

# STUDENT AND FAMILY HANDBOOK

## 2022-2023

VERITAS PREP CHARTER SCHOOL

MIDDLE SCHOOL CAMPUS • 370 PINE STREET • SPRINGFIELD, MA 01105

HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS • 225 CARANDO DRIVE • SPRINGFIELD, MA 01104

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## **I. Our Mission**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School prepares students in grades 5 – 12 to compete, achieve, and succeed in high school, college, and beyond.

## **II. Introduction**

Everything we do as a school is intended to help us reach this mission. We hold each student to the highest expectations and provide them with the support to reach them. This handbook outlines the expectations to which we will consistently hold all of our students and families and the supports we will provide to ensure that they are reached.

## **III. Equal Educational Opportunity**

Pursuant to its charter, Veritas Preparatory Charter School serves students in the 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades. Veritas Preparatory Charter School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, special needs, English or foreign language proficiency, athletic ability, or academic achievement.

## **IV. General School Information**

### **SCHOOL HOURS**

#### **Middle School Campus**

Arrive at the school building at 8:30 am

Classes begin at 8:45am

Classes end, and students are dismissed from the school building Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at 3:30 pm and Wednesdays at 1:30pm

Teachers hold professional development Wednesdays from 1:30 – 3:45 pm

#### **High School Campus**

Arrive at the school building at 7:45 am

Classes begin at 8:00 am

Classes end followed by a staggered dismissal from the school building Mondays-Thursdays between 3:15-3:30 pm and Fridays at 12:00pm

Teachers hold professional development Fridays from 12:00 – 1:30pm

### **SCHOOL CALENDAR AND CLOSINGS**

Student and teacher schedules reflect in length, organization, and content our dedication to the school's mission. At the Middle school, we operate on a trimester schedule and at the High school on a semester schedule which provides up to 185 total days of instruction.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School will close the school building in cases of extreme weather conditions. In such situations, we will follow the Springfield Public Schools closings. Please listen to local television stations for cancellation announcements. If Springfield Public Schools announces a delayed opening, early dismissal, or a closing, Veritas Prep will also be delayed, released early, or closed for the day.

## **STUDENT RECORDS**

Federal and state laws provide parents/guardians and eligible students (those who are age 14 or older) with rights of confidentiality, access, and amendment relating to student records. Copies of the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations (“Regulations”), detailing these rights, are available in the school’s Main Office or on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s website.

**High school:** As an Early College High School, Veritas must align our requirements to the regulations for high schools and for college learning. The policies below sometimes include separate rules for college courses. This ensures students can earn college credits and a high school diploma at the same time with the support they need.

Thank you for reading the policies below closely. To acknowledge your understanding of the specific requirements of Early College, we ask that all participating students and families sign the Early College Release Form included in this handbook.

**Access and Amendment by Parents/Guardians or Students** – A parent/guardian or eligible student has a right to access student records and to seek their amendment if the parent/guardian or eligible student believes them to be inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the student's privacy rights. In order to obtain access or to seek amendment to student records, please contact the Principal.

**Access to college records:** Veritas will work with our college partners to obtain and deliver student information. Students at Veritas agree to share their records with families and Veritas Staff as part of the Early College program agreement. All college course progress will be included in Veritas progress reports and report cards. Parents/guardians who have questions or concerns about college records should contact the Dean of Early College.

**Access by Non-Custodial Parents** – Massachusetts General Laws c. 71, §34H (“Section 34H”) governs access to student records by a parent who does not have physical custody of a student. Generally, Section 34H requires a non-custodial parent seeking access to submit a written request for consideration along with other documentation to the Principal or Executive Director on an annual basis. Parents/guardians who have questions or concerns regarding access to records by non-custodial parents should contact the Principal for detailed information regarding the procedures that must be followed.

**Access by Authorized School Personnel and Third Party** – Release of student records generally requires consent of the parent/guardian or eligible student. However, the state regulations provide certain exceptions. For example, staff employed or under contract to the district have access to records as needed to perform their duties. Veritas Preparatory Charter School also releases a student’s complete student record to authorized school personnel of a school to which a student seeks or intends to transfer without further notice to or receipt of consent from, the eligible student or parent/guardian.

In addition, Veritas Preparatory Charter School has a practice of releasing directory information, consisting of the following: the student's name, address, telephone listing, date and place of birth, major field of study, dates of attendance, weight, and height of the members of athletic teams, class,

participation in recognized activities and sports, honors and awards, and post-high school plans. In the event a parent/guardian or eligible student objects to the release of any of the above information, the parent/guardian or eligible student may state that objection in writing to the Director of Operations. Absent receipt of a written objection by the end of September each year, the directory information will be released without further notice or consent. Additionally, the school will release the names and addresses of students to a third-party mail house, upon request, unless the parent/guardian or eligible student requests that the school withhold that student's information.

Please see the Regulations for a description of other circumstances in which student records may be released without the consent of a parent/guardian or eligible student.

Parents/guardians and eligible students have a right to file a complaint concerning alleged failures by a school district to comply with the requirements of the student records laws and regulations with the Massachusetts Department of Education, 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148. Complaints relative to federal statutes and regulations governing student records may be filed with the Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue SW, Washington DC.

## **MEDICAL RECORDS AND HEALTH SERVICES**

Massachusetts state law requires all families enrolling a student for in-school, hybrid, or remote-learning, to submit the following paperwork:

**VERITAS PREP HEALTH HISTORY FORM:** This health form must be updated and signed by the student's parent/guardian **yearly**. This form provides us with emergency contact information and will help inform us of any severe allergies and new and/or ongoing health problems that may occur during the summer months. This form also allows you to give the school nurse permission to administer/apply certain over-the-counter medications approved by the School Medical Director's Standing Orders.

**PHYSICAL EXAMS:** All students must have a physical exam within one year prior to entrance to school or within 30 days after school entry and every other year thereafter. Any student requiring medications while at school and/or participating in any after school athletic program, must have updated health forms each year. Please provide the school nurse with a copy of your student's most recent physical exam and immunization record, signed by your student's provider.

**IMMUNIZATION RECORDS:** Under 105 CMR 220.00 Immunization of Students Before Admission to School: Students are required to have 5 doses of DTap, 4 doses of Polio, 3 doses of Hepatitis B, 2 doses of MMR & Varicella. Additionally, students in grades 7-12 require 1 dose of Tdap, 1 dose of MenACWY in grades 7-9 and another in grades 11-12. Medical exemptions (statement from a physician stating that a vaccine is medically contraindicated for a student) and religious exemptions (statement from student, or parent/guardian if the student is <18 years of age, stating that a vaccine is against sincerely held religious beliefs) must be renewed annually at the start of the school year.

**MEDICATIONS:** A "**Standard Medication Order Form**" must be completed each school year by your child's provider and signed and dated by **both** the provider and parent/guardian. Any medication to be given during school hours must be delivered directly to the School Nurse by the parent/guardian or another responsible adult. The medication must be brought to school in the **original, pharmacy labeled container**. Non-prescription medications also need to be delivered in their original packaging. If your child is being followed by a doctor for asthma or has a prescribed EpiPen for a life-threatening allergy, an action plan must also be completed by your child's provider and returned to the school nurse. Please

note, whenever possible, there will be no nebulizer treatments allowed at school. Inhalers with a prescribed spacer, using good technique are equally effective.

**ALLERGY AWARE FACILITY:** There may be individuals in our school that have a life-threatening allergy to foods of all varieties. Any exposure to the allergen through contact or ingestion can cause a severe allergic reaction that requires emergency medical treatment. As an *allergen-aware* school, nuts and nut-containing products **are allowed** on school premises for personal lunches and snacks, but **are not** permitted to be shared and/or distributed by families, students, coaches, staff, and/or visitors.

**EXCLUDABLE CONDITIONS:** Please notify the school nurse if your child has been diagnosed with any of the following conditions for guidance on when to return to school:

- Covid-19 \*see specific Covid-19 guidelines below\*
- Dengue
- Diphtheria
- Rubella (German Measles)
- Malaria
- Measles
- Meningitis
- Monkeypox
- Mumps
- Pertussis (Whooping Cough)
- Polio
- Smallpox
- Tuberculosis
- Varicella (Chicken Pox)
- Zika

**EXCLUSION DURING DISEASE OUTBREAKS:** In situations when one or more cases of disease are present in a school, all susceptible students and staff, including those with medical or religious exemptions, are subject to exclusion as described in the Reportable Diseases and Isolation and Quarantine Requirements (105 C.M.R. 300.000). The reporting and control of diseases identified as posing a risk to the public health is prescribed by state regulation and law.

**WHEN TO KEEP YOUR CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL:** It can be difficult to know when to keep your child home from school with Covid-19 still present in our community. If you suspect your child has Covid-19 please test them as soon as possible and refer to the Covid-19 guidelines below. If they test positive please let your school nurse know. However, in the absence of a known contagious illness, your child should not miss school except in the case of serious illness such as fever (temperature > 100 degrees), significant GI symptoms or severe pain symptom. Please contact your child's school nurse and/or pediatrician for specific guidance. For any extended absence, a clearance note from your medical provider needs to be presented to the school nurse prior to returning to school.

**COVID-19 GUIDELINES:** Per the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Covid-19 Isolation and Exposure Guidance for Children and Staff in the school setting:

- A rapid antigen test, such as a self-test done at home, is preferred to a PCR test in most situations

- To count for isolation, Day 0 is the first day of symptoms OR the day the positive test was taken, whichever is earlier
- Contact tracing is no longer recommended or required
- Testing of asymptomatic individuals is no longer recommended or required
- Universal masking is not recommended, however, any individual who wishes to continue to mask, should be supported in that choice. For those who need or choose to mask, masking is never required when the individual is eating, drinking, sleeping, or outside
- Quarantine is no longer required nor recommended for children or staff in these settings, regardless of vaccination status or where the exposure occurred. All exposed individuals may continue to attend programming as long as they remain asymptomatic. Those who can mask should do so until Day 10, and it is recommended that they test on Day 6 of exposure. If symptoms develop, follow the guidance for symptomatic individuals, below.
- Children and staff who test positive must isolate for at least 5 days. If they are asymptomatic or symptoms are resolving and they have been fever free without the use of fever-reducing medicine for 24 hours, they may return to programming on Day 6 and should wear a high-quality mask through Day 10:
  - If the individual is able to mask, they must do so through Day 10.
    - If the individual has a negative test on Day 6 or later, they do not need to mask.
    - If the individual is unable to mask, they may return to programming with a negative test on Day 6 or later.
- Symptomatic individuals can remain in their school or program if they have mild symptoms, are tested immediately onsite, and that test is negative. Best practice would also include wearing a mask, if possible, until symptoms are fully resolved. For symptomatic individuals, DPH recommends a second test within 48 hours if the initial test is negative.
  - If the symptomatic individual cannot be tested immediately, they should be sent home and allowed to return to their program or school if symptoms remain mild and they test negative, or they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and their symptoms are resolving, or if a medical professional makes an alternative diagnosis. A negative test is strongly recommended for return.
- All individuals are encouraged to stay up-to-date with vaccination as vaccines remain the best way to help protect yourself and others
- Veritas does not mandate the Covid-19 vaccine, however, please be advised that colleges the high school partners with may have a different policy

### **Covid-19 Symptoms:**

- Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Headache *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Muscle aches or body aches
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) *when in combination with other symptoms*

## **BREAKFAST, LUNCH, AND SNACKS**

Veritas participates in the Community Eligibility Program which provides all students with free breakfasts and lunches as well as free milk regardless of income qualifications. We use Sodexo to manage our food program and all meals provided are in compliance with the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs. A variety of hot and cold breakfast items will be served to students' throughout the week. Students are eligible to receive breakfast each morning, as long as he/she arrives by 8:30 am at the middle school campus and 7:45 am at the high school campus. The school will provide a variety of lunch options throughout the week, as well, with both hot and cold options available and milk being served daily or student's may bring their own lunches from home. **Note:** Students will not have access to a refrigerator or microwave so their lunches should not require refrigeration or microwaving.

Although the school provides free breakfast and lunch to all scholars, regardless of income, families are welcome to send their scholar with food from home. Food from home should aim to meet the same USDA guidelines as the food provided at school. The school provides free milk for all scholars. We highly discourage sugary drinks and sodas as these beverages provide no nutritional value. If you do send your scholar with such beverages, please note that they cannot be consumed in the classroom. Given the important papers and electronics in the classroom, only water is allowed. Food from home should be for personal consumption only unless the scholar has enough to share with the entire class for a celebration.

Any student having particular dietary restrictions should contact the school Nurse or Director of Operations as soon as possible, as well as provide medical documentation describing the specific dietary restrictions and needs of that student.

## **EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES**

All Veritas students will receive access to extracurricular opportunities including athletics, clubs, and student leadership opportunities. We recognize that extracurricular activities are important avenues for career exploration, social-emotional learning, and character development and will therefore make these opportunities available to students both during and after the school day. All extracurricular activities will be facilitated and supervised by Veritas staff members.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Springfield Public schools will provide transportation for students at both campuses. Veritas Preparatory Charter School will serve as a liaison and request information from families to inform bus stops and routes. Any questions or concerns regarding transportation should be communicated to the Director of Operations. Please see below for more information:

**Middle School:** Springfield Public Schools will provide transportation for Veritas Preparatory Charter School students in adherence with the district's transportation policy.

**High school: ALL** Veritas Preparatory High school students are eligible for transportation regardless of the student's home distance from the school. Unfortunately, due to the location of the school and lack of sidewalks, students may not walk to and from school. For families who'd prefer to pick up/drop off their scholar, please inform the Director of Operations as soon as possible.

In addition to daily transportation, Veritas Preparatory Charter High School will provide after school transportation for students participating in after school activities and academic programming.

## **SCHOOL SUPPLIES**

During student orientation week, students will receive some of their school supplies, including binders and folders to organize their materials for each subject. All families are encouraged to provide their students with Dixon Ticonderoga pencils and Wide-Ruled Filler Paper. Students are not allowed to write on or decorate the binders and folders provided by the school.

Students should not bring non-essential items of value to school – monetary or otherwise – since they cannot be securely stored. Although Veritas Preparatory Charter School prides itself on being very safe, the school does not accept responsibility for any missing items of value. Students who bring inappropriate items to school, including but not limited to toys, iPods, CD players, laser pointers, beepers, pagers and **cell phones**, will have such items confiscated and returned to the student at the end of the day. In some cases, a parent/guardian must collect the item.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

We keep parents/guardians advised of their child's academic progress toward promotion on a consistent basis. Parents/guardians receive both verbal and written communication concerning the progress of their child throughout the school year. We want to be sure parents/guardians are fully aware of their child's academic status at all times and that teachers have very specific and intentional times to meet with families. All parents/guardians are required to come to school to pick up their child's report cards at the Middle school and progress reports at the High school at the times outlined below:

**Middle School:** In the middle of each trimester (October, January, and May) families receive formal written progress reports. At the end of each trimester (November and March), there is a formal family conference/report card night where teachers and parents/guardians meet to discuss their student's progress as well as to pick up their student's report card.

**High School:** In the middle of each semester (November and March), there is a formal family conference night where teachers and parents/guardians meet to discuss their student's progress as well as to pick up their student's progress reports. At the end of each semester (January and June) families will receive formal written report cards.

**Translation** – Veritas Preparatory Charter School recognizes that communication and partnership with parents/guardians is vital for the educational success of students. We want to ensure that everyone in the school community has equal access to district and school publications. The following documents are available in Spanish and Somali:

- Application for Lottery Admission
- Student and Family Handbooks
- Parental Surveys
- Progress Reports
- Report Cards
- Individual Education Plans/Accommodation Plans

- District/School Communications
- Disciplinary Notices

A Spanish language interpreter is also provided at the following major school-wide events:

- School Information Sessions
- Report Card Nights
- Annual School Lottery Event

To enable effective communication with Limited English Proficient parents/guardians, interpretation and translation services are available at no cost to parents/guardians. A parent/guardian does not have to be of limited English proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending English to be eligible for interpretation services or translation, but rather, it is only necessary that a parent/guardian be limited in at least one of these areas to receive services. Interpretation services facilitate a parents'/guardians' due process rights, including interpretation for IEP meetings, 504 meetings and student discipline hearings. Families can request translation or interpretation services in their home language by calling the main office at 413-539-0055 (*Middle school*) or 413-264-2646 (*High school*).

## V. School Policies and Procedures

### ATTENDANCE POLICY

Given the fast pace and high rigor of Veritas Prep's curriculum, **missing one day of school can have a detrimental effect on a student's learning.** Attendance in high school, as in all grades, is essential to success. It is even more critical in high school as students prepare for careers and begin attending college classes. Inconsistent attendance and absences create significant challenges for students to find time to redo the learning and maintain current tasks. Missing too many classes can lead to real learning losses and course failures.

Parents/guardians are expected to ensure that their child is in school. Please do not allow your child to miss a day of school except for serious illness. We ask that families not schedule vacations or non-emergency appointments during school time. **Families should take advantage of 1:00pm dismissal on Wednesdays (middle school) and 12:00 pm dismissal on Fridays (high school), as well as school vacations, to schedule appointments and travel.**

**All student absences, including illness, appointments, vacations, excessive incomplete days, etc. count as absences. If a student exceeds 15 absences, either excused or unexcused, in a school year, Veritas Preparatory Charter School reserves the right to retain the student.** Veritas Preparatory Charter School distinguishes between excused and unexcused absences. A student would be given an excused absence if he/she provides a doctor's note for the day they are absent; a parent/guardian note excusing their student's absence is not sufficient documentation to excuse the absence.

