FAMILY HANDBOOK
2022–2023

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Newburyport, Massachusetts 01950
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www.rivervalleycharter.org
www.plusportals.com/RiverValleyCharter

Si necesita este documento traducido, por favor comuníquese con la escuela.
Se voce precisa este documento traduzido, entre em contato com a escola.
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River Valley Charter School
Welcome to River Valley Charter School

River Valley Charter School Mission
The mission of River Valley Charter School is to provide a rigorous academic program based on the Montessori philosophy and rooted in the history, culture, and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley. Students will reach their full potential as scholars and become self-reliant, productive members of society. They will be adept at critical thinking and creative problem solving and will be fully prepared to succeed in future schools, careers, and civic life.

Who We Are
River Valley Charter School is a regional public Montessori school serving students from four public school districts: Amesbury, Triton (Newbury, Rowley, Salisbury), Newburyport, and Pentucket (Groveland, Merrimac, West Newbury). River Valley is a Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commonwealth Charter School, established under the Educational Reform Act of 1993. The school is publicly-funded and is governed by a voluntary Board of Trustees. The purpose of the organization is entirely educational, operating in full compliance with all laws and regulations governing traditional public schools and charter schools.

River Valley opened in September 1999 with 160 students enrolled in grades 1 through 5 and has grown to 288 students in grades K through 8. All River Valley students must be residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to attend and are enrolled by means of a public lottery, with preference given first to siblings of currently attending students¹, and then to residents of the four sending districts.

Each elementary classroom of approximately 24 students has two adults, typically one Lead and one Assistant Teacher, providing a student-teacher ratio of approximately 12 to 1. Kinderhaus classrooms have approximately 16 students each with a Lead and Assistant Teacher as well. The Middle School Program houses seventh and eighth grade students with five Middle School content teachers, as well as a Middle School Coordinator, an Art Integration Specialist, and learning differences support staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office Hours</td>
<td>8:00 am – 4:00 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Number</td>
<td>(978) 465-0065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax Number</td>
<td>(978) 465-0119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System for Reporting Attendance and Dismissal Information</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pickuppatrol.net">www.pickuppatrol.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailing Address</td>
<td>2 Perry Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newburyport, MA 01950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Website</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rivervalleycharter.org">www.rivervalleycharter.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Facebook</td>
<td><a href="http://www.facebook.com/RVCS.MA">www.facebook.com/RVCS.MA</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Instagram</td>
<td><a href="http://www.instagram/rivervalleycharterschool">www.instagram/rivervalleycharterschool</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Charter Schools
Charter schools are tuition-free, public schools started by parents, teachers, businesses and/or community leaders. In Massachusetts, there are two types of charter schools: Horace Mann Charter Schools which are operated in conjunction with the local school district, and Commonwealth Charter School which operate independently from local school districts. Both types of charter schools are held to stringent standards of accountability by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). River Valley Charter School is a Commonwealth Charter School.

Charter schools are public schools of choice. They operate with freedom from some of the regulations that apply to traditional district schools in exchange for a higher degree of accountability. Charter schools create their own missions and adopt their own teaching methods. They also control their own staffing and budgeting. Charter schools are provided

¹ An “attending student” is defined as a student who is currently participating in classes at the school.
with per pupil funding based on the same rate of funding as the district in which a student resides. In addition, charter schools receive a per pupil facility stipend. Every year charter schools are required to report to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on achievement of accountability goals as well as Common Performance Criteria set by the State. They do this through the creation of an annual report. Every five years, the charter is evaluated to determine if the school is meeting the terms of its charter and whether it should be granted renewal for an additional five years. Additional evaluations occur in the interim years and include annual reporting, site visits, Tiered Focus Monitoring of our special education services and compliance with civil rights, and other audits.

Educational Philosophy
Montessori philosophy is based on the idea that each student is competent, unique, and has an innate desire to learn. An integral tenet is to support children in their journey toward increased independence. To implement the philosophy, River Valley Charter School

- Creates a challenging interdisciplinary curriculum combining the Common Core Standards with Montessori lessons;
- Provides an abundance of learning materials specifically developed for the Montessori classroom;
- Empowers the child to direct their own learning within the structure of the curriculum and with close guidance by the teacher;
- Facilitates inquiry, exploration, critical thinking, collaboration, and creative problem solving;
- Understands and capitalizes on individual learning styles; and
- Educates the whole child by infusing the development of self-reliance and independence within academic work.

Complementing the Montessori Method, River Valley Charter School provides place-based learning opportunities that integrate studies of the historical, cultural, and natural resources of our region.

Montessori Characteristics
Multi-Age Classrooms are an element of Montessori programming. River Valley elementary classrooms span three grades (grades 1-3 in Elementary 1 and grades 4-6 in Elementary 2); middle school spans two grades (grades 7-8). The kindergarten program, called Kinderhaus, is a full day, single-age program.

