

Virtual Connections Academy ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

COMMITMENT TO A HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: The Staff and Administration at Virtual Connections Academy believe 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 Virtual Connections Academy. We have adopted the definition of 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 Virtual Connections Academy 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, that 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, Virtual Connections Academy prohibits both active and passive support for bullying. Virtual Connections Academy 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 that 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, the 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, the VCA 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. Virtual Connections Academy 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 any further information, or have any questions or concerns, please contact VCA Administration at **224-801-8821**.