*Acceptable reasons for excused absences, tardies, and dismissals include:*

- A verified medical appointment or illness: Note: Medical notes from Doctors must indicate that the child was seen at the Doctor's office on the day of absence. Dr.'s notes must be turned in within 5 days of the absence)
- The death of a family member (parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin)

- Religious holidays
- Legal obligation such as court appearance – verified with copy of summons
- Absences approved by the Principal
- Additionally, students are afforded rights under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (“Section 504”), the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”) should their absences be related to a disabling condition. Other rare exceptions may apply.

Students who are absent from school **cannot** attend or participate in any school-sponsored activities occurring on the day of the absence, unless the school has given advance permission. Because Veritas Preparatory Charter School reserves the right to retain any student who exceeds 15 absences, the school will provide support at the following set intervals:

- At 3, 5, 10 and 15 student absences, Veritas Prep will contact the family in writing.
- The Culture Team will contact the family for meetings at 5, 10 and 15 absences. The meetings will discuss supports for the student, which may include an attendance contract or Saturday School assignments.
- At 15 student absences, **the school reserves the right to retain any student.**

According to M.G.L. c. 76 and c. 72, § 8, all students under 16 are expected to be in school. All students under the age of 16 will be expected to comply with these laws and, when applicable, Veritas Preparatory Charter School will follow the procedures set forth in M.G.L. c. 76, § 18 before permanently unrolling a student from Veritas and offering that seat to another prospective student. In cases of truancy, the Executive Director (or her/his designee) will investigate the situation. Veritas Preparatory Charter School operates in compliance with Department of Transitional Assistance requests and requirements, which can include mandated reporting of truancy to appropriate state agencies.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School keeps accurate records of attendance and will make the records available for inspection by the DESE as needed. All questions regarding student attendance and attendance records should be directed to the school’s Director of Operations. In cases of truancy, Veritas Preparatory Charter School may report the student and/or family to appropriate local and state authorities.

**Incomplete Days: Lateness and Early Dismissal** – At Veritas Preparatory Charter School, if a student does not complete a full school day, he/she is assigned an Incomplete Day. If a student is not in his/her assigned seat by 8:45am at the middle school and 8:05 am at the high school, for any reason, he/she is assigned an Incomplete Day. If a student is dismissed early, for any reason, he/she is assigned an Incomplete Day. If a student arrives late and leaves early, this counts as **two** Incomplete Days.

Every 5 Incomplete Days count as 1 absence within the school’s Attendance Policy.

Incomplete Days due to traffic, weather, family emergencies, etc., are not excused.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School may excuse Incomplete Days in cases of court-mandated appearances, if proper documentation is provided, disability related appointments and religious observances.

**Excessive Incomplete Days are not tolerated.** In order to ensure that students show up on time and do not leave early, the school will provide consequences and support at the following set intervals:

- Every 5 Incomplete Days count as one absence within the school's attendance policy.
- At 10 Incomplete Days Veritas Prep's administration will contact the family in writing
- At 20 Incomplete Days, Veritas Prep's administration will require a family meeting to discuss attendance issues.
- Incomplete Days will result in deductions to student's weekly paycheck.

Early dismissal guidelines:

- For their own safety, **students must be picked up by a parent, guardian or designated emergency contact person in order to be dismissed prior to the end of the day.** This policy applies to all early dismissals, including a note or appointments and illness.
  - Students leaving early must check in with the main office before leaving
  - Parent/guardians or emergency contacts **MUST** show and ID when dismissing a scholar
- If a parent/guardian needs to change how their student is to be dismissed, :
  - A phone call has to be made to the school office so that ample time is given to notify the student and his/her teachers without disrupting class :
    - **Middle school:** 2:30pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and by 12 Noon on Wednesdays
    - **High school:** 2:30 pm Monday –Thursday and by 11 am on Fridays
      - If a call is made after these times, we will not be able to accommodate your request.

If a student needs to be sent home due to a behavioral infraction, a parent/guardian must come to the school, meet with the Director of Culture or his/her designee, and remove the student from school grounds. Incomplete Day consequences apply in cases of suspension. Students being sent home for behavioral infractions will not be dismissed unless the parent/guardian has physically come to the school (see Appendix A: Code of Conduct for more details), unless certain rare exceptions apply.

**High School only:**

#### **PERIOD and COURSE ATTENDANCE**

When students are in school, they must attend all scheduled classes. Attendance is taken in every class, within the first 5 minutes. Students who are not present in class within the first 10 minutes will be marked absent unexcused unless they bring the teacher a signed note or pass from a staff member which indicates permission to be elsewhere at that time.

#### **UNEXCUSED MISSED CLASS TIME**

Any unexcused missed class time when a student is present in school

- Must be made up during teacher Office Hours for that course or another agreed-upon time between the teacher and student.

- Students are expected to make up the time within 48 hours. Families will be notified a day in advance of required Office Hours.
- Efforts will be made to work with student schedules when attending Office Hours within 48 hours is not possible. However this could affect a students' grade or course credits and may result in no credit for missed work.
- Missed Office Hours for missed class time may result in a student-family-teacher conference or Administrative Office Hours

**College courses** may not allow make-up work for absences beyond the allowable number in their policy. A close review and signature acknowledging course policies prior to course enrollment is required for all college courses.

**College Course Attendance:** College Instructors have the legal right to determine their own attendance and grading policies. Some have very strict attendance policies and require that no more than 3 classes are missed to earn credit. These policies are published in their syllabus and reviewed with our students. All Scholars taking college courses must adhere to the course specific attendance and lateness policies as detailed on the course syllabus. Veritas staff work with Scholars to ensure they understand these policies and track their progress towards expectations and support them to succeed. **It is the scholar's responsibility to contact all professors and program staff, if they are going to miss their college class.** Dismissal from any college class is highly discouraged.

Our Early Alert System (see [Program of Study](#)) ensures students and families are notified if a student is at risk of losing credit for attendance or academic performance reasons.

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT POLICY

We believe all Scholars can succeed with the right opportunities and supports. Academic supports are built into our schedule, including:

### Middle School:

***Focused Tutoring*** will be provided as part of the daily schedule for students struggling with math and/or literacy. Tutoring will be targeted to address specific skills and content in order to address academic needs as they arise and ongoing if needed.

### High School:

Our program of study is designed to be in compliance with the state requirements. Please refer to the [High School program of study](#) to learn more. Below are academic supports we will provide to students to be successful in their high school career:

- ***Personalized learning block:*** We have created a time in the high school schedule when all staff are ready to support students and all students can access support. During this time we provide targeted instruction for students in areas of need. This year we will have a heavy emphasis on math support
- ***Structured Study: ADD HERE AFTER WE DISCUSS:*** Needs a new name and description aligned to DESE direct instruction expectations
- ***Office Hours:*** Each teacher holds weekly Office Hours to provide support for students and check in on assignments, habits or other needs.

- **Focused Tutoring** will be provided to students identified as needing additional support beyond the structures in our school day and specialized supports for individualized education plans. Tutoring will be targeted to address specific skills and content in order to address academic needs as they arise and ongoing if needed.

## **MAKE-UP WORK POLICY**

Students who are not in school miss critical academic assignments and assessments. Our school make-up policy is designed to hold students accountable for all missed assignments and assessments, as well as to ensure timely make-up work so that students do not fall behind academically. Students with incomplete work will earn a “0” (zero) for that assignment in their gradebook.

If students miss a class for any reason (absence, lateness, and early dismissal), they are responsible for collecting their missing work from the teacher. All work, including homework, needs to be completed by the following day. If a student is out for two days, he/she will have two days to complete the make-up work, etc.

**Assessments** – If a student is absent for any reason (up to five consecutive days), or if a student is late and/or dismissed early, all missed assessments (e.g., tests, quizzes) must be made up within the number of consecutive school days that the student had been absent. For example, if a student had been absent for three consecutive days, he/she would have three school days to take the missed assessment. If a student is absent for five or more consecutive school days, he/she must meet their teacher to determine a reasonable timeline for making up missed assessments. In rare circumstances, exceptions to the make-up policy may be granted by a school administrator.

**College Courses** - As noted previously, Early College Instructors set their own rules for missed and makeup work. Veritas staff will work closely with students to ensure they understand these policies and are meeting college course expectations.

## **HOMEWORK POLICY**

Homework (HW) is assigned nightly and is an essential component of Veritas Preparatory Charter School’s academic program. Each night, you can expect your scholar to have homework in multiple classes. Every effort is made to avoid homework over school vacations to support student mental health and time for their busy lives.

HW is used to review and apply materials and subject content taught in class that day or in a previous lesson, and serves as a consistent barometer for student performance. It is used to engage in reading, and begin or follow up on longer term tasks including writing and projects. HW tasks are designed to be completed independently, using resources students have been taught to work with in class.

Since HW is review or application of subject content already taught, it allows teachers to know how each student is performing on lesson standards and to identify any interventions students may need.

Nightly HW also helps students become accustomed to the self-motivation and time-management skills needed to advance their education. At the high school level, homework is graded on Habits of Success - Time and Task Management. For more on Habits of Success, see [Program of studies](#).

Students will need a quiet space where they can complete their HW each evening. We ask families to provide this space and help redirect their scholar if he or she gets distracted, but we do not expect families to provide academic assistance. If your scholar is struggling to complete a specific assignment:

**Middle school:** Please call his or her teacher for support or write a note on the assignment.

**High school:** Please ask them to contact their teacher try to call his or her teacher for support or assist them in writing a note to the teacher about the assignment. At the high school level, it is important that students reach out for the support they need, and given they are still young, may need your support to do this. Homework at the college level is entirely determined by the professor and students must follow those policies outlined in the course syllabus. Veritas staff will ensure students understand all course expectations.

Teachers should reach out to discuss supports for consistently struggling scholars such as adjusting homework or providing after school tutoring. If you feel your child's academic needs are not being met, please reach out to your scholar's teacher(s).

## **HOMEWORK CENTER**

At the middle school campus, students will be assigned to Homework Center that day if they do not bring their completed homework to school. Homework Center provides a quiet space for scholars to complete work during lunch. Although it is not enough time to complete all work, we hope that attending Homework Center allows scholars to build their academic habits and practice some of the skills they missed by skipping a homework assignment.

At the High school campus, we have structured study time on certain school days, where students may complete homework assignments.

## **GRADING AND PROMOTION POLICY**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School is committed to setting students up for success in high school and establishes rigorous standards for promotion. We will use standards-based assessments and classwork to determine a student's proficiency level and assign grades for each subject. Recommendation for promotion is made by the lead classroom teacher and the principal will make final promotion decisions. In special circumstances, the school may make exceptions to these promotion criteria.

### **Middle School**

**A scholar's promotion is primarily determined by the following criteria: grade level standards mastery, overall reading level, and attendance. While this set of criteria guides promotion and retention decisions, we also consider each scholar's circumstances in making this decision.**

### **Promotion Guidelines**

- **Grade Level Standards Mastery.** In the 0-4 standards-based grading system an average of 3 in each core subject area is meeting grade level standards mastery in that subject. The expectation is that all scholars will demonstrate mastery of grade level standards by the end of the year. To

help gauge a scholar's progress, the report card will compare his or her averages in each subject to the expected mastery level at that point in time and generate a letter grade. Teachers and families will be in communication via progress reports, report cards, and conferences if a scholar is not showing progress toward mastery. At the end of the second trimester, families will be notified if their child is at risk of retention during report card night.

- **Reading & Math Level.** If end of year assessments indicate that a scholar is reading and/or doing math well below grade level band, that scholar is at risk of be retained.
- **Attendance.** Absences are tracked on progress reports and report cards. Veritas Preparatory Charter School does not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences with respect to promotion. Scholars who accumulate more than 15 absences during the school year will be considered for retention in their current grade level.

### **High school**

Promotion policies at the high school level are different from the middle grades given the use of credits and the unique scheduling and structure of high school that allows students to complete grade level work during a variety of times

Students at the high school level are identified as freshmen (grade 9), sophomores (10), juniors (11) and seniors (12) based on their year of attendance rather than courses or credits completed. This means in the first year, students are considered freshmen, second year students are sophomores and so on, regardless of credit accumulation or standing in courses.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School is committed to setting students up for success throughout high school and into college. Our standards-based grading system tracks student success on state expectations for each grade level, and students who do not meet those expectations for a course will have to retake that course or a similar course or courses focused on the same standards. Several courses are tied to specific grade levels, like English 9. However, a student may be considered a sophomore (10th grader) even if they are retaking English 9.

However, in order to graduate within 4 years, students need to accumulate a certain number of credits each year (see [Program of Study](#)) and failing to meet course standards and earn course credits and having to repeat courses or standards may interfere with the timeline to graduation or require summer and alternate programming to graduate within 4 years.

In addition, with our Early College program and as is true in any high school where courses may have a specific sequence to prepare students for the next level, students may not be able to access a sophomore or junior level course if they haven't successfully completed the previous year's expectations. In such cases, students will focus on meeting the standards not yet met. We make every effort to support students to meet standards in the planned amount of time, and provide extra tutoring and support sessions during school vacations and more.

**Summer Work** – It is impossible to make up a year's worth of work over our short summer. Instead of hosting summer school, we ask all Veritas Preparatory Charter School scholars complete summer work to stay sharp with their reading and math.

### **DRESS CODE POLICY**

## **Middle School:**

**Philosophy** – Veritas Preparatory Charter School has a dress code that applies during all school days and during all school-sponsored events unless otherwise noted. The Veritas Preparatory Charter School dress code has been adopted to improve the educational environment for all students. Specifically, we have instituted a dress code for the following reasons:

- Foster a sense of school identity and community;
- Ensure that our students focus on learning instead of clothing;
- Increase school safety and security by making the presence of visitors/outside immediately apparent;
- Reduce the cost of clothing for families.

**Enforcement** – It is the goal of the school to have a dress code that makes things easier for families and students rather than more difficult. For that reason, we make every effort to be clear about this policy and consistent in its enforcement. Families who have questions or concerns should contact the school immediately and seek clarification. We are constantly seeking feedback from families on our policies and have made changes to the dress code policy over the years to make it most convenient for families.

**Like all school policies, the dress code policy is strictly enforced.** Although it may seem as if small exceptions should be no problem, we cannot allow deviations from this code. Our staff do not have the time to inspect every item for acceptability or exception. If the policy states “shoes should be all black,” it means just that. It is important that all students adhere to the same code. If an exception is made for one student, it would then have to apply to all students, and the code has, in effect, changed. **Students who are out of dress code are not allowed to attend their classes.** The school will do their best to provide the proper uniform for a student to borrow for that day, however, if that is not possible, **families of students who are not in dress code will be asked to bring the proper attire to school.**

The Veritas Preparatory Charter School dress code is not intended to suppress speech or expression. Students have alternate ways to express themselves through, among other things, verbal and written expression in the classrooms. Students also have opportunities to earn dress down days through culture incentives on Rockstar Mondays.

### **All Veritas Viper Apparel**

- Students can wear any solid color pants (no jeans) and a Veritas top (must have a logo).
- Students must wear Veritas approved or provided apparel for a top. This can be t-shirts, sweatpants, sweatshirts, etc.
- Veritas Viper apparel will come in many different colors, designs and styles. Students can design and suggest different clothing options.
- Students can wear choice shoes as long as they follow the following guidelines: Shoes must have a closed toe and a back. Students are not allowed to wear crocs, slides, slippers, etc. for safety reasons.
- Students are not allowed to wear hoods at any time to ensure appropriate classroom engagement. (Students can wear hoodies as long as the hood is down during the school day).
- Students are allowed to wear hats that do not cover the ears.

### **Dress Down Day Dress Code:**

- Students must wear clothing including both a shirt with pants, shorts or skirt and shoes.
- When the body is standing straight, clothing must cover the chest, back, torso, stomach, and lower extremities from armpit to armpit to mid-thigh. Tops must have a strap and at no time may any part of a student's buttocks be exposed.
- Clothing must cover all undergarments. No underwear or undergarments may be visible at any time. Clothing may not be see-through or skin tight.
- Clothing must be suitable for all scheduled classroom activities. Crocs and hoodies are not permitted at any time. Hats that do not cover the ears are permitted.

### ***Fit and Professionalism***

- **Students may not wear clothing with logos, unless it is the Veritas logo.**
- Students may wear shirts tucked or untucked.
- Students **may not alter** their clothing in any way (e.g. writing, cutting, etc.)

### ***Accessories***

- Students may not wear **accessories** that are unprofessional, distracting or potentially unsafe. Any clothing or accessory that might disrupt learning or that does not conform to standards of health, safety and cleanliness is not allowed.
  - Chains and necklaces may need to be removed during Fitness class.

### **High School**

The founding Student leadership council collaborated with the leadership team to develop a dress code with the following grounding beliefs:

- Ensure students focus on learning
- Encourage students to express their individuality
- Promote equity for all genders

### **Allowable Dress:**

- Students must wear clothing including both a shirt with pants, skirt, or the equivalent, and shoes that are appropriate for the occasion.
- Shirts and dresses must have fabric in the front and on the sides with lengths that are appropriate for the occasion.
- Clothing must cover undergarments and private parts.
- Hats and headwear must allow the face to be visible and not interfere with the line of sight of students or staff.
- Hoodies must be down to allow the face and ears to be visible so students can remain part of the learning community.

