guidelines for respectful, responsible behavior online that I am expected to follow off line
- treat school resources carefully and alert staff if there is any problem with their operations
- encourage positive, constructive discussion when allowed to use communicative or collaborative technologies
- alert a teacher or other staff member if I see threatening/ bullying, inappropriate or harmful content (images, messages, posts) online
- use school technologies at appropriate times, in appropriate places, for educational purposes only
- site sources when using online sites and resources for research; ensure there is no copyright infringement
- recognize that use of school technologies is a privilege and treat it as such
- be cautious to protect the safety of myself and others
- help to protect the security of school resources

Unacceptable Use. Students will NOT:

- use school technologies in a way that is harmful to self or others
- search for inappropriate images or content
- engage in cyber-bullying, harassment, or disrespectful conduct towards others- staff or students
- attempt to circumvent the school's safety measures or filtering tools
- use school technologies to send spam or junk mail
- plagiarize content found online
- post personally-identifying information
- agree to meet someone met online in real life
- use language that would be unacceptable in the classroom
- use school technologies for illegal activities or information on such activities
- attempt to hack or access sites, servers, accounts or content that is not for educational use

This is not an exhaustive list.

ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

COMMITMENT TO A HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: The Connections Organization (Connections Day School, South Campus, New Connections Academy, and Connections Academy East) believes that all students have a right to a safe and healthy school environment free from bullying and harassment. We are committed to promoting mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance for all of our students. Our ongoing, school-wide culture promotes a positive reclaiming environment

BULLYING DEFINED: Bullying is a behavior that must be addressed because of the potential harmful short and long-term impact that it can have on students. Bullying can lead to depression,

low self-esteem, anxiety and feelings of isolation, as well as school refusal and low academic achievement. We believe that bullying is contrary to State Law and contrary to the policy of our schools. We have adopted the definition for bullying as created by the Illinois Legislature.

The Illinois legislature defines "Bullying" as: "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:

- 1. Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property*
- 2. Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health*
- 3. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance*
- 4. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a 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."

CONDUCT OFF SCHOOL GROUNDS: If any of the above conduct occurs off of our school grounds, but still creates, or could reasonably be expected to create, a substantial disruption in the school setting and/or at school sponsored activities and events, this conduct may be subject to the conditions set forth in this policy.

REPRISAL OR RETALIATION AND FALSE ACCUSATIONS: Reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports a bullying incident is prohibited under this policy. Reporting an incident to staff in good faith will not reflect upon the individual's status, nor will it affect grades or employment status.

Appropriate remedial actions may be imposed on those making false accusations of bullying as a means of retaliation or as a means of bullying. Since bystander support of harassment or bullying can support negative bullying behaviors, the Connection Organization prohibits both active and passive support for bullying. The Staff will provide encouragement and support for students to walk away from acts of bullying.

CURRICULUM AND TRAINING: A curriculum segment, specific to bullying prevention, will be taught to our students on an annual basis. Staff may also receive updated training on their responsibilities for responding to incidents of bullying as needed.

RESPONSE PROCEDURES: Through established behavioral and teaching strategies school employees are engaged in an ongoing effort to prevent incidents of bullying from occurring. We realize that there is a continuum of bullying behaviors which starts with interactions that might be considered mildly inappropriate. Staff provides student supervision, close observation so that even minor inappropriate student interactions are responded to in an effort to prohibit bullying

from occurring. Staff members are expected to intervene according to our internal procedures when they see a bullying incident occur. All other members of the school community, including students, parents, volunteers and visitors, are encouraged to report any act that they think may be a violation of this policy.

All incidents of reported/suspected bullying will be investigated, making reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within 10 school days. Parents and or guardians of all students involved in these incidents will be promptly informed. Appropriate school personnel with experience and training in bullying will be included in this investigation process. The Principal and other Administrators will be informed of the investigation and outcome. Consistent with Federal and State laws governing student privacy rights, the parents and guardians of the students who are parties to the investigation will be provided relevant information and the opportunity to meet with appropriate school staff/administration to discuss the investigation, findings and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying.

CONSEQUENCES: The following factors will be taken into consideration when determining appropriate consequences: age, developmental issues, disabilities, degree of harm, surrounding circumstances, nature and severity of the behavior, past or continuing patterns of behavior, relationship between involved parties, and the context in which the incident has occurred. Counseling services, restorative measures, social-emotional skill building and community-based services may be made available to assist victims of bullying as well as those who have bullied. A hierarchy of consequences may be used as a basis for determining the disciplinary action.

NOTIFICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS: Students, parents and staff will be made aware of this policy. The policy will be incorporated into the Student/Parent Handbook, and the respective Connections Organization school's Employee Handbook, both of which are distributed annually, and will be distributed to parents, students and staff as appropriate. This policy shall be reviewed for its effectiveness in limiting/eliminating bullying every two years. The school keeps data on student behavior that will be utilized in this evaluation. Any changes made to this policy will be made available to all stakeholders and posted on our website.

SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION: If you would like further information, or have any questions or concerns, please contact the Senior Staff Members at your school (principal, clinical psychologists).

POLICY ON TRANSGENDER & GENDER NON-CONFORMING STUDENTS

PURPOSE

This policy is designed to create a safe, comfortable learning environment for all students, and to ensure that every student has equal access to all school programs and activities. This policy sets out guidelines for the Connections Organization (Connections Day School, South Campus, New Connections Academy, and Connections Academy East) to address the needs for transgender and gender non-conforming students.

This policy cannot anticipate every potential situation that might occur with respect to a transgender or gender non-conforming student, and the needs of each transgender or gender non-conforming student must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In all cases, the goal is to ensure the safety, comfort, and healthy development of the transgender or gender non-conforming student, all while maximizing the student's social integration and sense of belonging, and minimizing any kind of stigmatizing of the student.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions identified here are not comprehensive, and are not meant to label students. They are intended to assist in understanding this policy and the obligations of staff to follow through with the identified rules, boundaries and expectations.

- **Gender Identity** – refers to a person's psychological identification as male, female, both or neither, regardless of the sex assigned at birth. This includes a student's gender-related identity, appearance, expression or behavior.
- **Transgender Students** – refers to students whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth.
- **Gender Non-Conforming Students** – refers to students whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations, such as "feminine" boys, "masculine" girls, and students who are perceived as androgynous.
- **Preferred Name** – refers to the name with which a student identifies and prefers others to use.
- **Transition** – refers to the personal process a transgender student undergoes to begin to live as their self-identified gender. This may include some or all of the following cultural, legal and medical adjustments: telling one's family, friends, and/or classmates; changing one's style of dress, changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly some form of surgical procedure.

GUIDANCE & BEST PRACTICES

Student Transitions: If a student is interested in transitioning during the school year, the student's academic and clinical team, along with a representative from the hometown school district will hold a meeting with the student and their parent(s)/legal guardian(s) to explore this possibility prior to making any school-related changes. The team will discuss a reasonable timeline for the transition in order to create conditions to support a safe and accepting environment at the hometown school. Finally, the team shall train any school staff that interacts directly with the student on the transition plan, timelines for transition and any relevant legal requirements. Should the student and/or their parent(s)/legal guardian(s) request changes to the original timeline or conditions that were created at the first meeting, the student's team must hold another meeting with the student and their parent(s)/legal guardian(s) prior to making any changes.

Confidentiality: School staff shall not discuss a student's transgender status with anyone other than the student and the student's parent(s)/legal guardian(s), unless the information is necessary in order to provide accommodations for the student, ensure the student's safety, or if the student has given written consent.

Names & Pronouns: Transgender and gender non-conforming students will be addressed by their preferred names, and by the pronouns corresponding to their preferred gender identity (with parental/guardian approval to do so). A legal name or gender change is not required, and the student need not change his or her official school records. While staff members or students may make inadvertent or honest mistakes in the use of preferred names or pronouns, the intentional or persistent refusal by staff members or students to respect a student's gender identity and preferred names and pronouns will be considered a violation of this policy.

Restroom Accessibility: Students will have access to the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity, regardless of the student's sex assigned at birth. This access shall be presented as an option for the student, but not a requirement. This option is also available to the student when on community outings, and students will be accompanied by a staff member to the restroom to ensure their safety

Gender Segregated Activities: To the best extent possible, school staff will reduce or eliminate the practice of segregating students by gender – and maintain only those practices that have a clear and sound educational purpose. In situations where students are segregated by gender, students should be offered the option to participate in the group that corresponds to their gender identity.

Official Records: Connections Organization schools maintains records that include a student's legal name and legal gender. However, to the extent that the schools are not legally required to use a student's legal name and gender on other school records or documents, the school shall also include the name and gender preferred by the student. Senior staff members will change a student's official records to reflect a change in legal name or gender upon receipt of court documentation that such a change has been made, or through amendment of state or federally-issued identification.

