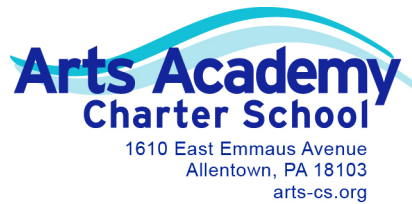


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Board Policy 2.15

Child Abuse

PURPOSE:

Child abuse is a tragic reality within Pennsylvania, and the Board recognizes the school's role in reporting all instances of suspected child abuse, including abuse and/or sexual misconduct by school employees.

AUTHORITY:

This Policy establishes procedures for the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse in compliance with the PA Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) as well as the mandatory reporting by educators of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual misconduct under the Educator Discipline Act.

The Executive Director or designee is authorized to develop administrative regulations, consistent with Pennsylvania law and this Policy, in order to effectively ensure the proper implementation of this Policy throughout the school.

DEFINITIONS:

Child Abuse – the definition of this term shall be consistent with the current, legally-applicable definition under the CPSL.

Direct Contact with Children – for the purposes of this Policy, this term, consistent with the CPSL, shall mean “the care, supervision, guidance or control of children or routine interaction with children.”

School Employee – Any individual employed by the school who provides a program, activity or service sponsored by a school and has or may have direct contact with children during the course of his/her employment.

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GUIDELINES AND REQUIREMENTS:

ANNUAL PROVISION OF WRITTEN MANDATORY REPORTING PROCEDURES TO ALL SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

All school employees shall be provided, on an annual basis, a copy of the required mandatory reporting procedures, which shall be consistent with this Policy and shall include the following:

- The current definition of “child abuse” under the CPSL;
- Procedures for reporting suspected abuse, consistent with this Policy, including specific procedures for providing notification of the Principal;
- Procedures and definitions pertaining to the mandatory reporting by educators of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual misconduct under the Educator Discipline Act;

TRAINING OF SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

All school employees who come into contact with children shall receive training regarding child abuse recognition and reporting, which shall include training on the following legally-required topics:

1. Recognition of the signs of abuse and sexual misconduct and reporting requirements for suspected abuse and sexual misconduct under the CPSL.
2. The requirements of the "Professional Educator Discipline Act," including mandatory reporting requirements.
3. School's policies related to reporting of suspected abuse and sexual misconduct.
4. Maintenance of professional and appropriate relationships with students.

The Executive Director or designee shall be responsible for ensuring the proper enforcement of these training requirements as well as ensuring that the training provided is in full compliance with the requirements of Act 126 and provides training on all of the above-listed topics, as mandated by Act 126.

DUTY TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE

All school employees and volunteers have a duty and legal responsibility to report all instances where the employee has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is the victim of child abuse. Professional privilege and/or promises / assurances of confidentiality to the student do not apply to any situations involving suspected abuse and do not relieve a mandated reporter of the duty to make a report of suspected child abuse.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

School employees and volunteers with reasonable cause to suspect child abuse are required to immediately report such suspicions to the Department of Public Welfare via the statewide toll-free child abuse reporting hotline (800-932-0313) or make a written electronic report via the DPW online reporting system. Where a reporter makes their initial report orally, they must then make a written report within 48 hours of the oral report.

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All employees and volunteers with independent reason to suspect abuse (i.e., whose reason to suspect child abuse does not arise exclusively from another employee's suspicion) shall be required to make the mandatory report to DPW regardless of whether a report has been made by another school employee regarding the same child.

Once the initial report has been made to DPW via telephone hotline or online reporting system, such individual is required to then immediately notify the Principal of the child's school. In such instances, the Principal is not required to file a separate report of suspected abuse to DPW unless the principal has reason to suspect child abuse independent of the employee's report. The Principal shall be responsible for the facilitation of the school's cooperation in the investigation process, including, but not limited to, facilitating interviews with the child and staff members.

In cases where the suspected abuser is the Principal, employees reporting suspected abuse are required to report the suspected abuse directly to the Executive Director.

Each building is required have a consistent established procedure for the immediate notification of the Principal an employee reporting suspected child abuse. It shall be the responsibility of the Executive Director or designee to determine the proper manner in which notification to the Principal must be made under this Policy, which may be standardized in all school buildings or be independently established in each school building.