### **Non-Allowable Dress:**

- Clothing may not depict, advertise or advocate the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other controlled substances.
- Clothing may not use or depict hate speech targeting groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation or any other protected groups.
- Clothing, including gang identifiers, must not threaten the health or safety of any other student or staff.

- If the student's attire threatens the health or safety of any other person, then discipline for dress violations should be consistent with discipline policies for similar violations.

**Dress Up days:** As an Early college high school, we will have regular dress up days where students are expected to wear business casual attire.

If students do not meet our dress code expectations:

1st time: Conversation & strategizing for success; offer VPCS gear

2nd time: Attend Office Hours and review policy and why we have it

3rd time: Family Conference

## **ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY**

### **Electronic Devices**

- **Middle School:** Students may not use beepers, headphones/music equipment (e.g. CD-players, iPods, etc.), tablets, or cell-phones while in the school building, until after school or after detention. If students are in possession of an electronic device it must be shut down, with alarms turned off, and out of sight while students are inside the school. For example, a cell phone may be powered off and kept inside of a student's bag for use after school. While in school, the office phone may be utilized by the student to contact a parent/guardian.

If a student is seen with an electronic device, the device will be confiscated and given to a school leader who will return it to the student at the end of the day. The parent/guardian will be notified and the student will receive a detention. If the student violates the electronic policy again in the course of the same school year, a parent/guardian must come to the school to pick up any electronic device and the student will be subject to disciplinary consequences.

- **High School:** Use of cell phones, electronic devices and headphones/earbuds are prohibited during the school day, unless the student has earned enough points to use it during designated times and days.
  - Scholars who have earned enough points may use cell phones during lunch, on Thursdays. Cell phones and/or personal electronics/devices may not be used during an evacuation or fire drill unless directed by school staff.
  - The expectation is that cell phones and all other personal electronics/devices are turned off and put away unless at designated times. This includes, but is not limited to: cell phones, smart watches, headphones/earbuds, gaming devices, personal computers, tablets, etc.
  - VPCS is not liable for any damage or theft of personal electronic devices that are brought to the VPCS or college partner Campuses.
  - If a cell phone and/or personal device/electronic is seen by a staff member outside of designated times:

- o The scholar will be asked to store the device in the cell phone lockers found in all classrooms. Students may retrieve their device at the end of the class.
- o If a scholar refuses to turn in his/her cell phone and/or personal electronic device, it will be confiscated and the student will receive office hours.
- o Any scholar who has more than 3 cell phone/personal electronics violations per quarter will be required to turn in their cell phones and/or personal devices to the assistant principal upon entering the school building each day for up to 30 days.

### **Consequences of Breach of Policy**

Use of all Veritas Prep technology resources is a privilege. By using school provided devices, the user agrees to follow all Veritas Prep regulations, policies, and guidelines. Students and staff are encouraged to report misuse or breach of protocols to appropriate personnel, including building administrators or teachers. Abuse of these privileges may result in one or more of the following consequences:

- Suspension or cancellation of use or access privileges.
- Payments for damage or repairs.
- Discipline under appropriate school policy (ies).
- Liability under applicable civil or criminal laws.

### **Communication & Social Media**

Students are provided with school email accounts and online tools to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication and learning. When using online tools, members of the VPCS community will use appropriate behavior and means of communication.

Users need to be aware that data and other material/files maintained on the school's systems may be subject to review, disclosure, or discovery. Use of personal email accounts and communication tools to conduct school business is strongly discouraged and may open an individual's personal account to be subject to inquiries. VPCS will cooperate fully with local, state, and federal authorities in any investigation concerning or related to any illegal activities or activities not in compliance with school district policies or government regulations.

### **Guidelines for Online Communication**

- Students will use their school email account for communication with teachers or other students pertaining to academic subjects only.
- Students should only be communicating via school platforms and not with outside platforms that could be unsafe or lead to inappropriate content.
- Teachers will use school email addresses when communicating with students and parents/guardians online.
- When teachers communicate with a parent/guardian, they refrain from discussing any non-related students when possible.

### **Use of Copyrighted Materials**

Violations of copyright law that occur while using the VPCS network or other resources are prohibited and have the potential to create liability for the school as well as for the individual. Students must comply with regulations on copyright plagiarism that govern the use of material accessed through the

VPCS network. Users will refrain from using materials obtained online without requesting permission from the owner if the use of the material has the potential of being considered copyright infringement.

### **Appropriate & Prioritized Technology Use**

Technology is provided to students for academic purposes. VPCS reserves the right to prioritize academic use and limit certain network activities that are negatively impacting learning. Users are prohibited from using the VPCS network to access content that is inappropriate or illegal, including but not limited to content that is pornographic, obscene, illegal, or promotes violence.

### **Network Filtering & Monitoring**

As required in the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), VPCS is required to protect students from online threats, block access to inappropriate content, and monitor Internet use by minors on school networks. IT (Insource) is responsible for managing the school's Internet filter and will work with the VPCS staff to ensure the filter meets the academic needs while protecting minors from inappropriate content.

### **GoGuardian**

VPCS uses a program called GoGuardian to assist in the monitoring of student Chromebook use. This platform assists in filtering out inappropriate or non-academic web content. VPCS staff are alerted by GoGuardian when content on a student's Chromebook may be considered inappropriate. VPCS staff will monitor these alerts and contact parents/guardians as needed to inform them of student activity.

When in a class session, GoGuardian helps teachers monitor the work habits and work production of students logged into class. Teachers can actively monitor student screens, assist them with opening proper web pages, and close out of unnecessary web content that may be open.

### **Network Security**

Users are prohibited from altering or bypassing security measures on electronic devices, network equipment, and other software/online security measures without the written consent of VPCS.

### **Passwords**

Users are required to adhere to password requirements set forth by the IT (Insource) when logging into school computers, networks, and online systems. Users are not authorized to share their password and must use extra caution to avoid email scams that request passwords or other personal information.

### **Device Support**

VPCS provides basic installation, synchronization, and software support for VPCS-issued electronic devices. Password protection is required on all VPCS-issued electronic devices to prevent unauthorized use in the event of loss or theft. If students find they are in need of device support or must report an issue with their VPCS device, that student and/or parent/guardian must reach out to one of their advisory teachers who will contact the Operations team or tech support.

### **Loss/Theft**

Users must take reasonable measures to prevent a device from being lost or stolen. In the event an electronic device is lost or stolen, the user is required to immediately notify appropriate school staff and local authorities. VPCS will take all reasonable measures to recover the lost property and to ensure the security of any information contained on the device. If a device is not recovered the cost to replace the

device may be the responsibility of a parent/guardian if it is discovered that the loss/theft was preventable.

### **Damage/Destruction**

Users must take reasonable measures to prevent a device from getting damage beyond normal use.. In the event an electronic device is damaged, the user is required to immediately notify appropriate school staff. Extensive or continued destruction or damage to a device(s) could result in excessive costs that would be the responsibility of a parent/guardian.

## **INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY**

**Acceptable Use** – The Internet is a global network linking computers around the world. Internet use provides valuable opportunities for research, curriculum support, and career development. Veritas Preparatory Charter School offers Internet access to its students and staff. The primary purpose of providing access to the Internet is to support the educational mission of the Veritas Preparatory Charter School. Veritas Preparatory Charter School expects that students and staff will use this access in a manner consistent with this purpose.

While the Internet is a tremendous resource for electronic information, it has the potential for abuse. Veritas Preparatory Charter School makes no guarantees, implied or otherwise, regarding the factual reliability of data available over the Internet. Users of the Veritas Preparatory Charter School Internet service assume full responsibility for any costs, liabilities, or damages arising from the way they choose to use their access to the Internet. Veritas Preparatory Charter School has installed special filtering software in an effort to block access to material that is not appropriate for children.

**Unacceptable Use** – The following is a list of prohibited behaviors. The list is not exhaustive but illustrates unacceptable uses of the Veritas Preparatory Charter School’s Internet Service.

- Disclosing, using or disseminating personal identification information about self or others;
- Accessing, sending or forwarding materials or communications that are defamatory, pornographic, obscene, sexually explicit, threatening, harassing, or illegal;
- Using the Internet service for any illegal activities such as gaining unauthorized access to other systems, arranging for the sale or purchase of drugs or alcohol, participating in criminal or gang activity, threatening others, transferring obscene material, or attempting to do any of the above;
- Using the Internet service to receive or send information relating to dangerous instruments such as bombs or other explosive devices, automatic weapons or other firearms, or other;
- Vandalizing school computers by causing physical damage, reconfiguring the computer system, attempting to disrupt the computer system, or destroying data by spreading computer viruses or by any other means;
- Using the internet to bully another person is referred to as “cyber bullying” in this handbook and the school’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.
- Copying or downloading of copyrighted material without authorization from the copyright holder, unless the copies are used for teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research. Users shall not copy and forward or copy and upload any copyrighted material without prior approval of the Executive Director;
- Plagiarizing material obtained from the Internet. Any material obtained from the Internet and included in one's own work must be cited and credited by name or by electronic address or

path on the Internet. Information obtained through E-mail or news sources must also be credited as to sources;

- Using the Internet service for commercial purposes;
- Downloading or installing any commercial software, shareware, freeware or similar types of material onto network drives or disks without prior permission of the Executive Director; and
- Overriding the Internet filtering software.

**Safety Issues** – Use of the Internet has potential dangers. Users are encouraged to read two brochures regarding Internet safety that the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office has prepared. The brochures are entitled *The Internet, Your Child and You: What Every Parent Should Know* and *Internet Safety: Advice from Kids Who Have Faced Danger Online*. Copies of these brochures are available on the Internet at [www.ago.state.ma.us](http://www.ago.state.ma.us).

The following are basic safety rules pertaining to all types of Internet applications.

- Students should never reveal any identifying information such as last names, ages, addresses, phone numbers, families' names, families' employers or work addresses, or photographs.
- Students should use the "back" key whenever they encounter a site they believe is inappropriate or makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Students should immediately tell a school staff member if they receive a message that they believe is inappropriate or makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Students should never share passwords or use another person's password. Internet passwords are provided for each user's personal use only. If a student suspects that someone has discovered his or her password, the student should change it immediately and notify a school staff member.

**Privacy** – Users should not have an expectation of privacy or confidentiality in the content of electronic communications or other computer files sent and received on the school computer network or stored in the user's directory or on a disk drive. Veritas Preparatory Charter School reserves the right to examine all data stored on diskettes involved in the user's use of Veritas Preparatory Charter School's Internet service.

Internet messages are public communication and are not private. All communications including text and images may be disclosed to law enforcement or other third parties without prior consent of the sender or the receiver. Network administrators may review communications to maintain integrity system-wide and ensure that users are using the system responsibly.

**Violations** – Access to the Veritas Preparatory Charter School's Internet service is a privilege not a right. Veritas Preparatory Charter School reserves the right to deny, revoke or suspend specific user privileges and/or to take other disciplinary action, up to and including suspension, expulsion (students), or dismissal (staff) for violations of this policy. The school will advise appropriate law enforcement agencies of illegal activities conducted through Veritas Preparatory Charter School Internet service. The school also will cooperate fully with local, state, and/or federal officials in any investigation related to any illegal activities conducted through the service.

## **NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School does not discriminate in admission to, access to, treatment in, or employment in its services, programs and activities, on the basis of race, color or national origin, in

accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; on the basis of sex, in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; on the basis of disability, in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title B of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA); or on the basis of age, in accordance with the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1974 (ADEA). In addition, no person shall be discriminated against for admission to Veritas Preparatory Charter School on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement, as required by M.G.L.c.71, §89(m); 603 CMR 1.05(2). Finally, no person shall be discriminated against in obtaining the advantages, privileges or access to the courses of study offered by Veritas Preparatory Charter School on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation as required by M.G.L. c. 76, § 5.

## **PROHIBITION OF HARASSMENT POLICY**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School is committed to maintaining a school environment free of harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. Harassment by administrators, certified and support personnel, students, vendors and other individuals at school or at school-sponsored events is unlawful and is strictly prohibited. Veritas Preparatory Charter School requires all employees and students to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner with respect to their fellow employees, students and all members of the school community.

***Definition of Harassment*** – *In general, harassment includes communications such as jokes, comments, innuendoes, notes, display of pictures or symbols, gestures, or other conduct that offends or shows disrespect to others based upon race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.*

*By law, what constitutes harassment is determined from the perspective of a reasonable person with the characteristic on which the harassment is based. What one person may consider acceptable behavior may reasonably be viewed as harassment by another person. Therefore, individuals should consider how their words and actions might reasonably be viewed by other individuals. It is also important for individuals to make it clear to others when a particular behavior or communication is unwelcome, intimidating, hostile or offensive.*

## **PROHIBITION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY**

While all types of harassment are prohibited, sexual harassment requires particular attention. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. Acceptance of or submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment or education.
2. The individual's response to such conduct is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting an employee or as a basis for educational, disciplinary, or other decisions affecting a student.
3. Such conduct interferes with an individual's job duties, education or participation in extracurricular activities.
4. The conduct creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or school environment.

## **PROHIBITION OF BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING POLICY**

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71, Section 37H and 37O, bullying and cyberbullying are prohibited and may result in disciplinary action by the school administration. Please see Veritas Preparatory Charter School's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy in Appendix C.

## **PROHIBITION OF HAZING POLICY**

*Massachusetts Anti-Hazing Law: M.G.L. c. 269, Section 17. Hazing; organizing or participating; hazing defined.*

*Section 17. Whoever is a principal organizer or participant in the crime of hazing, as defined herein, shall be punished by a fine of not more than three thousand dollars or by imprisonment in a house of correction for not more than one year, or both such fine and imprisonment.*

*The term "hazing" shall mean any conduct or method of initiation into any student organization, whether on public or private property, which willfully or recklessly endangers the physical or mental health of any student or other person. Such conduct shall include whipping, beating, branding, forced calisthenics, exposure to the weather, forced consumption of any food, liquor, beverage, drug or other substance, or any other brutal treatment or forced physical activity which is likely to adversely affect the physical health or safety of any such student or other person, or which subjects such student or other person to extreme mental stress, including extended deprivation of sleep or rest or extended isolation.*

*Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section to the contrary, consent shall not be available as a defense to any prosecution under this action.*

*M.G.L. c. 269, Section 18. Failure to report hazing.*

*Section 18. Whoever knows that another person is the victim of hazing as defined in section seventeen and is at the scene of such crime shall, to the extent that such person can do so without danger or peril to himself or others, report such crime to an appropriate law enforcement official as soon as reasonably practicable. Whoever fails to report such crime shall be punished by a fine of not more than one thousand dollars.*

*M.G.L. c. 269, Section 19. Copy of secs. 17--19; issuance to students and student groups, teams and organizations; report.*

*Section 19. Each institution of secondary education and each public and private institution of postsecondary education shall issue to every student group, student team or student organization which is part of such institution or is recognized by the institution or permitted by the institution to use its name or facilities or is known by the institution to exist as an unaffiliated student group, student team or student organization, a copy of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen; provided, however, that an institution's compliance with this section's requirements that an institution issue copies of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen to unaffiliated student groups, teams or organizations shall not constitute evidence of the institution's recognition or endorsement of said unaffiliated student groups, teams or organizations.*

*Each such group, team or organization shall distribute a copy of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen to each of its members, plebes, pledges or applicants for membership. It shall be the duty*

*of each such group; team or organization, acting through its designated officer, to deliver annually, to the institution an attested acknowledgement stating that such group, team or organization has received a copy of this section and said sections seventeen and eighteen, that each of its members, plebes, pledges, or applicants has received a copy of sections seventeen and eighteen and that such group, team or organization understands and agrees to comply with the provisions of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen.*

*Each institution of secondary education and each public or private institution of postsecondary education shall, at least annually, before or at the start of enrollment, deliver to each person who enrolls as a full time student in such institution a copy of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen.*

*Each institution of secondary education and each public or private institution of postsecondary education shall file, at least annually, a report with the board of higher education and in the case of secondary institutions, the board of education, certifying that such institution has complied with its responsibility to inform student groups, teams or organizations and to notify each full time student enrolled by it of the provisions of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen and also certifying that said institution has adopted a disciplinary policy with regard to the organizers and participants of hazing, and that such policy has been set forth with appropriate emphasis in the student handbook or similar means of communicating the institution's policies to its students. The board of higher education and, in the case of secondary institutions, the board of education shall promulgate regulations governing the content and frequency of such reports, and shall forthwith report to the attorney general any such institution which fails to make such report. (Amended by 1987, 665.)*

## **CORPORAL PUNISHMENT POLICY**

In accordance with M.G.L. sect. 37G, corporal punishment of pupils is prohibited. Veritas Preparatory Charter School maintains a strict Code of Conduct (see Appendix A) and clear disciplinary procedures. These procedures do not allow for corporal punishment but rather include a clear set of consequences including deductions from behavior Promotion System, detentions, loss of privileges, suspensions, and expulsions.