Discrimination & Harassment: It is the responsibility of school staff to ensure that transgender and gender non-conforming students have a safe school environment. This includes ensuring that any incident of discrimination, harassment or violence are given immediate attention (i.e., investigation the incident, taking appropriate corrective action, and providing students and staff members with appropriate resources). Complaints alleging discrimination or harassment based on a person's actual or perceived transgender or gender non-conforming status are to be handled in the same manner as other discrimination or harassment complaints.

SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION: If you would like further information, or have any questions or concerns, please contact the Senior Staff Members at your school (principal, clinical psychologists).

MEDICATION

Whenever possible, the parent or guardian should make arrangements for medication to be administered at home, before and/or after school hours. If a student's physical health and/or emotional wellbeing require the administration of medication during school hours, then the school policies and procedures are as follows:

1. Medication(s) are defined as all prescription and non-prescription (over the counter) pharmaceuticals and preparations. This includes but is not limited to; pain relievers, fever reducers, cough drops, eye drops, contact lens solutions, inhalers, allergy medications, skin ointments/lotions.
2. Medication will not be administered at school without a written physician's order and written parent/guardian permission on our school Authorization for the Administration of Medication form.
3. Prescription medication must be provided in the original pharmacy or physician labeled container clearly marked with the student's name and directions for use. Over the counter (OTC) medications must be in the original manufacturer's packaging and clearly marked with the student's name.
4. It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to provide the school with any and all medications/preparations that have been authorized to administer.
5. All student medications (prescription and over the counter) must be **delivered to school by the parent, guardian, or other responsible adult.** You may deliver medications:
 - To the school Monday thru Friday, 8:00am to 4:00 pm (Tues. – Thur. during summer session).
 - Once per month at Parent Night.
 - Via Federal Express or regular mail addressed to the principal.

(Please note: Place medication(s) in a brown paper bag and staple it shut. Label the bag with student name, date, and note only the numeric quantity of medication you are providing. Quantity of medication provided will be reconciled upon arrival in the nurse's office.)
6. All medications, which are taken during school hours, will be locked in the nurse's office. An exception may be considered for bronchial inhalers with physician orders and parent permission.
7. The parent/guardian must assume responsibility for informing the school of any change in the student's health, or medications. Written Physician Orders and Parent Permission must accompany changes in medication given at school.
8. The school will act based on the health and medication information provided by the parent/guardian and health care provider(s). It is expected that the information provided is accurate, complete and up-to-date and that any changes will be communicated to the school in an expedited manner.

SUSPENSION POLICY

Positive, proactive alternatives to suspension are emphasized at Connections Organization schools. However, misbehavior by a student at which endangers self, others or property may result in a recommendation to the student's home school district that s/he be suspended for a total of no more than 10 days during a school year. Suspensions are a permissible educational

procedure for all students when identified as a behavioral management technique in the student's IEP. Multiple suspensions will result in a staffing with the student's school district to determine necessary revisions in the student's programming, additional supportive services and/or alternative placement.

EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR (ESY) / SUMMER TERM

Every alternative school is mandated by the Illinois State Board of Education to have a Summer school program. The purpose of this Summer Term is to provide structure to alternative school students over the summer months, in an effort to prevent regression caused by an interruption in the educational and social/emotional process. Summer Term is an opportunity for students to earn 1 High School credit, or extra credit towards their next year in Grade School or Junior High School.

The Summer Term begins, after a short break, and consists of 20 school days spread out over 7 consecutive weeks. Students are required to be in attendance all day on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Summer Term is followed by approximately 26 days of Summer Vacation.

Summer Term is a mandatory part of the academic and social/emotional program, and a required part of a student's education, according to his/her IEP. If a student does not attend Summer Term, a placement cannot be held for them, and they will likely require a new alternative school placement in the Fall.