REPORTS OF SUSPECTED ABUSE BY SCHOOL EMPLOYEES AND/OR SCHOOL VOLUNTEERS

The Principal must immediately notify the Executive Director of all reports of suspected abuse by a school employee and/or a school employee, whereupon the Executive Director shall authorize a thorough investigation into the allegations of abuse.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF REPORTS

All reports of suspected child abuse shall remain confidential, and the release of data by the school that would identify the individual who made a report of suspected child abuse and/or who cooperated in a child abuse investigation is strictly prohibited.

EMPLOYEE CLEARANCES

School employees shall be subject to the requirements of 24 P.S. §1-111 and §1-111.1 and shall, in addition, be required to submit to the school, prior to employment, certification from the PA Department of Public Welfare as to whether the applicant is named in the Statewide database as the alleged perpetrator in a pending child abuse investigation or as the perpetrator of a founded report or an indicated child abuse report. Employees must report all arrests and/or convictions for relevant offenses within 72 hours of arrest and/or conviction.

Every 60 months, as required by law, school employees shall be required to obtain and produce updated clearances required in 24 P.S. 1-111 as well as the statewide database certification from the PA Department of Welfare indicated above.

It shall be the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that all employees have produced and the school has maintained the required clearances. Any employee whose clearances have not been renewed within the 60-month timeframe shall be subject to discipline, up to and including

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termination. At no time may an employee with lapsed clearances work in a position with direct contact with children. The Principal shall provide notice to each employee, in writing, of the required renewal date not more than twelve (12) months and not less than six (6) months prior to the date of the employee's required renewal.

The information provided and compiled under this section, including, but not limited to, the names, addresses and telephone numbers of applicants/employees, shall not be subject to the PA Right to Know law (65 P.S. § 67.101 et seq.).

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers who, on the basis of their role as an integral part of a regularly-scheduled program, activity or service, accept responsibility for a child are legally required to report where the volunteer has reasonable to suspect that the child is a victim of child abuse.

All volunteers are required to produce the following clearances/background checks:

- (1) PA State Police Criminal History Report – Pursuant to 18 Pa.C.S. Ch. 91 (relating to criminal history record information), a report of criminal history record information from the Pennsylvania State Police or a statement from the Pennsylvania State Police that the State Police central repository contains no such information relating to that person. The criminal history record information shall be limited to that which is disseminated pursuant to 18 Pa.C.S. § 9121(b)(2) (relating to general regulations).
- (2) Department of Public Welfare Child Abuse Certification – A certification from the Department of Public Welfare as to whether the applicant is named in the Statewide database as the alleged perpetrator in a pending child abuse investigation or as the perpetrator of a founded report or an indicated report.

Volunteers who have resided outside of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania within the past ten (10) years and those who do not meet the requirements for exemption from the Federal criminal history record information are required to submit to a third background check requirement:

- (3) FBI Criminal History – Submission of a full set of fingerprints to the PA State Police for the purpose of a record check, and the PA State Police or its authorized agent shall submit the fingerprints to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the purpose of verifying the identity of the applicant and obtaining a current record of any criminal arrests and convictions.

Requirements for exemption of the third requirement (FBI Criminal History):

- (1) The position for which the individual is being considered is an unpaid, volunteer position;
- (2) The prospective volunteer has been a Pennsylvania resident for the past ten years;
- (3) The prospective volunteer affirms, in writing, that he/she is not disqualified from service under 23 P.S. 6344(c) (Grounds for denying employment or participation in program,

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activity or service) and/or has not been convicted of an offense similar in nature to the crimes listed in 6344(c) under the laws or former laws in the United States or abroad.

CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

Upon notification by a state or county agency that a child abuse investigation involves suspected child abuse by a school employee, including, but not limited to, a service provider, independent contractor or administrator, the Principal shall immediately notify the Executive Director and implement a plan of supervision or alternative arrangement for the individual under investigation. As required by law, such plan of supervision or alternative arrangement must be approved by the county agency and kept on file with the agency until the investigation is completed.