## **STUDENT RESTRAINT POLICY**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School complies with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education restraint regulations, 603 CMR 46.00 et seq. ("Regulations"), to the extent required by law. According to their terms, the Regulations apply not only at school but also at school-sponsored events and activities, whether or not on school property. A brief overview of the Regulations is provided below.

**Methods and Conditions for Implementation** – School staff may use physical restraint, defined as the use of bodily force to limit a student's freedom of movement and does not include touching or holding a student without the use of force for the purpose of directing the student, as an emergency procedure of last resort only when a student is not responsive to verbal directives or other lawful and less intrusive behavior interventions, or such interventions are deemed to be inappropriate under the circumstances, and the student's behavior poses a threat of assault or imminent, serious harm to self and/or others.

Physical restraint will not be used when a student cannot be safely restrained because it is medically contraindicated for reasons including, but not limited to, asthma, seizures, a cardiac condition, obesity, bronchitis, communication-related disabilities, or risk of vomiting, as a response to property destruction, disruption of school order, a student's refusal to comply with a public education program rule or staff directive, or verbal threats when those actions do not constitute a threat of assault, or imminent, serious, physical harm, or as a standard response for any individual student. No written individual behavior plan or individualized education program (IEP) may include use of physical restraint as a standard response to any behavior. Physical restraint is an emergency procedure of last resort. A teacher, employee or agent of Veritas Preparatory Charter School may use reasonable force to protect students, other persons, or themselves from assault or imminent serious harm.

**Veritas Prep Reporting Requirements** – A Veritas Preparatory Charter School staff member who administers restraint shall inform the Principal of the restraint as soon as possible and by written report no later than the next school working day. The written report shall be provided to the Principal for review of the use of the restraint. If the Principal has administered the restraint, the Principal shall prepare the report and submit it to the Executive Director. The Principal or designee shall maintain an on-going record of all reported instances of physical restraint, which shall be made available for review by a parent/guardian or the DESE upon request.

The Principal or shall make reasonable efforts to verbally inform a student's parent(s)/guardian(s) of any physical restraint employed within 24 hours of the event, and shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) by written report sent either within three school working days of the restraint to an email address provided by the parent(s)/guardian(s) for communications about the student with Veritas Preparatory Charter School, or by regular mail postmarked no later than three school working days of the restraint. If Veritas Preparatory Charter School customarily provides said parent(s)/guardian(s) with report cards and school-related information in a language other than English, the report shall be provided in that language. The Principal shall provide the student and the parent/guardian an opportunity to comment orally and in writing on the use of the restraint and on information in the written report.

When a physical restraint has resulted in an injury to a Veritas Preparatory Charter School student or staff member, the Veritas Preparatory Charter School shall send a copy of the written report required by 603 CMR 46.06(4) to the DESE postmarked no later than three school working days of the administration of the restraint. Veritas Preparatory Charter School will also send the Department a copy of the record of physical restraints maintained by the Principal pursuant to 603 CMR 46.06(2) for the 30-day period prior to the date of the reported restraint.

## **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE FOR HARASSMENT AND/OR DISCRIMINATION**

**Where to File a Grievance** – Any student or employee who believes that Veritas Preparatory Charter School has discriminated against or harassed her/him because of her/his race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, disability, or age in admission to, access to, treatment in, or employment in its services, programs, and activities may file a complaint with the Executive Director or the **Civil Rights Coordinator** who is identified as the Grievance Administrator.

**Complaints of Harassment by Peers** – In the event the complaint consists of a student's allegation that another student is harassing him/her based upon race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, disability, or age in admission to, access to, treatment in, or employment in its services, programs, and activities, the student may, in the alternative, file the complaint with the Director of Culture. The Director of Culture will collaborate with the Grievance Administrator to resolve the grievance or issue.

**Complaints of Discrimination Based on Disability** – A person who alleges discrimination on the basis of disability relative to the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of a person, who because of a handicap needs or is believed to need special instruction or related services, pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Chapter 766, and/or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, must use the procedure outlined in the Massachusetts Department of Education's *Parents' Notice of Procedural Safeguards Brochure* rather than this Grievance Procedure. A copy of the brochure is available in the main office.

A person with a complaint involving discrimination on the basis of a disability other than that described above may either use this Grievance Procedure or file the complaint with the U.S. Department of Education at the address provided at the end of this Grievance Procedure.

**Contents of Complaints and Timelines for Filing** – Complaints of alleged discrimination or harassment should be filed under this Grievance Procedure. The complaint must be in writing. The Grievance Administrator or any person of the grievant's choosing, may assist the grievant with filing the complaint. The written complaint must include the following information:

1. The name and school (or address and telephone number if not a student or employee) of the grievant.
2. The name (and address and telephone number if not a student or employee) of the grievant's representative, if any.
3. The name of the person(s) alleged to have caused the discrimination or harassment (respondent).
4. A description, in as much detail as possible, of the alleged discrimination or harassment.
5. The date(s) of the alleged discrimination or harassment.
6. The name of all persons who have knowledge about the alleged discrimination or harassment (witnesses), as can be reasonably determined.
7. A description, in as much detail as possible, of how the grievant wants the complaint to be resolved.

**Investigation and Resolution of the Complaint** – Respondents will be informed of the charges as soon as the Grievance Administrator deems appropriate based upon the nature of the allegations, the investigation required, and the action contemplated.

The Grievance Administrator will interview witnesses whom he/she deems necessary and appropriate to determine the facts relevant to the complaint and will gather other relevant information. Such interviews and gathering of information will be completed within fifteen (15) school days of receiving the complaint.

Within twenty (20) school days of receiving the complaint, the Grievance Administrator will meet with the grievant and/or her/his representative to review the information gathered and, if applicable, to propose a resolution designed to stop the discrimination or harassment and to correct its effect. Within ten (10) school days of the meeting with the grievant and/or representative, the Grievance Administrator will provide written disposition of the complaint to the grievant and/or representative and to the respondent(s).

Notwithstanding the above, it is understood that in the event a resolution contemplated by the Veritas Preparatory Charter School involves disciplinary action against an employee or a student, the complainant will not be informed of such disciplinary action, unless it directly involves the complainant

(i.e., a directive to "stay away" from the complainant, as might occur as a result of a complaint of harassment).

Any disciplinary action imposed upon an employee or student is subject to applicable procedural requirements.

All the time lines specified above will be implemented as specified, unless the nature of the investigation or exigent circumstances prevent such implementation, in which case, the matter will be completed as quickly as practicable. If the time lines specified above are not met, the reason(s) for not meeting them must be clearly documented.

Confidentiality of grievant/respondents and witnesses will be maintained, to the extent consistent with Veritas Preparatory Charter School's obligations relating to investigation of complaints and the due process rights of individuals affected.

Retaliation against someone because he/she has filed a complaint under this Grievance Procedure is strictly prohibited. Acts of retaliation may result in disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or expulsion/discharge.

**Appeals** – If the grievant is not satisfied with a disposition by a Grievance Administrator, the grievant may appeal the disposition to the Board of Trustees by writing to: the chair of the Board of Trustees, Veritas Preparatory Charter School, 370 Pine Street, Springfield, MA 01105.

The Board of Trustees will issue a written response on the appeal to the grievant within thirty (30) school days of receiving the appeal.

Generally, a grievant may file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, JW McCormack POCH, Boston, Massachusetts 02109-4557, telephone (617) 223-9662, TTY (617) 223-9695 as follows:

1. Within 180 calendar days of alleged discrimination or harassment, or
2. Within 60 calendar days of receiving notice of Veritas Preparatory Charter School's final disposition on a complaint filed through Veritas Preparatory Charter School, or
3. Within 60 calendar days of receiving a final decision by the Massachusetts Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education Appeals, or
4. Instead of filing a complaint with Veritas Preparatory Charter School.

## **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE FOR BULLYING**

Students who are victims of bullying, who witness bullying activity, or who are retaliated against for reporting bullying, should report the incident to the Director of Culture. Students may also report to a teacher or counselor, or other trusted adult in the building, who will in turn report the incident to the Director of Culture. The Director of Culture will collaborate with the Director of Student Services, the Grievance Administrator, or any other appropriate personnel to conduct an investigation regarding the allegations. Parent/guardian of the alleged target and alleged perpetrator will be contacted when the allegations are made, and after the investigation is complete and a determination is made in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, Section 37O. The same process for appeals described above applies to the grievance procedure for bullying. Students and Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may consult the Bullying Prevention and

Intervention Plan (see Appendix C) for a detailed description of the school's procedures regarding bullying.

In the event that the Director of Culture is the individual accused of misconduct, the report should be made to the Principal or Executive Director as appropriate under the Bullying and Intervention Plan detailed in Appendix C.

A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action.

Please note that in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, Section 37O, law enforcement may be contacted by the school in some bullying cases.

### **SCHOOL VISITOR POLICY**

Families are welcome to visit the school anytime except during state testing. All visitors, including parents/guardians, must sign in at the main office and receive a visitor's badge before proceeding through the building. Visitors must adhere to Veritas Prep's school culture of respect, professionalism, and minimize disruptions to the flow of the school day. This means following our expectation of silent hallways, respectfully addressing any concerns or needs with the appropriate adults, refraining from using profanity or discriminatory language in conversation. Visitors who violate this policy will be immediately asked to leave the school and will no longer be allowed to visit.

**Visiting Classrooms** – Visitors are expected to observe instruction quietly from the back of the room in order to avoid disruptions. We teach our students not to engage with visitors during instructional times in order to minimize disruptions.

**Tours** – Tours can be scheduled with our Director of Operations or Family engagement manager who can be reached by phone at 413-539-0055 (*Middle school*) or 413-264-2646 (*High school*).

In 2022-2023, visitors may be limited to rooms being at capacity and complying with safety regulations based on the current status and guidelines for the COVID crisis.

### **VOLUNTEER POLICY**

We will occasionally encourage family members to volunteer at school or on school sponsored trips. All school volunteers must first pass a CORI check prior to working with students other than their own child. We will ask all family members interested in volunteering to submit a copy of their license or state issued identification and give signatory permission to the school's authorized representative to perform a criminal background check. Information from this check will remain confidential. Families can contact our Family and Engagement Manager to coordinate volunteer opportunities.

### **COMPLAINT PROCEDURE**

This complaint procedure is established by Veritas Preparatory Charter School for the purpose of complying with M.G.L. c. 71, sec. 89 (II). This statute requires charter schools to establish a process for

any individual to file a complaint with the school's Board of Trustees in the event that the individual believes the school has violated any of the provisions of charter school law and/or regulations. This complaint procedure must be disseminated to all school community members and must be made available upon request. Both the school and the Board work in conjunction with one another to hear and resolve any complaints. If a problem arises, both the school and the Board encourage the complainant to address the problem directly with the staff member(s). If the complainant is dissatisfied with the proposed resolution by the appropriate faculty or staff member, a meeting should be scheduled with the Executive Director. If this does not resolve the issue, then the Board encourages the complainant to contact the Board Chair who will arrange to have the complaint heard at the next possible meeting of the Board of Trustees.

If this meeting does not resolve the relevant complaint, the complainant should follow the guidelines set by M.G.L. c. 71, 89(II) and 603 CMR 1.10. If an individual believes that the school has violated any provision of the charter school law and regulations, he or she may file a formal complaint directly with the Board of Trustees. After receiving the complaint, the Board must send a written response to the individual within 30 days. The Board of Trustees shall, pursuant to a complaint received under 603 CMR 1.10, or on its own initiative, conduct reviews to ensure compliance with M.G.L. c. 71, 89 and 603 CMR 1.00. The charter school and the specific individuals involved shall cooperate to the fullest extent with such review. If the Board does not address the complaint to the individual's satisfaction, the individual may submit the complaint to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, who shall investigate the complaint and make a written response, 603 CMR 1.10(4). In the event the charter school is found in non-compliance with M.G.L. c. 71, s 89, or 603 CMR 1.00, as a result of a complaint or upon investigation, the Commissioner or the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education may take such action as it deems appropriate, including but not limited to suspension or revocation of the charter under 603 CMR 1.13, or referral of the matter to the District Attorney, the Office of the Attorney General, or any other agency for appropriate legal action. If an individual believes that the school has violated any federal or state law or regulation regarding special education may file a complaint directly with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

## VI. Appendices

### APPENDIX A: CODE OF CONDUCT

#### A. Code of Conduct Purpose

Veritas Preparatory Charter School has created a Code of Conduct in order to:

- Maintain a respectful space for learning,
- Allow students to focus on their learning,
- Set forth the implications and potential consequences of student misconduct, and
- Prepare students to become engaged citizens who follow rules set by our communities.

The Code of Conduct describes behaviors that Veritas Preparatory Charter School considers inappropriate or unacceptable (which we will call “Disciplinary Offenses”) and the consequences of those behaviors.

#### B. Code of Conduct Philosophy

Students who do not meet the school community’s clearly defined standards for reasonable and acceptable behavior will not be permitted to disrupt the education of others. Without a firm and consistent discipline policy, none of what we envision for the school can happen. This is the basis of our student Code of Conduct.

Respect is core to our school culture. Students are expected to always respond respectfully to the authority and direction of school staff. Behaviors that are considered disrespectful include but are not limited to: rolling of the eyes, making inappropriate remarks or sounds in response to a request, or questioning a staff person’s action or authority in a disrespectful manner. Such disrespect will not be tolerated.

At Veritas Preparatory Charter School, we seek to help students become mature young adults. To that end, while we will not tolerate disrespect, we do allow for students to express disagreement in a respectful manner. The school has developed routines and procedures that enable students to easily express such disagreement with respect for all involved. Failure to disagree respectfully will result in further consequences.

Enforcement of Veritas Preparatory Charter School’s Code of Conduct is based upon a framework of progressive discipline. Specifically, minor infractions result in less severe consequences while larger infractions result in more severe consequences. Furthermore, first-time infractions result in less severe consequences while repeated infractions result in more severe consequences. Our consequences are designed to correct behavior and are aligned with our weekly behavior Promotion System. For example, for minor misbehaviors we use a deduction, which is designed to quickly and consistently change a student’s behavior. We also have several other consequences that escalate in severity to encourage a student to change his or her behavior and make better choices.

### **C. Code of Conduct Behavior Management System**

The behavior management system at Veritas Preparatory Charter School consists of a combination of rewards, incentives, and logical consequences. The system is designed to allow students opportunities to be recognized for positive behavior while also holding them accountable when they struggle. The behavior management system is explicitly taught to students and staff at the start of each school year. The objective is to increase the amount of time students spend learning in the classroom and minimize the amount of time spent out of the classroom.

#### **Promotion System**

Teachers use the Promotion System to provide frequent visual feedback on behavior. There is a five-level ladder on the board and a magnet for each scholar. Names are moved up and down the ladder based on positive or negative choices made by scholars throughout the day. The higher up they move; the more points they accumulate. Teachers record points and reset magnets twice per day, at the midday and end of day. A student can earn a maximum of 6 points per day, 3 points on Friday, totaling 27 points per week. Scholar names are reset on the behavior ladder and start fresh every day.

If students have enough points at the end of each week, they will be able to participate in *Rock Star Friday*. This will include a variety of incentives such as a special breakfast, dress-up days, jean days, and more. If students earn enough points during the month, they are invited to participate in the monthly incentive, which include larger activities. Parents/guardians will be notified if their scholar has qualified to participate through a permission slip or flyer that will go home each month.

### **D. Code of Conduct Disciplinary Offenses**

A school-related Disciplinary Offense refers to a violation of this code occurring:

- While the student is on school grounds or school-related transportation,
- During school-sponsored activities and trips, and
- During all other school-related events.
- Off of school grounds resulting in substantial disruption to the school environment

We have levels of consequences outlined below, but Veritas Preparatory Charter School staff has sole discretion to determine the consequence of each disciplinary offense.

#### **Community Violations**

Some behaviors at Veritas directly impact the learning of our community. These behaviors will receive a *community violation*, in which scholars will serve a same day reflection during lunch or afterschool.

Scholars earn community violations by:

1. Talking in our silent hallways
2. Being disrespectful to staff or other students
3. Being continually disruptive to the learning environment.

#### **Silent Hallways**

Silent hallways help maximize learning time and minimize disruption. It makes the hallway a less desirable place to be, therefore lessening the number of times students are out of class. Also, silent hallways promote focused classrooms!

## Reflection

At Veritas, we value same day reflection. We know that middle schoolers learn best from their mistakes when they can reflect shortly after the community violation takes place. The more time between a reflection and the community violation, the less likely scholars are to recall the specifics of the incident and understand the potential effects their actions had on others. This tends to lead to repeated misbehavior.

To keep the consequence close to the infraction, reflection is held twice per day, during lunch and after school. A student may be asked to serve reflection if they ended the morning or afternoon or the lowest level of the behavior chart, or if they earned a community violation.

Lunch Reflection- Lunch reflection is for morning infractions. Lunch will be provided to the student in the reflection room. Students who are unable to behave appropriately may earn an after school reflection.

After School Reflection- After school reflection is for afternoon infractions. After school reflection is from 3:30-4:00pm and from 1:00-1:30 on Friday. Students who are unable to behave appropriately, or skip after school reflection will earn a half day of out of class reflection the following day.

If a student is required to serve an after school reflection but has a previously scheduled extracurricular activity on the same day, he/she will be required to serve the detention and forfeit the opportunity to attend the activity.