TRANSITION TO MAINSTREAM

Successful transition to a less restrictive educational environment is our ultimate goal for ALL students. Examples of transition are: returning to the home school district, attending the CLC Technology Campus, engaging in a job training program, etc. The criteria to meet this goal, and time-line for this process, will be individualized for each student. However, the following list identifies the basic expectations that must be met in order for transition to be considered:

- The Student maintains an acceptable attendance rate.
- The Student earns, and maintains, passing grades (C or better).
- The Student is an active and appropriate participant in all forms of therapy – Individual, Group and Family therapy.
- The Student consistently demonstrates appropriate, positive school behaviors; sets a good example for peers and spends little, to no, time in the Behavior Intervention Services (BIS) Office.
- The Student is showing consistent effort to meet IEP goals.
- The Student's team (teacher and therapist) believes that this student is appropriate for a transition, and that it is in his/her best interest.
- The Student feels prepared to manage a transition in placement.
- Parents/Guardians feel that their child is prepared to manage a transition in placement.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Graduation requirements for Junior High School and High School students are set by the home school district. Upon meeting these requirements, and if approved by the home school district, the student is eligible to participate in graduation ceremonies, both at the Connections Organization school he/she attends and his/her home school. The student will receive a certificate of completion from the alternative school and a formal diploma from his/her home school district.

STUDENT RECORDS

PERMANENT RECORDS: These records consist of: identifying information; academic transcripts; ranks and scores on college entrance examinations; attendance records; accident reports; health records; extracurricular activities; honors & awards and release of information forms. The school shall maintain these permanent records, in any convenient form, not less than six (6) years after the student has transferred, graduated or otherwise permanently withdrawn from school.

TEMPORARY RECORDS: These records consist of all information not required for permanent records. These items could include: family background information; intelligence and aptitude testing results; psychological reports and casenotes; teacher anecdotal records and conference reports; honors; extracurricular activities; disciplinary information; Special Education files; and release of information forms. The temporary record shall not be maintained beyond its period of usefulness to the school, and in no case longer than five (5) years after the students has transferred, graduated or otherwise permanently withdrawn from school.

REVIEW OF RECORDS: Parents have the right to inspect, copy and review records of their child. A qualified professional will assist the parent in interpreting the information contained in their child's record. A parent may authorize release of the student records (in part or whole) by signing a consent form. Students may inspect their permanent records. Any student who is 18 years of age has all inspection rights accorded to parents. Records may be forwarded to a school district in which a student seeks to enroll and/or when a student moves into a new school district with a signed release of information.

RETURN OF RECORDS POLICY

In accordance with Illinois Administrative Code 401.270 (d), the Connections Organization (Connections Day School, South Campus, New Connections Academy, and Connections Academy East) will return to the students' public school, all the students records of students who are no longer attending (as listed below) within 30 calendar days and maintain a record of having returned said records. Upon receipt of students' record, public school administrator will sign and return student receipt.

The following items will be returned to the public school for each student:

- State medical and county medical information
- IEP information from previous placement(s)
- Behavioral information from previous placement(s)

- Original copy of IEP paperwork and reports
- All case notes
- Any previous report cards and/or attendance reports from previous placement(s)

The Connections Organization schools will keep:

- Intake information
- Releases/registration
- Nurse reports/medication logs
- Copy of most recent IEP paperwork and reports
- Domain paperwork
- Staffing notes/conference notices
- Copy of FBA/BIP
- School billing/attendance calendars
- School reports cards/progress reports

Student records that are kept at the Connections Organization schools will be archived for 2 years for a regular day school student and 1 year for diagnostic student before they are archived.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

The staff at the Connections Organization often only access their e-mail and voicemail communications during normal school hours (*School Year – Monday-Friday, 8:00am-4:00pm / Summer Term – Tuesday-Thursday, 8:00am-4:00pm*). Outside of these hours, e-mail and voicemail communications with school staff are **not to be used for emergency purposes**. In the event of an emergency, please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room for assistance.

CONNECTIONS ORGANIZATION
CONNECTIONS DAY SCHOOL, SOUTH CAMPUS,
NEW CONNECTIONS ACADEMY, CONNECTIONS ACADEMY EAST

RECEIPT & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I have received a copy of the Connections Organization **Student & Parent Handbook** (*updated: July, 2016*), and have read through the provisions set therein with my child.

I understand the provisions of this handbook, and have discussed all questions, comments and concerns with the Senior Staff Members at CDS, **Dr. Joan Gross** (Principal), **Dr. Kristen Pollina** (Clinical Director) and **Dr. Giovanna Vitullo** (Diagnostic Program Coordinator). Administrative staff can be reached at **847.680.8349** or through **CDS e-mail**, please call the front desk, or see the school website, for specific phone extensions and email addresses.

I understand that the school has the right to change, modify, alter or cancel any provision of the handbook without notice; and that the handbook supersedes all policies, written or oral, that may have been in effect

I have kept a copy of this handbook, and know that I can find it on the school website, so that I may refer to it at any time.

Parent/Guardian Printed Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Student Printed Name

Student Signature

Date