Families will receive an **automated phone call by 2:30pm** if their scholar has earned an after-school reflection. It is the parent's/guardian's responsibility to call the school back if the scholar is unable to serve that day. Other than for family/medical emergencies or health-related appointments, students may not be excused from detention. In this case, all students will be required to make-up a missed reflection the following school day.

## Referral

Referrals to the Director of Culture are a last resort for teachers to use as a behavior intervention because they remove the scholar from the learning environment. Teachers are trained to prevent negative student behaviors within the classroom by using a variety of strategies prior to referring them out of class.

A student will be referred out of class if they are sent to the in-class reflection desk twice in a half-day period. This will allow the student time to reset and reflect, making them more prepared to learn. Additionally, any behaviors that significantly endanger the physical or psychological safety of a member of the Veritas Preparatory Charter School community or cause significant disruption to the learning environment will result in a student being referred to the Director of Culture immediately.

When referred, the student will be given a pass and expected to report directly to the reflection room. In the reflection room, they will have the opportunity to process with staff and the sending teacher before returning to class. Students will likely not be given work to complete during a reflection as the reflection room staff is expected to get students back to class as soon as possible.

## In-School Suspension

A student can earn an In-School suspension for a variety of reasons. First, if a student earns a referral and is sent to the reflection room and their behavior becomes a continued disruption to others, students may earn a strike. If a student earns three strikes, they are moved to the other side of the reflection room and placed in half-day or full-day in-school suspension. If a behavior in the classroom is egregious, the Director of Culture can determine a scholar be placed in In-school suspension for a half or full day.

During the duration of the in-school suspension, the student will be given all class materials and basic instruction to help them complete work. If deemed necessary, a student may be given an assignment or project to complete related to their offense such as writing an essay or cleaning up graffiti in the bathroom. Students who are in In-school suspension will earn credit for all work they complete in their time out of class.

In -School Suspension Procedures – When a student is removed from their classroom or is otherwise placed into a full or half day of In-School Suspension, the following procedures will be followed:

- The Director of Culture shall inform the student of the disciplinary offense charged and the basis for the charge, and provide the student an opportunity to dispute the charges and explain the circumstances surrounding the alleged incident. If the Director of Culture determines that the student committed the disciplinary offense, the Director of Culture shall inform the student of the length of the student's In-School Suspension, which shall not exceed ten days, cumulatively or consecutively, in a school year.
- On the same day as the In-School Suspension decision, the Director of Culture shall make reasonable efforts to notify the parent/guardian orally as soon as possible of the disciplinary offense, the reasons for concluding that the student committed the infraction, and the length of the In-School Suspension. If the Director of Culture is unable to reach the parent/guardian after making and documenting at least two attempts to do so, such attempts shall constitute reasonable efforts for purposes of orally informing the parent/guardian of the In-School Suspension.
- The Director of Culture shall send written notice to the parent/guardian about any full day In-School suspension, including the reason, length, and invite the parent/guardian to a meeting. The Director of Culture provides notice on the day of the suspension by hand-delivery, certified mail, first-class mail, email to an address provided by the parent/guardian for school communications, or other method of delivery agreed to by the Director of Culture and the parent/guardian.

If the suspension results in less than 10 cumulative days, then the decision is not eligible for appeal to the Principal. If the In-School Suspension results in more than 10 cumulative days, an appeal may be filed with the Principal following the directions in the “*Appeals*” section.

### **Out-of-School Suspension**

Students who earn Out-of-School suspension will be prohibited from attending school for a specific number of days as determined by a school administrator. Offenses that may warrant an Out-of-School Suspension include, but are not limited to:

- Serious or continued disrespect of a fellow student including, but not limited to, hazing, bullying and harassment
- Serious disrespect of faculty, staff or other members of the school community
- Assaulting another student
- Using or possessing tobacco products
- Making verbal or physical threats, empty or otherwise, that threaten the safety of another individual within the school community.
- Misbehavior or disruption while assigned to In-School Suspension
- Setting off false alarms (i.e.; fire, elevator)
- Gambling
- Cheating
- Leaving school grounds without permission
- Being charged with a felony (which could also warrant expulsion, see M.G.L. c. 71, §37H1/2 in *Appendix A-1*)
- Repeated offenses for which the student has already earned consequences

Suspensions may be short term or long term. Short term suspension means the removal of a student from the school premises and regular classroom activities for ten (10) cumulative school days or less. Long term suspension means the removal of a student from the school premises and regular classroom activities for more than ten (10) consecutive school days, or for more than ten (10) school days cumulatively for multiple disciplinary offenses in any school year.

The Principal may, in his/her discretion, allow a student to serve a long-term suspension in school.

Out-of-School Suspension Procedures for Handbook Offenses  
 (For discipline related to violations of M.G.L. c. 71, sec. 37H and 37H1/2 see “Expulsion Procedure” below)

When a student has engaged in behavior warranting an Out-of-School Suspension, the family of the student will be notified via phone of the conduct and the pending suspension. The family of the student will be offered the opportunity for an informal hearing before the Principal or the Principal’s designee. Additionally, a written notification will be sent by mail to the family. Except as otherwise provided herein, the suspension will commence subsequent to the opportunity to meet with the Principal or Director of Culture.

The written letter for a short term out-of-school suspension will include:

- A description of the offense
- The basis for the charge
- The potential disciplinary consequences including the potential length of suspension
- Notice of the opportunity for a hearing regarding the discipline, including the opportunity to dispute the charges, present the student’s explanation, and for the parent/guardian to attend
- The date, time and location of any opportunity to be heard
- A brief summary of any rights to an interpreter service if needed to participate

For a long-term Out-of-School Suspension, the notice shall include the components of the notice for short-term suspension and notice of the following rights:

- The opportunity to review the records or documents the principal may use in making the disciplinary decisions

- The right to be represented by counsel of his/her own choice at the family's own expense;
- The right to call upon witnesses and to present an explanation in defense of the student
- The right to cross-examine witnesses presented by the school
- The right to have the hearing audio recorded and to receive a copy of the recording.

In the case of danger or a risk of substantial disruption, the student will be removed from class pursuant to the emergency removal provision below and provided notice and the opportunity to present his/her version of the relevant facts in accordance with the due process protections enumerated in Appendix A-1: Student and Parental Rights.

In the informal hearing, the Director of Culture will summarize and discuss the events leading to the discipline, the basis for the charge, and any other pertinent information. The student and family shall have the opportunity to share information, present information and present mitigating circumstances. After the conclusion of the informal hearing, the Principal or designee will make a determination of the consequence to be imposed. The determination will be communicated verbally to the student and family and in a written letter sent through the mail or email and shall include reasons for his/her determination, the duration of the suspension and notice of the opportunity to make up assignments.

In a long-term suspension hearing, the Principal shall also provide written notice of the determination that includes the following:

- The disciplinary offense, the date of the hearing, and the individuals who participated
- The key facts and conclusions
- Length and effective date of suspension and date of return to school
- Notice of the opportunity to receive educational services and make academic progress while on suspension
- Notice of appeal rights, including the process for appealing and notice that the suspension will remain in place pending the outcome of the appeal.

A student or family will have the right to appeal the decision if the suspension exceeds 10 days cumulatively for the academic year or if an appeal to the Executive Director is available pursuant to the Appeals provision below and/or processes enumerated in Appendix A-1: Student and Parental Rights. For instructions on filing an appeal, please see the "Appeals" section.

Students are responsible for completing academic work missed during the suspension. If possible, the student will complete this work while at home. If not, the work will need to be completed once the scholar returns to school by deadlines in accordance with the school make-up policy. If a student does not complete this work, the student may face standard academic consequences (e.g., Homework Center, no academic credit).

**Alternative Education Environments for Suspended students (>10 Days)** – Any student who has been removed from class for more than ten (10) consecutive days in a school year is entitled to alternative education services provided by the school. A student who receives Special Education services under the IDEA who has been removed from class for more than ten 10 cumulative days in a school year is also entitled to alternative education services provided by the school. These services may include:

- Outside of school tutoring
- Distance learning via technology

- Saturday school/After School Tutoring

Additional information related to the continuation of education services is provided in Appendix A-1: Student and Parental Rights.

### **Expulsion**

Expulsion is defined as the exclusion from Veritas Preparatory Charter School on a permanent basis at the discretion of the Principal with the potential for appeal to the Executive Director. MA law (M.G.L. c. 71, §37H, §37H1/2 and §37H3/4) provides for the expulsion of students by the Principal for the following Disciplinary Offenses:

- Possessing a dangerous weapon including but not limited to a knife or a gun
- Possessing a controlled substance as defined in M.G.L. c. 94C including but not limited to illegal drugs (e.g. marijuana) and prescription medication that is not prescribed to the student.
- Assaulting educational personnel (i.e. threatening assault, hitting, kicking, punching, slapping, pushing)
- Being convicted of a felony or being found guilty of committing a felony either by admission or by adjudication, where the student's continued presence would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of the school.

In addition to any of these infractions, any breaches of Federal law, Massachusetts state law, or local laws of Springfield, may be handled in cooperation with the law enforcement officials and may constitute grounds for disciplinary action.

Expulsion Procedures – When a student has engaged in an expellable behavior, the student's family will receive a phone call as well as written notice of a disciplinary hearing. The written notice will include:

- A description of the offense
- The basis for the charge
- The potential consequence including the effective date and duration of any suspension
- An explanation of the opportunity for a hearing regarding the suspension
- The date, time and location of the hearing
- A brief summary rights to an interpreter and/or representation
- Notice of the opportunity to present relevant facts
- A statement regarding whether or not the Principal will schedule a formal hearing to consider further discipline, up to and including expulsion from school in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, §37H

The procedures will be applicable when expulsion is attributable to conduct governed by M.G.L. c.71, §37H and 37H½:

When the exclusion of a student from school is based on possession of a dangerous weapon, possession of a controlled substance, or assault, an administrator may place a student on short-term suspension (ten days or less) based upon an informal hearing, to be followed by a formal hearing

before the Principal within that period of suspension to determine whether to take additional disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion from school.

1. The informal hearing will be in the form of a conference between the student and the Principal. At this conference, the student (1) shall be informed of the reason for the conference, (2) shall be given the opportunity to present evidence and/or mitigating factors, and (3) the Principal shall give a decision on the suspension. If the Principal deems delay of the hearing necessary to avoid danger or substantial disruption, this process may occur immediately after, rather than before, the suspension.

2. Prior to putting a suspension into effect, the Principal or designee shall make a reasonable effort to telephone and inform the student's parent/guardian of the impending suspension; this shall include attempts to contact the parents/guardians at home and at work. Parents/guardians may contact the school for additional information regarding the suspension.

When considering a suspension/expulsion of a student charged with/convicted of felony, the Principal will use the standards and procedures set forth in M.G.L. c.71, §37H1/2. In addition, prior to initiating such procedures, the Principal may meet informally with the student and/or his parents/guardians to review the charge and the applicable standards if the Principal deems appropriate.

## **Appeals**

### **Suspension/Expulsion Appeal Process**

Except for long term suspensions imposed pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71, sec. 37H, any student who has been in-school or out-of-school suspended for more than 10 cumulative days, or expelled from Veritas Preparatory Charter School pursuant to these provisions, shall have the right to appeal to the Executive Director. The student shall have five (5) days from the effective date of the suspension or expulsion in which to notify the Executive Director of his/her appeal, except for expulsions pursuant to 37H, which allows for an appeal within 10 days of the effective date of expulsion. The student has the right to counsel at a hearing before the Executive Director. The subject matter of the appeal shall not be limited solely to a factual determination of whether the student has violated any provisions of this section.

Whenever an appeal hearing is recommended, the above procedural safeguards will be in effect:

- The student shall receive written notice of the following:
  - Charges and a statement of the evidence;
  - Date, time and place of a hearing;
  - Notice of the right at the hearing to:
    - Be represented by parents, guardian or other representative (at the student's / family's expense)
    - Present evidence
    - Confront and cross-examine witnesses
- The school will make an audio recording of the hearing and a copy of such will be made available to the student upon request.
- Notices and proceedings will be translated into the student's/parent's/guardian's primary language if necessary for their understanding of the proceedings.

- A student and/or parent/guardian, upon request, will have the right to review the student's records in accordance with the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations or other applicable laws.
- All decisions by the Executive Director regarding expulsion of a student will be issued to the student in writing and not appealable to the Board of Trustees.

#### **F. Discipline of Students with Special Needs**

Federal and state law provide certain procedural rights and protections relating to discipline of students who have been identified under such laws as having special needs based upon a disability. A copy of these rights is located in the Appendix B.

#### **G. Student Searches**

In order to maintain the security of all its students, Veritas Preparatory Charter School staff reserves the right to conduct searches of its students and their property when there is reasonable suspicion that the student has violated the law or a school rule. If searches are conducted, the school will attempt to ensure that the privacy of the students is respected to the extent practicable, and that students and their families are informed of the circumstances surrounding the results of the search. School lockers, cubbies and desks, which are assigned to students for their use, remain the property of Veritas Preparatory Charter School, and students therefore, have no expectation of privacy in these areas.

#### **H. Bus Behavior**

The Veritas Preparatory Charter School Code of Conduct applies on school bus transportation. Students who take the school bus are expected to act responsibly and respectfully at all times. All school rules apply on the bus. Certain additional rules will apply to the bus. Students may be given assigned seats. A school administrator will meet the bus every day. No child will exit the bus before a school administrator checks with the driver as to behavior. Failing to be in the assigned seat, putting hands out of the bus, throwing things, using bad language, not obeying the bus driver, are all offenses, as well as those listed in part (C) of this Code of Conduct. More serious behavior (i.e. fighting) will be investigated and assigned consequences just as if it happened on school grounds.

One offense = loss of bus privileges for a week.

Two offenses = loss of bus privileges for a month.

Three offenses = loss of bus privileges for the year.

Disciplinary offenses, if serious enough, can warrant immediate loss of bus privileges for the year. Other consequences (e.g., demotions, detentions, suspensions, expulsions) apply as well.

**Families are strongly encouraged to reinforce the importance of proper bus behavior and the potential consequences for bad behavior.**

Students with an IEP or 504 accommodation plan will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

#### **I. School Trips/End-of-Year Events**

The school's curriculum may sometimes require outside learning experiences or special school events. During these activities, it is important for all students to be responsible for their behavior since the site of the activity or event is a temporary extension of the school grounds.

A permission slip that allows students to attend all school-sponsored field trips and events will be in the enrollment packet or sent home at the beginning of the year for returning students and should be signed by a parent/guardian. The school will notify all parents/guardians before each school-sponsored trip.

A student may be considered ineligible for a trip for reasons including but not limited to: low D.R.I.V.E. average, not returning the school-sponsored trip permission form, involvement in a disciplinary incident, poor school attendance, misbehavior or severe lack of academic effort prior to the trip, etc. Students who are ineligible for attending a trip will be still required to attend school that day.

If families or other volunteers assist with such trips or events, students must afford these chaperones the same respect they would provide to teachers and other school staff. Appropriate behavior must be maintained when attending school-sponsored events, and riding on school-provided transportation. Past inappropriate behavior, or excessive demotions and/or consequences, may result in loss of privileges in attending or participating in class trips and events, end-of-year or otherwise.

- In 2020-2021, all field trips and class trips are currently suspended due to travel restrictions put in place for the COVID crisis.

#### **J. Cheating, Plagiarism, and Copying Other's Work**

Cheating on homework or exams, using resources inappropriately, and copying other people's work – students' or otherwise – is not only unfair but in the case of plagiarism, illegal. If students are unsure about an assignment or unsure about a test question or testing procedure, they should go to their teacher and ask for direction. Specific guidelines regarding cheating and plagiarism will be reviewed with students during Student Orientation and continued throughout the year. The school will determine appropriate consequences but cheating, plagiarism, and copying others' work may result in a Referral, Suspension, loss of academic credit, and/or other consequences.

## **APPENDIX B: STUDENT AND PARENTAL RIGHTS**

### **PROVISIONS GOVERNING DUE PROCESS FOR DISCIPLINARY REMOVALS and SERVICES DURING REMOVALS**

The Principal or his/her designee may remove a Veritas Preparatory Charter School student from privileges, such as extracurricular activities and attendance at school-sponsored events, based on the student's misconduct. A removal from privileges and/or extracurricular activities is not subject to the procedures set forth herein.

Student disciplinary offenses resulting in removal from the classroom (i.e., suspensions and expulsions) are subject to due process procedures, including notices, hearings, appeals, and educational services during removals. The following sections provide you with information about these rights.

Please note that students have the right to be represented by counsel or a lay person of the student's choice, at the student's/parent's/guardian's expense, at any and all hearings concerning a long-term suspension or expulsion. If you wish to bring an attorney to any hearing or meeting at the school, please inform Veritas Preparatory Charter School immediately. If you fail to inform the school prior to bringing an attorney to a hearing, and Veritas Preparatory Charter School's attorney is not present, then Veritas Preparatory Charter School will exercise its right to cancel and reschedule the meeting to ensure that its attorney can attend. This rescheduling may delay the hearing or meeting, and if so, your child's disciplinary removal will be extended until a decision is rendered following the rescheduled hearing or meeting. Veritas Preparatory Charter School hereby notifies you that it may have its legal counsel present at any hearings and meetings involving student discipline.

#### **A. NOTICE OF STUDENT AND PARENTAL RIGHTS UNDER G.L. c. 71 §37H**

This Notice of Student and Parental Rights applies to student misconduct that involves weapons, drugs, assault on school staff.

Specifically, any student who is found on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, in possession of a dangerous weapon, including, but not limited to, a gun or a knife, may be subject to expulsion from the school by the Principal. Any student who is found on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, in possession of a controlled substance, including, but not limited to, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, may be subject to expulsion from the school by the Principal. Any student who assaults a Principal, Dean, Director, teacher, teacher's aide or other educational staff on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, may be subject to expulsion from the school or school district by the Principal.

Any student who is charged with any of the misconduct detailed above has an opportunity for a hearing before the Principal. At the hearing, the student may have representation at his or her own (or family's) expense, along with the opportunity to present evidence and confront witnesses at said hearing before the Principal. After said hearing, the Principal may, in his or her discretion, decide to suspend rather than expel a student who has been determined by the Principal to have committed the misconduct detailed above.

Any student who has been expelled from Veritas Preparatory Charter School pursuant to GL c. 71 §37H shall have the right to appeal to the Executive Director. The expelled student shall have five (5) days from

the date of the expulsion in which to notify the Executive Director of his or her appeal. The student has the right to counsel, at his or her own (or family's) expense, at a hearing before the Executive Director. The subject matter of the appeal shall not be limited solely to a factual determination of whether the student committed the alleged infraction.

Students who are suspended or expelled under §37H are entitled to receive educational services during the period of suspension or expulsion under Veritas Prep Charter School's Education Service Plan, which is described below in Section D. If the student withdraws from Veritas Preparatory Charter and/or moves to another school district during the period of suspension or expulsion, the new school/district/district of residence shall either admit the student to its schools or provide educational services to the student under the new school or district's education service plan.

#### **B. NOTICE OF RIGHTS UNDER G.L. c. 71 §37H½**

This Notice of Student and Parental Rights applies to student misconduct that involves student criminal or felony delinquency charges, findings, or admissions.

##### ***Suspension Following Criminal or Felony Delinquency Complaint***

Upon the issuance of a criminal or felony delinquency complaint against a student, the Principal may suspend such student for a period of time determined appropriate by the Principal if he or she determines that the student's continued presence in school would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of the school. The student is entitled to receive written notification of the charges and the reasons for such suspension prior to such suspension taking effect. The student shall also receive written notification of his right to appeal and the process for appealing such suspension; provided, however, that such suspension shall remain in effect prior to any appeal hearing conducted by the Executive Director.

The student shall have the right to appeal the suspension to the Executive Director. The student shall notify the Executive Director in writing of his or her request for an appeal no later than five (5) calendar days following the effective date of the suspension. The Executive Director shall hold a hearing with the student and the student's parental within three (3) calendar days of the student's request for an appeal. At the hearing, the student shall have the right to present oral and written testimony on his or her behalf, and shall have the right to counsel. The Executive Director shall have the authority to overturn or alter the decision of the Principal, including recommending an alternate educational program for the student. The Executive Director shall render a decision on the appeal within five (5) calendar days of the hearing. The Executive Director's decision shall be the final decision of Veritas Prep with regard to the imposition of discipline.

##### ***Expulsion Following Felony Adjudication or Admission***

Upon a student being convicted of a felony or upon an adjudication or admission in court of guilt with respect to such a felony or felony delinquency, the Principal may expel said student if the Principal determines that the student's continued presence at Veritas Preparatory Charter School would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of the school. The student shall receive written notification of the charges and reasons for such expulsion prior to such expulsion taking effect. The student shall also receive written notification of his or her right to appeal and the process for appealing such expulsion, provided, however, that the expulsion shall remain in effect prior to any appeal hearing conducted by the Executive Director.

The student shall have the right to appeal the expulsion to the Executive Director. The student shall notify the Executive Director, in writing, of his request for an appeal no later than five (5) calendar days following the effective date of the expulsion. The Executive Director shall hold a hearing with the student and the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) within three (3) calendar days of the expulsion. At the hearing, the student shall have the right to present oral and written testimony on his or her behalf, and shall have the right to counsel. The Executive Director shall have the authority to overturn or alter the decision of the Principal, including recommending an alternate educational program for the student. The Executive Director shall render a decision on the appeal within five (5) calendar days of the hearing. The Executive Director's decision shall be the final decision of Veritas Prep with regard to the expulsion.

Students who are suspended or expelled under §37H½ are entitled to receive educational services during the period of suspension or expulsion under Veritas Preparatory Charter School's Education Service Plan, which is described below in Section D. If the student withdraws from Veritas Preparatory Charter School and/or moves to another school district during the period of suspension or expulsion, the new school/district/district of residence shall either admit the student to its schools or provide educational services to the student under the new school or district's education service plan.

### **C. NOTICE OF STUDENT AND PARENTAL RIGHTS UNDER G.L. c. 71 §37H¾**

This section governs all student offenses that may be subject to short- or long-term suspensions that *do not* involve dangerous weapons, controlled substances, assault on school staff, felony or felony delinquency charges, and/or felony delinquency findings or admissions, all of which are governed by G.L. C.71 §§37H and 37H½, as detailed above.

In every case of student misconduct for which suspension may be imposed, the Principal will exercise discretion in deciding the consequence for the offense, consider ways to re-engage the student in learning, and avoid using long-term suspension from school as a consequence until alternatives have been tried. The following outlines student and parental rights when the Principal is considering and/or decides to implement a removal from Veritas Preparatory Charter School as a consequence for student misconduct.

Students who are suspended under §37H¾ are entitled to receive educational services during the period of suspension or expulsion under Veritas Prep Charter School's Education Service Plan, which is described below in Section D. If the student withdraws from Veritas Prep and/or moves to another school district during the period of suspension, the new school/district/district of residence shall either admit the student to its schools or provide educational services to the student under the new school or district's education service plan.

#### ***Notice of Suspension and Hearing under §37H¾***

Unless the Principal determines that an emergency removal is required (*see* Emergency Removals section below) or decides to implement an in-school suspension of ten (10) or fewer consecutive days (and no more than 10 cumulative days per school year) (*see* In-School Suspension section below), the Principal may not impose a suspension as a consequence for a disciplinary offense without first providing the student and the parent/guardian with verbal and written notice, and providing the student an opportunity for a hearing on the charge and the parent/guardian an opportunity to participate in such hearing.

The Principal is required to provide this verbal and written notice to the student and the parent/guardian in English and in the primary language of the home if other than English, or other means of communication where appropriate. The notice must set forth the following information:

the disciplinary offense;

the basis for the charge;

the potential consequences, including the potential length of the student's suspension;

the opportunity for the student to have a hearing with the Principal concerning the proposed suspension, including the opportunity to dispute the charges and to present the student's explanation of the alleged incident, and for the parent/guardian to attend the hearing;

the date, time, and location of the hearing;

the right of the student and the student's parent/guardian to interpreter services at the hearing if needed to participate;

if the student may be placed on long-term suspension following the hearing with the Principal, the student's short and long term suspension hearing rights and the right to appeal the Principal's decision to the Executive Director (see Hearing Rights section below).

The Principal is required to make and document reasonable efforts to notify the parent/guardian verbally of the opportunity to attend the hearing. The Principal is presumed to have made reasonable efforts, and therefore may conduct a hearing without the parent/guardian present, if the Principal has sent written notice (by hand delivery, first-class mail, certified mail, email, or any other method of delivery agreed to by the Principal and parent/guardian) and has documented at least two (2) attempts to contact the parent/guardian in the manner specified by the parent/guardian for emergency notification.

### ***Emergency Removal***

The Principal has the authority to remove a student from school temporarily when a student is charged with a disciplinary offense and the Principal determines that the continued presence of the student poses a danger to persons or property, or materially and substantially disrupts the order of the school, and, in the Principal's judgment, there is no alternative available to alleviate the danger or disruption. The Principal is required to notify the Executive Director immediately in writing of an emergency removal and the reason for it, and describe the danger presented by the student. The temporary removal shall not exceed two (2) school days following the day of the emergency removal, during which time the Principal is required to:

Make immediate and reasonable efforts to orally notify the student and the student's parent/guardian of the emergency removal, the reason for the need for emergency removal, and the Hearing Rights outlined below;

Provide written notice to the student and parent/guardian.

Provide the student an opportunity for a hearing with the Principal that complies with the rights outlined below in the Hearing Rights section, as applicable, and the parent/guardian an opportunity to attend the

hearing, before the expiration of the two (2) school days, unless an extension of time for hearing is otherwise agreed to by the Principal, student, and parent/guardian.

Render a decision orally on the same day as the hearing, and in writing no later than the following school day.

The Principal may not remove a student from school on an emergency basis for a disciplinary offense until adequate provisions have been made for the student's safety and transportation.

### **Hearing Rights**

#### ***Principal's Hearing under §37H<sup>3</sup>: Short-term Suspension***

Short-term suspension means the removal of a student from the school premises and regular classroom activities for ten (10) consecutive school days or less.

The purpose of the hearing with the Principal is for the Principal to hear and consider information regarding the alleged incident; provide the student an opportunity to dispute the charges and explain the circumstances of the alleged incident; and determine if the student committed the disciplinary offense, and if so, the consequences for the infraction. At a minimum, the Principal is required to discuss the disciplinary offense, the basis for the charge, and any other pertinent information. The student and parent/guardian both shall have an opportunity to present and offer information, including mitigating facts, that the Principal should consider in determining whether other remedies and consequences may be appropriate. Based on the available information, including mitigating circumstances, the Principal shall determine whether the student committed the disciplinary offense, and, if so, what remedy or consequence will be imposed.

The Principal is required to provide written notification to the student and parent/guardian of the determination and the reasons for it, and, if the student is suspended, the type and duration of suspension and the opportunity to make up assignments and such other school work as needed to make academic progress during the period of removal.

Please note that if the student is in grades pre-K through 3, the Principal is required to send a copy of the written determination to the Executive Director and explain the reasons for imposing an out-of-school suspension, before the short-term suspension takes effect.

#### ***Principal's Hearing under §37H<sup>3</sup>: Long-term Suspension***

Long-term suspension means the removal of a student from the school premises and regular classroom activities for more than ten (10) consecutive school days, or for more than ten (10) school days cumulatively for multiple disciplinary offenses in any school year.

The purpose of the long-term suspension hearing is the same as the purpose of a short-term suspension hearing. At a minimum, in addition to the rights afforded a student in a short-term suspension hearing, the student shall have the following rights during a long-term suspension hearing:

in advance of the hearing, the opportunity to review the student's record and the documents upon which the Principal may rely in making a determination to suspend the student or not;

the right to be represented by counsel or a lay person of the student's choice, at the student's/parent's/guardian's expense;

the right to produce witnesses on his or her behalf and to present the student's explanation of the alleged incident, but the student may not be compelled to do so;

the right to cross-examine witnesses presented by the school district; and the right to request that the hearing be recorded by the Principal, and to receive a copy of the audio recording upon request. If the student or parent/guardian requests an audio recording, the Principal shall inform all participants before the hearing that an audio record will be made and a copy will be provided to the student and parent/guardian upon request.

The Principal shall provide the parent/guardian, if present, an opportunity to discuss the student's conduct and offer information, including mitigating circumstances, that the Principal should consider in determining consequences for the student.

Based on the evidence, the Principal shall determine whether the student committed the disciplinary offense, and, if so, after considering mitigating circumstances and alternatives to suspension, what remedy or consequence will be imposed, in place of or in addition to a long-term suspension. The Principal shall send the written determination to the student and parent/guardian by hand-delivery, certified mail, first-class mail, email to an address provided by the parent/guardian for school communications, or any other method of delivery agreed to by the Principal and the parent/guardian. If the Principal decides to suspend the student, the written determination will:

Identify the disciplinary offense, the date on which the hearing took place, and the participants at the hearing;

Set out the key facts and conclusions reached by the Principal;

Identify the length and effective date of the suspension, as well as a date of return to school;

Include notice of the student's opportunity to receive education services to make academic progress during the period of removal from school;

Inform the student of the right to appeal the Principal's decision to the Executive Director or designee (only if the Principal has imposed a long-term suspension). Notice of the right of appeal shall be in English and the primary language of the home if other than English, or other means of communication where appropriate, and shall include the following information stated in plain language:

the process for appealing the decision, including that the student or parent/guardian must file a written notice of appeal with the Executive Director within five (5) calendar days of the effective date of the long-term suspension; provided that within the five (5) calendar days, the student or parent/guardian may request and receive from the Executive Director an extension of time for filing the written notice for up to seven (7) additional calendar days; and that the long-term suspension will remain in effect unless and until the Executive Director decides to reverse the Principal's determination on appeal.

If the student is in a public preschool program or in grades K through 3, the Principal shall send a copy of the written determination to the Executive Director and explain the reasons for imposing an out-of-school suspension, whether short-term or long-term, before the suspension takes effect.

#### ***Executive Director's Hearing under §37H%***

A student who is placed on long-term suspension following a hearing with the Principal has the right to appeal the Principal's decision to the Executive Director.

In order to appeal the Principal's decision to impose a long-term suspension, the student or parent/guardian must file a notice of appeal with the Executive Director within five (5) calendar days of the effective date of the long-term suspension (in the alternative, within five calendar days of the effective date of the long-term suspension the parent/guardian may request and receive from the Executive Director an extension of time for filing the written notice for up to seven additional calendar days). If the appeal is not timely filed, the Executive Director may deny the appeal, or may allow the appeal in his or her discretion, for good cause.

The Executive Director shall hold the hearing within three (3) school days of the student's request, unless the student or parent/guardian requests an extension of up to seven additional calendar days, in which case the Executive Director shall grant the extension.

The Executive Director must make a good faith effort to include the parent/guardian in the hearing, and will be presumed to have made a good faith effort if he or she has attempted to find a day and time for the hearing that would allow the parent/guardian and Executive Director to participate. The Executive Director shall send written notice to the parent/guardian of the date, time, and location of the hearing.

The Executive Director will conduct a hearing to determine whether the student committed the disciplinary offense of which the student is accused, and if so, what the consequence will be. An audio recording of the hearing will be made, a copy of which shall be provided to the student or parent/guardian upon request.

The student and parent/guardian shall have all the rights afforded them at the Principal's hearing for long-term suspension, as detailed above in the sections entitled Principal's Hearing under §37H<sup>3</sup>: Short-term Suspension and Principal's Hearing under §37H<sup>4</sup>: Long-term Suspension.

The Executive Director shall issue a written decision within five (5) calendar days of the hearing. If the Executive Director determines that the student committed the disciplinary offense, the Executive Director may impose the same or a lesser consequence than the Principal, but shall not impose a suspension greater than that imposed by the Principal's decision. The decision of the Executive Director shall be the final decision of the school.

#### ***In-School Suspension under §37H<sup>4</sup>***

The Director of Culture may use In-School suspension as an alternative to short-term suspension for disciplinary offenses.

The Director of Culture is required to inform the student of the disciplinary offense charged and the basis for the charge, and provide the student an opportunity to dispute the charges and explain the circumstances surrounding the alleged incident. If the Director of Culture determines that the student committed the disciplinary offense, the Director of Culture must inform the student of the length of the student's in-school suspension, which shall not exceed 10 days, cumulatively or consecutively, in a school year.

On the same day that the Director of Culture decides to impose an In-School suspension, the Director of Culture must make reasonable efforts to verbally notify the parent/guardian of the disciplinary offense, the reasons for concluding that the student committed the infraction, and the length of the in-school suspension.

The Director of Culture shall also invite the parent/guardian to a meeting to discuss the student's academic performance and behavior, strategies for student engagement, and possible responses to the behavior. Such meeting shall be scheduled on the day of the suspension if possible, and if not, as soon thereafter as possible. If the Director of Culture is unable to reach the parent/guardian after making and documenting at least two attempts to do so, such attempts shall constitute reasonable efforts for purposes of verbally informing the parent/guardian of the in-school suspension.

The Director of Culture shall send written notice to the student and parent/guardian about the In-School suspension, including the reason and the length of the in-school suspension (and inviting the parent/guardian to a meeting with the Director of Culture, if such meeting has not already occurred). The Director of Culture shall deliver such notice on the day of the suspension by hand-delivery, certified mail, first-class mail, email to an address provided by the parent/guardian for school communications, or by other method of delivery agreed to by the Principal and the parent/guardian.

#### ***Removal from Privileges and Extracurricular Activities***

The Director of Culture may remove a student from privileges, such as extracurricular activities and attendance at school-sponsored events, based on the student's misconduct. A removal from privileges and/or extracurricular activities is not subject to the procedures set forth herein.

#### ***Education Services and Academic Progress under §37H<sup>3/4</sup>***

Students serving an In-School suspension, short-term suspension, long-term suspension, or expulsion have the opportunity to earn credits, as applicable, make up assignments, tests, papers, and other school work as needed to make academic progress during the period of his or her removal from the classroom or school.

Students who are expelled or suspended from school for more than ten (10) consecutive days, whether in school or out of school, have an opportunity to receive education services and make academic progress toward meeting state and Veritas Preparatory Charter School requirements, through the school-wide Education Service Plan.

#### **D. SERVICES DURING REMOVALS AND SCHOOL-WIDE EDUCATION SERVICE PLAN**

Students who are suspended from Veritas Preparatory Charter School for 10 or fewer consecutive days, whether in or out of school, have the opportunity to make academic progress during the period of suspension; make up assignments; and earn credits missed including, but not limited to, homework, quizzes, exams, papers and projects.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School has developed a school-wide Education Service Plan for all students who are expelled or suspended from school for more than 10 consecutive school days, whether in or out of school. The Principal shall ensure these students have an opportunity to make academic progress during the period of suspension or expulsion, to make up assignments and earn credits missed, including, but not limited to, homework, quizzes, exams, papers and projects.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School's Education Service Plan is subject to change and may include tutoring, alternative placement, Saturday school, and online or distance learning.

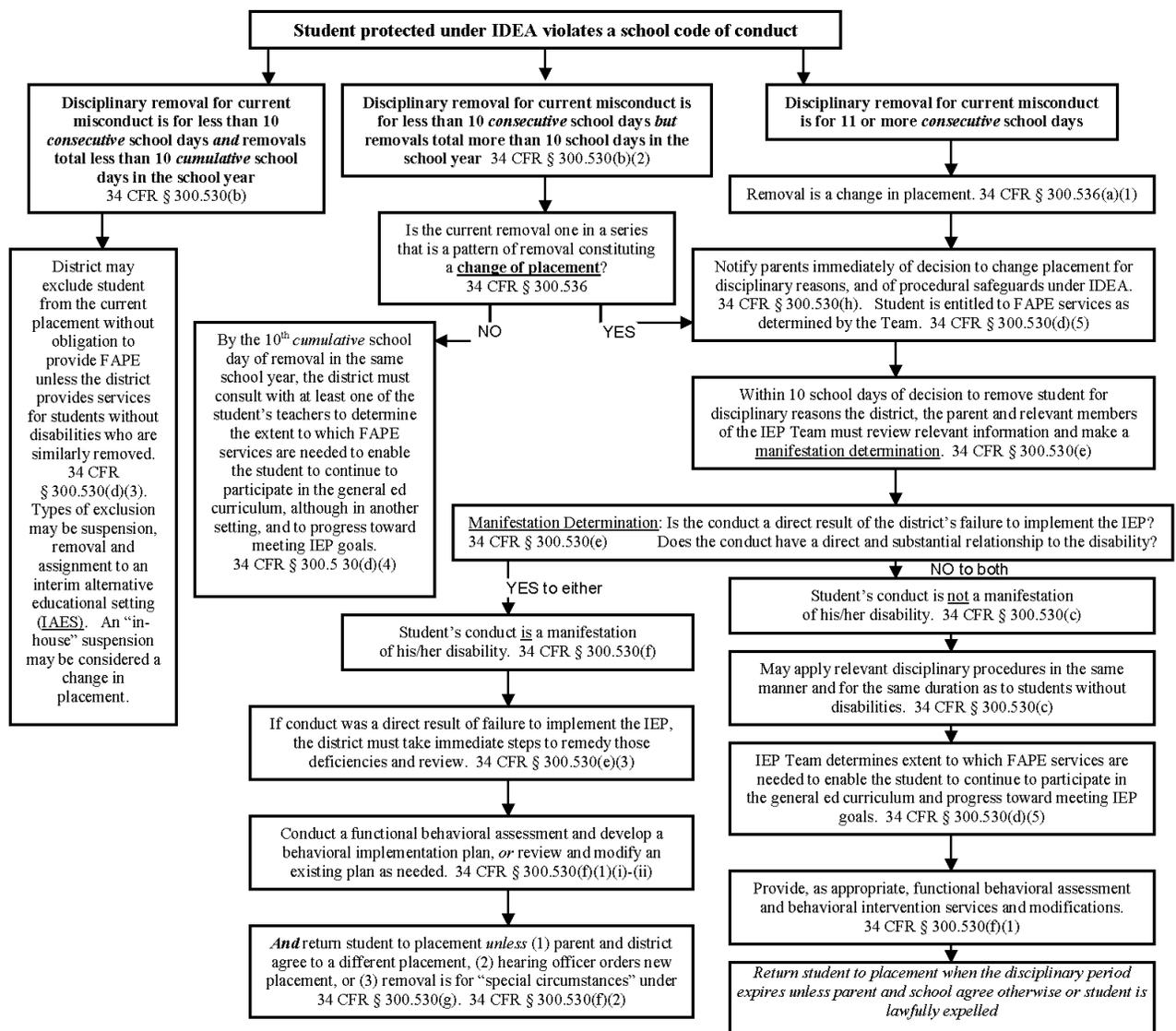
If Veritas Preparatory Charter School expels a student or suspends a student for more than 10 consecutive school days, Veritas Preparatory Charter School is required to provide the student and the parent/guardian of the student with a list of alternative educational services. Upon selection of an

alternative educational service by the student and the student's parent/guardian, Veritas Preparatory Charter School shall facilitate and verify enrollment in the service.

## APPENDIX C: DISCIPLINE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

### Discipline of Special Education Students Under IDEA 2004 20 U.S.C. § 1415(k) and 34 CFR §§ 300.530-300.536

- This chart should be read in conjunction with discipline procedures in state law, M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 37H & 37H1/2, and district-wide and school-wide student codes of conduct.
- Protections in the IDEA apply to students who have been found eligible for special education and to students for whom the school is deemed to have knowledge that the child might have a disability (i.e., students who have not yet been found eligible but the school had a basis of knowledge of a disability, including students who have been referred for initial evaluation). 34 CFR § 300.354
- Beginning on the 11<sup>th</sup> school day of a student's disciplinary removal during the school year, and if removal is a change in placement, the student must be provided free appropriate public education (FAPE) services during the period of removal to allow him/her to continue to participate in the general education curriculum and progress towards IEP goals, even if in a different setting. 34 CFR § 300.530(b) & (d).
- If the conduct that the student is being disciplined for involves the "special circumstances" of weapons, illegal drugs, controlled substances, or serious bodily injury, school personnel may remove the student to an interim alternative educational setting (IAES) for up to 45 school days, regardless of the manifestation determination. 34 CFR § 300.530(g). The IEP Team must determine the IAES.
- Although the following flowchart lays out the steps that a school district must take when disciplining a student with a disability, it is important to remember that at any point the parent and school district can agree to change a student's placement for disciplinary reasons. Agreements should be in writing, and signed by the school personnel and the parent.



Massachusetts Department of Education: December, 2007

## DEFINITIONS

A student for whom the district is deemed to have knowledge of a disability – A child who has not yet been determined to be eligible for special education and related services may assert the disciplinary protections under IDEA if the school had a basis of knowledge that the child is a child with a disability before the behavior that precipitated the disciplinary action occurred. The school is deemed to have knowledge if: (1) the child’s parent expressed concern in writing to administrative or supervisory personnel of the school or district that the child is in need of special education and related services; (2) the parent of the child had requested a special education evaluation; or (3) the child’s teacher or other school or district personnel expressed specific concerns to the director of special education or to other supervisory personnel about a pattern of behavior demonstrated by the child. The school or district is *not* deemed to have knowledge of a disability if (1) the parent has not allowed an evaluation or has refused special education and related services, *or* (2) the child has been evaluated and determined not to be a child with a disability. 34 CFR § 300.534.

Change of placement – A change of placement because of a disciplinary removal occurs if a child with a disability is removed from his/her current educational placement for more than 10 consecutive school days, or the child is subjected to a series of removals that constitutes a pattern because: (1) the removals total more than 10 school days in a school year; (2) the child’s behavior is substantially similar to previous incidents that resulted in the series of removals; and (3) additional factors such as the length of each removal, the total amount of time the child has been removed, and the proximity of the removals to one another constitute a pattern. 34 CFR § 300.536.

Current placement – The placement from which the student was removed for disciplinary reasons.

Interim alternative educational setting (IAES) – An IAES is a disciplinary placement that is not the same as the child’s current placement as defined in his/her IEP.

Manifestation determination – The determination made by the district, the parent, and relevant members of the student’s Team, after review of all relevant information in the student’s file including the IEP, teacher observations, and relevant information provided by the parents, whether (1) the conduct in question was caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to the child’s disability; *or* (2) the conduct in question was the direct result of the district’s failure to implement the student’s IEP. 34 CFR § 300.530(e).

Special circumstances – Where the disciplinary conduct is a “special circumstance,” school personnel may remove a student to an IAES for not more than 45 school days, regardless of the results of the manifestation determination. Special circumstances exist if the student:

- carries a weapon to or possesses a weapon at school, on school premises, or to or at a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or local educational agency (district); or
- knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs, or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance, while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or local educational agency; or
- inflicts serious bodily injury upon another person while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or local educational agency. 34 CFR § 300.530(g).

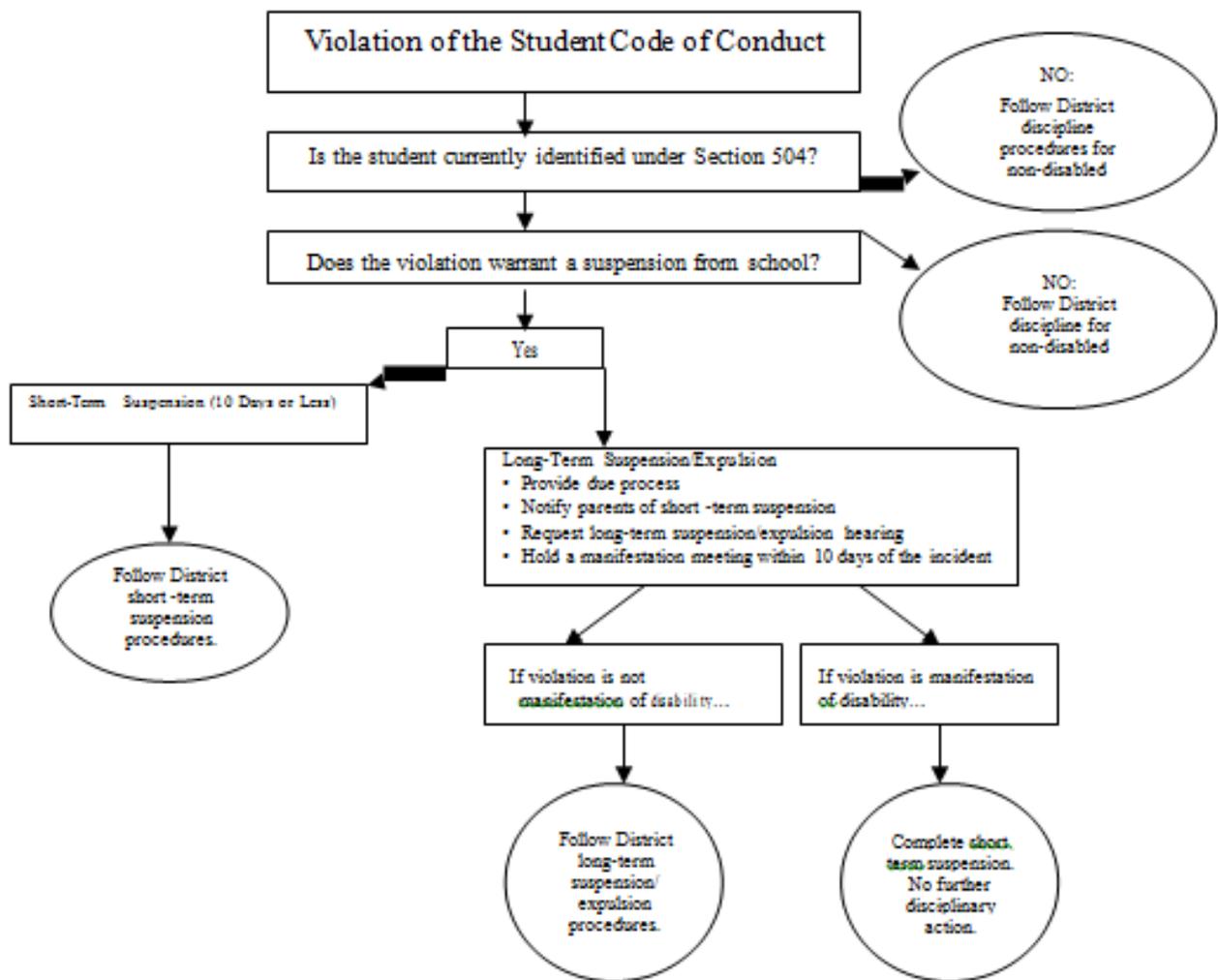
Serious bodily injury – As defined in 18 U.S.C. § 930, a bodily injury that involves a substantial risk of death, extreme physical pain, protracted and obvious disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ, or mental faculty. 34 CFR § 300.530(i)(3).

## a 504 Disabled Student

### What is the discipline process for a 504 disabled student?

Section 504 disabled students are subject to the same disciplinary action as non-disabled students, provided that the student's behavior is not a manifestation of his or her qualifying disability. A 504 Team must conduct a manifestation determination whenever a disabled student is subject to out-of-school suspension for 10 consecutive school days or more.

If the 504 Team concludes that the violation is a manifestation of the student's qualifying disability, the discipline process must end and the 504 Team should review the 504 Plan to determine if changes are appropriate. If the violation is not a manifestation, the student is subject to the same disciplinary action that any non-disabled student would receive for the same violation.



## **Must a school make a manifestation determination when considering the long term suspension or expulsion of a student with a Section 504 Plan?**

Yes. Similar to suspension or expulsion of a student having a disability under IDEA, it is necessary to conduct a manifestation determination for a Section 504 disabled student when:

The suspension or expulsion will be for more than 10 consecutive school days. Like IDEA, a suspension/expulsion of more than 10 consecutive days constitutes a significant change in placement and requires schools to determine if the cause of the behavior is the disability identified in the student's 504 Plan.

A series of suspensions that total more than 10 days may also trigger the manifestation determination requirement of Section 504. If cumulative suspensions/expulsions for a student on a 504 Plan total more than 10 days, it must be determined if a significant placement change has occurred. This is done on a case-by-case basis. If a group of short suspensions creates a pattern of exclusion, then this constitutes a change in placement and the school must conduct a manifestation determination meeting before further suspensions or expulsions occur. The Office of Civil Rights has identified some of the key factors in determining patterns of exclusion: the length of each suspension, the proximity of one suspension to another, the nature of the behavior, and the total amount of time the student is excluded from school.

## **Who makes the manifestation determination for a student on a 504 Plan and what information is included in this process?**

The manifestation determination should be made by a 504 Team that consists of persons who have knowledge of the student and the meaning of the information that will be reviewed. When possible, the members of the 504 Team should be the same members who designed the student's 504 Plan. School officials responsible for school disciplinary procedures, such as the school Principal, Director of Culture, or Executive Director, cannot make the determination. However, such administrators may present pertinent student information to the 504 Team.

The 504 Team must have available information that competent professionals would require when making a manifestation determination. Such information might include attendance and academic records, psychological evaluation data, behavior plans, discipline records and staff observations. The information should be current enough to afford an understanding of the behavior that is the subject of the manifestation determination.

The manifestation determination should begin with the 504 Team deciding whether the student's 504 Plan is appropriate and was being properly implemented. If the 504 Team concludes the 504 Plan is not appropriate or that the accommodations were not provided, the school should not take any further disciplinary action. The 504 Team should review and update the 504 Plan, if necessary.

If the student's educational placement is correct, the 504 Team will next consider if the behavior is the result of the student's disability. This inquiry is resolved by considering the relationship between the student's disability and his or her ability to control and understand the consequences of his or her behavior:

- Does the disability impair the student's ability to control his or her behavior?
- Does the disability impair the student's ability to understand the consequences of his or her behavior?

If the 504 Team answers either question in the affirmative, then the behavior is a manifestation of the student's disability and no disciplinary action can be taken past the 10 days.

If the 504 Team determines that the behavior is not a manifestation of the disability, the District may impose whatever long-term suspension or expulsion it would impose under the same circumstances as if a non-disabled student were the offender. The District has no obligation to continue to provide educational services to a 504 student during the period of a long-term suspension or expulsion.

The 504 Team must conclude its work by completing a Section 504 Manifestation Determination form.

**How does a school proceed with drug/alcohol violations by a student on a Section 504 Plan?**

A student who is currently engaged in the illegal use of drugs/alcohol is not considered a student with a disability. A student with a history of drug/alcohol abuse who has been successfully rehabilitated, or is participating in a drug rehabilitation program and is not currently engaging in the illegal use of drugs, is covered by Section 504. Section 504 allows school districts to take disciplinary action pertaining to the use or possession of illegal drugs/alcohol against a 504 student who is currently engaging in the illegal use of drugs/alcohol to the same extent such discipline is taken against non-disabled students.

## APPENDIX D: BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

### Contents:

1. Priority statement
2. Definitions
3. Prohibition against bullying and retaliation
4. Training and professional development
5. Prevention measures, targeted services, and other resources
6. Reporting and responding to bullying and retaliation
7. Collaboration with families
8. Resolving problems and disputes
9. Plan assessment and accountability
10. Relationship to other laws

### 1. Priority statement

At Veritas Preparatory Charter School, we expect that all members of our school community will treat each other with kindness and respect. Veritas Preparatory Charter School will provide and maintain a learning environment that is free of bullying and any other verbal or physical misconduct, including cyber-bullying, that disrupts the learning environment or makes it unsafe. Veritas Preparatory Charter School's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan ("The Plan") is published in response to Massachusetts laws against bullying and is an integral part of our efforts to promote learning and to prevent behavior that can impede the learning process. The Plan spells out Veritas Preparatory Charter School's comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation. The Plan is consistent with school policies against discrimination, harassment, bullying, and retaliation that appear in Veritas Preparatory Charter School's Student and Family Handbook and Student Code of Conduct. The Director of Culture is responsible for the implementation and administration of The Plan. Questions and concerns related to this Plan may be referred to the Director of Culture.

### 2. Definitions

**Bullying**, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students or by a member of a school staff of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the victim's property;*
- (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself/herself or of damage to his/her property;*
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim;*
- (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or*
- (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.*

Veritas Preparatory Charter School also uses as a guide the following definition of bullying from StopBullying.gov to assist in making determinations about the incidence and response to bullying situations:

*Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:*

*a) An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.*

*b) Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.*

*Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.*

(accessed 6/24/2015 from [stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/](http://stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/))

**Cyberbullying** is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings.

**Hostile environment**, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

**Retaliation** is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

**School Staff** includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, and athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

**Aggressor** is a student or a member of a school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

**Target** is a student against whom bullying, cyber bullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

### **3. Prohibition against bullying and retaliation**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School will not tolerate any form of bullying or cyberbullying, nor will we tolerate retaliation against any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying. Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited on school grounds and at school-sponsored events, activities, functions, and programs. Bullying and cyber-bullying also are prohibited at School bus stops, on School buses, other vehicles owned, leased, or used by the school, and through use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by the school. In addition, bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited at a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by the school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for a targeted student; infringes on the rights of a targeted student at school; or materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the school.

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71, § 370, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

### **4. Training and professional development**

The first 3 weeks of Veritas Preparatory Charter School's annual staff training includes introduction to Veritas Preparatory Charter School policies, procedures, school-wide discipline program, and specifically, this Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. This annual training will include staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the Director of Culture or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and the range of prevention and social-emotional learning programming that will be offered to all students. Staff members hired after the start of the school year are required to participate in a school-based training regarding bullying prevention within the school year they are hired, unless they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last two years.

Veritas Preparatory Charter School is committed to ongoing professional development in regards to bullying prevention and understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. We have committed to build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. All staff training content, which is outlined below, has been informed by research and will include information on:

- developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;
- developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment;
- information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

Professional development will also address ways to prevent and respond to bullying or retaliation for students with disabilities that must be considered when developing students' Individualized Education

Programs (IEPs). This will include a particular focus on the needs of students with autism or students whose disability affects social skills development.

All staff will be provided with written notice of the Plan, including sections related to staff duties, in the employee handbook.

## **5. Prevention measures, targeted services, and other resources**

The Director of Culture is primarily responsible for the implementation and oversight of the Plan except in such instances in which the reported bullying incident involves the Director of Culture. In such cases as detailed herein and otherwise, the Principal will assume primary responsibility for implementation and oversight of the Plan. In instances in which the reported bullying involves the Principal, the Executive Director or designee will assume primary responsibility for implementation and oversight of the Plan, unless the reported bullying involves the Executive Director, in which case the report should be communicated to the Board of Trustees.

### **a. School-wide bullying prevention and prosocial climate programs**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School is committed to a rigorous academic environment in which all students feel safe to grow and challenge themselves. As such, our foremost efforts to prevent bullying in the school will be aimed at creating a supportive community with high expectations for staff and students. Specific measures we will employ include:

- setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and class routines;
- creating safe school and classroom environments for all students, with special consideration for students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, homeless students, students with limited English proficiency, and other students who may be at increased risk to be targets of bullying;
- using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- using positive behavioral supports;
- encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- using positive approaches to behavioral health, including collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution training, teamwork, and positive behavioral supports that aid in social and emotional development; and using the Internet safely.

We recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing based on actual or perceived characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, or sensory, disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics. The school will follow steps to create a safe, supportive environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. Veritas Preparatory Charter School shall provide additional support to vulnerable students, as necessary, to provide them with the skills, knowledge and strategies needed to prevent or respond to bullying or harassment.

## **b. Social-emotional learning curriculum and bullying prevention programming**

Social-emotional learning curricula informed by current research and bullying prevention programs will be utilized to develop student skills and capacities for prosocial behavior and effective response to bullying or harassment. Lessons may include the following topics and themes:

- developing and enhancing student skills in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, healthy relationships, respectful communication, and responsible decision-making;
- using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
- empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
- helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance;
- safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies with emphasis on privacy and considerate participation in social media;
- engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and differences.

The approaches outlined above will be integrated into the academic curricula and used in advisory, enrichment and community meetings in order to deliver the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan as part of the school's social-emotional learning curriculum. Veritas Preparatory Charter School will focus on teaching our behavior expectations and core values through skill-focused character education. By focusing on teaching students specific skills, Veritas Preparatory Charter School hopes to provide students with the tools and skills to positively interact with everyone they meet.

## **c. Targeted services and resources**

Any students identified by members of the school community as participants in a bullying situation (whether as aggressors, targets, or witnesses) will be offered brief supportive counseling services provided by the school counselors. The counselors will consult with teachers and families to determine options for additional support which may include referral to community-based behavioral health services, extended school counseling, continued case management and monitoring, or the termination of services for the time being.

When appropriate and congruent with the family's preferences, Veritas Prep will draw upon the range of community-based providers in Hampden County to make referrals for more intensive treatment and services. This may include agencies such as Behavioral Health Network (the local Children's Behavioral Health Initiative Community Service Agency), the Gandara Center (the local Spanish Language Community Service Agency), the Center for Human Development, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hampden County. When appropriate, other informal supports may be offered to students and families involved in a bullying situation, including but not limited to check-ins with staff, educational materials, and suggested readings.

As required by M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, when the IEP Team determines the student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her disability, the Team

will consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

## **6. Reporting and responding to bullying and retaliation**

### **a. Direct and anonymous methods for reporting bullying or retaliation**

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents/guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Reports made by students, parents/guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously. Veritas Preparatory Charter School will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including, but not limited to, an Incident Reporting Form, periodic student concern surveys, and an anonymous report collection box.

Use of an Incident Reporting Form is not required as a condition of making a report. Veritas Preparatory Charter School will: 1) include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents/guardians; 2) make it available in the school's main office, the counseling office, the school nurse's office, and other locations determined by the Director of Culture or designee; and 3) post it on the school's website. The Incident Reporting Form will be made available in the most prevalent language(s) of origin of students and parents/guardians.

At the beginning of each school year, Veritas Preparatory Charter School will provide the school community, including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals, students, and parents/guardians, with written notice of its policies for reporting acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the name and contact information of the Director of Culture or designee, and the Principal or designee if the Director of Culture or another administrator is the alleged aggressor, will be incorporated in student and staff handbooks, published on the school website, and conveyed in information about the Plan that is made available to parents/guardians.

#### **i. Reporting by staff**

A staff member will report immediately to the Director of Culture or designee, or to the Principal if the Director of Culture or another administrator is the alleged aggressor, or to Board of Directors or designee if the Executive Director is the alleged aggressor when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The requirement to report as provided does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school or district policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

#### **ii. Reporting by students, parents, guardians, and other community members**

Students who are victims of bullying, who witness bullying activity, or who are retaliated against for reporting bullying, should promptly report the incident to the Director of Culture or designee. Students may also report to a teacher, counselor, or other trusted adult in the building, who will in turn report the incident to the Director of Culture, designee, or another appropriate party (see above guidelines for reporting by staff).

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made anonymously. However, no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Therefore, an

investigation into the anonymous report must uncover further evidence to warrant disciplinary action.

Students, family members, and others may also request assistance from a staff member to report a bullying situation. In consultation with administrators, counselors, and other staff as appropriate, students will be provided developmentally appropriate guidance about reporting bullying and discussing incidents with others.

## **b. Responding to reports of bullying or retaliation – allegations of bullying by a student**

### **i. Maintaining safety**

The first response to any report of potential bullying involving a student is to assess the student's safety and take reasonable steps to limit targeted students from additional harm. The Director of Culture or designee will interview involved students and determine the measures needed to restore a sense of safety. Actions taken to promote safety may include, but not be limited to:

- creating a personal safety plan for students who may be at risk for further bullying or retaliation;
- altering seating arrangements in class, meal times, the bus, and other shared spaces;
- identifying a "safe staff member" who is available to offer additional support; or
- altering the aggressor's schedule and access to targeted students.

Students who have made reports, witnesses to bullying situations, students who provide information during investigations, or students who are thought to have reliable information about bullying or retaliation will be sheltered by these and other measures which may also be implemented to provide protection from bullying and retaliation.

### **ii. Obligation to notify others (parents/guardians, other schools, law enforcement)**

*Notice to parents/guardians:* While not required, the Director of Culture or designee may contact the families of students involved in order to engage their support at the beginning of an investigation into a potential bullying situation. When deciding whether to contact families at the beginning of an investigation, the Director of Culture or designee will consider to the extent practicable the privacy of involved students, family strengths and stressors, and likelihood of escalating tensions and retaliatory behavior. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Director of Culture or designee will promptly notify the parents/guardians of the target and the aggressor of the determination and of the procedures for responding to it. When appropriate, families of targets and aggressors may be invited for a collaborative meeting to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation.

*Notice to another school or district:* If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the Director of Culture or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the administration of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, and 603 CMR 49.00.

*Notice to law enforcement:* At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the Director of Culture or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator, the Director of Culture or designee will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and established agreements with law enforcement agencies. Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the Director of Culture or designee shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator.

### **c. Investigation**

The Director of Culture or designee will be responsible for promptly conducting an investigation regarding any allegations of bullying or retaliation. The investigation will consider all available relevant information including the nature of the allegations, the history of the conflict, and roles and ages of students involved. During the investigation, the Director of Culture or designee may, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, family members, and others as needed. Whoever is conducting the investigation will remind any participants of its importance to the school's positive climate, their obligation to be truthful and forthcoming, and that retaliation against anyone who reports or provides information about bullying is prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the Director of Culture or designee, other staff members, and in consultation with the school counselors as needed. Any staff members investigating a bullying or retaliation report should maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable. The Director of Culture or designee will maintain the official written record of the investigation and its findings, except if the Director of Culture is the alleged aggressor in which case another administrator will conduct the investigation and maintain the official record.

If needed, the Director of Culture or designee may consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

### **d. Determination**

The Director of Culture or designee will consult with any staff members who assisted in the investigation to reach a determination about the extent to which the allegations of bullying or retaliation are substantiated. The determination will be based on the definition of bullying provided above (see Section 2, "Definitions").

Following the investigation, the Director of Culture or designee will also determine what responsive actions or disciplinary measures are needed. If bullying or retaliation are found to have occurred, a plan of action will be developed to 1) prevent recurrence and ensure that targeted students do not experience any restriction or barrier to participating in school activities; and 2) address any underlying social or emotional issues that may have contributed to the aggressor's bullying or retaliation behavior. Depending on the circumstances, the Director of Culture or designee may choose to consult with the students' teachers, school counselors, family members, and other community members to develop an effective plan of action.

The Director of Culture or designee will promptly notify the parents/guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and any consequential actions being taken. All notice to parents/guardians will comply with state and federal educational privacy regulations. As a result,

parents/guardians of targeted students may not be informed of specific disciplinary actions taken against student aggressors unless there is a “stay away” order that a targeted student must be aware of in order to report violations.

## **e. Responses to bullying**

### **i. Skill-building, support, and additional resources for involved students**

Veritas Preparatory Charter School is dedicated to matching comprehensive supports and skill-building to students who are struggling to meet our community expectations for social interaction and respectful behavior. When it is determined that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the school will use one or more of the following strategies to support both targeted students and aggressor students:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions with a school counselor or another staff member based on Veritas Prep’s social-emotional learning program and character education curriculum;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with counselors, teachers, and other appropriate school personnel;
- implementing targeted positive behavior supports for students involved in the bullying situation to teach community values and expectations about respectful social interaction and incentivize prosocial behaviors and constructive conflict management;
- adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills and reinforcing their use in a variety of settings at school;
- making a referral to a relevant community-based service provider for additional targeted support;
- meeting with parents/guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home; and
- coaching teachers and other staff members to recognize warning signs of potential recurrences of the bullying situation and use supportive strategies to intervene.

### **ii. Disciplinary action**

If the Director of Culture or designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the Director of Culture or designee, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior. Discipline will be consistent with this Plan and with the Code of Conduct. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state laws regarding student discipline, govern discipline procedures for students with disabilities. The Director of Culture or designee will consult with the Director of Student Services regarding all cases involving students with disabilities.

If the Director of Culture or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student will be subject to disciplinary action.

In accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, Section 37O, law enforcement may be contacted by the school in some bullying cases.

### **iii. Promoting safety for targets and others**

The Director of Culture or designee will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the sense of safety for targeted students and others who may have been secondarily impacted by the bullying situation. This may include increased staff supervision at times and locations where bullying is likely to occur (e.g. hallways, transition times, etc.), altering bus seating arrangements, and clarifying school expectations with an entire class. The Director of Culture or designee will consult with the Director of Student Services regarding all cases involving English Language Learners.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the Director of Culture or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the Director of Culture or designee will work with appropriate school staff to implement them as soon as practicable.

All students will receive the same protections regardless of their legal status, including but not limited to involvement with the criminal justice system, child protection services, and immigration status.

### **f. Responding to allegations of bullying or retaliation perpetrated by school staff**

The procedures for reporting and investigating allegations of bullying by a staff member are the same as previously described for students identified as the aggressor, except in these cases special attention will be paid to maintaining safety for the target if the alleged aggressor is his or her teacher or a school staff member whom he or she sees or interacts with in the course of the school day. The Director of Culture or designee may work in collaboration with the Director of Student Services, the Vice Principal, the Principal, the Executive Director, and counselors to investigate the allegations, provide safety planning and supports such as scheduling or staffing alternatives for the student(s) during these investigations in a way that does not impede the quality of the educational experience, and set up a plan of action once a determination is made. The Director of Culture or designee will emphasize the importance of the investigation to the identified aggressor, target, and witnesses, the need to be truthful, and that retaliation against someone who reports bullying or provides information during a bullying investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Procedures for notifying parents/guardians and law enforcement personnel of these incidents will also follow the previously outlined protocol.

1. If the Director of Culture or designee determines that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Director of Culture or designee will:
  - a. immediately notify the local law enforcement agency if s/he believes that criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator;
  - b. take appropriate disciplinary action consistent with district policy; and take whatever other appropriate action to end the bullying;
  - c. notify the victim and the parents/guardians of the victim, and to the extent consistent with state and federal law, notify them of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation (the victim, parent/guardian is not precluded from seeking redress under any other available law, either civil or criminal); and
  - d. if suitable, provide information concerning counseling or referral to appropriate services for victims and for appropriate family members of said students.

2. A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying shall be subject to disciplinary action consistent with the Code of Conduct.

3. Nothing contained herein should not be interpreted as to prevent a victim or accused from seeking redress under any other available law, either civil or criminal.

## **7. Collaborating with Families**

Each year the school will inform parents/guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. The school or district will send parents/guardians written notice each year about the student-related sections of the plan and the school's Internet safety policy. All notices and information made available to parents/guardians will be in hard copy and electronic formats, and will be available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents/guardians.

## **8. Resolving problems and disputes**

Any parent/guardian wishing to file a claim/concern or seek assistance outside of the school's process may do so with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Resolution System (PRS). That information can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa>, emails can be sent to [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu) or individuals can call 781-338-3700. Hard copies of this information are also available at the school.

Families will be informed about using the Department's PRS through the school website as well as yearly written communications at the beginning of the school year.

An alleged target who is allegedly targeted based as a result of a protected classification (e.g. disability, race, sex, religion, national origin, homelessness) may file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, JW McCormack POCH, Boston, Massachusetts 02109-4557, telephone (617) 223-9662, TTY (617) 223-9695: Please consult the Veritas Prep's policies on non-discrimination for further information.

## **9. Plan assessment and accountability**

In accordance with the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Veritas Prep's standards of continued program assessment and accountability, the plan will also include certain steps to ensure that Veritas maintains a data-driven plan that meets student's needs.

The Director of Culture will keep records of and report the following to the Department:

- the number of alleged situations of bullying or retaliation each year;
- the number and nature of substantiated incidents of bullying and retaliation;
- the number of students disciplined for engaging in bullying or retaliation; and
- other information required by the Department.

The Director of Culture will administer the DESE-developed student survey at least once every four years to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in schools.

This plan will be reviewed at least once every two years to evaluate the school's effectiveness in implementing its provisions and their effect on incidences of bullying, harassment, and retaliation behaviors. The Director of Culture will, in collaboration with the Director of Student Services and other staff, be responsible for regular revisions to the plan as necessary.

## **10. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS**

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of Veritas Prep, no person shall be discriminated against in admission to Veritas Preparatory Charter School or in obtaining the advantages, privilege and courses of study at Veritas Preparatory Charter School on account of race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in the Plan prevents Veritas Preparatory Charter School from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state, or federal law, or school policies.

In addition, nothing in the Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of Veritas Preparatory Charter School to take disciplinary action or other action under M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 37H or 37H½, other applicable laws, or school policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.