The mixed ages/grade levels maximize curriculum options, encourages cooperation, and fosters self-confidence.

Interdisciplinary Approach allows subjects to be taught thematically using reading, writing, and mathematics as tools for the pursuit of knowledge and skills.

Montessori Materials focus on many levels of understanding, beginning with the concrete and moving to the abstract. Materials are self-correcting and reinforce autonomy, confidence, and self-motivation.

Long Work Periods enable students to explore a topic or material thoroughly. Whole-class instruction is minimal, with lessons being given to individuals or small groups.

Mastery Learning goes beyond memorization and repetition to true understanding and application of knowledge, skills, and concepts. Rather than simply covering concepts in a predetermined order, our curriculum maps identify learning goals for each level, and our teachers have the flexibility to present concepts that suit the learning needs and styles of each student. Rather than structuring the day to assign a limited amount of time to each subject area, our Montessori approach provides both students and teachers flexibility in the time they choose to devote to any given pursuit. When a student, or group of students, demonstrates a particular interest in exploring a concept, question, or issue more deeply, the Montessori philosophy calls for teachers to facilitate such interests. The individual student progresses at their own rate, either moving ahead without having to wait for the rest of the group or taking the time they need to internalize the material.
Collaboration is encouraged, and students frequently work together on assignments. Though direct instruction is provided to every student every day, students spend a large portion of the learning time working with each other. This approach not only fosters collaboration, but also provides students the opportunity to articulate their thinking to others, which helps to deepen their comprehension.

Classroom Design emphasizes study centers, with clusters of student-sized tables and open areas for floor work. Each study center is surrounded by shelves of books and materials pertaining to a particular area, such as language arts, mathematics, history, science, and geography. Students are allowed to move about the classroom and choose resources, working individually or in small groups.

Community Resources are used as both a source of knowledge and as a means of applying what students learn. The connection and commitment to our community is a logical extension of the Montessori philosophy that grounds the students’ knowledge and applies their skills in a meaningful context.

Peace Education is integral to the Montessori Method and is woven all through the River Valley curriculum – in interdisciplinary studies of other cultures, the Fundamental Human Needs curriculum, studies of interdependence, and active outreach to other communities and cultures. In general, peace education provides students with the values, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors, to live in harmony with themselves, others, and the natural environment.

In addition to teaching for peace, our classrooms are designed to encourage peace and harmony within the classroom community. Classrooms for our younger students contain “peace corners,” where students can go for a quiet moment to help them feel centered and ready-to-learn, or where two students can speak together to resolve differences. At all levels, lessons are given on “grace and courtesy,” a Montessori expression used to help students reflect on and learn how to be respectful and at peace with themselves and with others. Peace education is also evident in our approach to discipline, which is non-punitive, emphasizes protection of civil rights, and encourages students to work together to find peaceful resolution to conflicts.

A Commitment to Social Justice is developed through social contracts which are created at the beginning of each year and define the expectations and conditions for peaceful, respectful, and productive learning environments. This process provides opportunities for students to articulate and deepen their thinking regarding social justice in the school setting and beyond.

Race-related events that received specific and intentional notice by the greater society in 2020, and continue to this day, put newfound emphasis on racial injustice in the United States and confirmed the need to explicitly teach about social justice issues, systemic racism, and our responsibility for addressing it. While our Montessori pedagogy ensures that students have a sense of social justice in general terms, living in a community with limited racial diversity can make societal inequities less obvious on a day-to-day basis. River Valley continues to renew and strengthen its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice and especially for supporting students as they take responsibility for this work as well.

What Our Logo is About
Our logo is a representation of Montessori’s Five Great Lessons and was designed by Libby Delana, a Newburyport resident. In our logo, a child is juggling five objects representing Montessori’s Five Great Lessons: the world represents the Story of Creation, the shell represents the Coming of Life, the hand represents the Story of Humans, the hieroglyphics represent the Story of Language, and the infinity sign represents the Story of Numbers.

Montessori uses its Five Great Lessons to inspire and interest children. Through the vastness of the tales, children are presented with the keys to all the sciences, providing a comprehensive framework to demonstrate how the sciences, art, history, language, and geography are interrelated. From that point, students are introduced to increasing levels of detail and complexity within these broad areas.
Accountability
Charter schools are held to strict accountability requirements that cover three critical areas: faithfulness to the school’s mission, academic success, and organizational viability. Charter schools are required to write accountability plans that guide assessment of the school’s mission and key design features over a five year period. The 2019-2024 Accountability Plan was approved in March of 2020 by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Other programming areas are evaluated via Common Performance Criteria determined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Common Performance Criteria include ten criteria that have been identified as critical to the success of charter schools and include:

- Mission and key design features
- Access and equity
- Compliance
- Dissemination
- Student performance
- Program delivery
- Culture and family engagement
- Capacity
- Governance
- Finance

Every year the school submits an annual report to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Charter School Office. Every five years the school goes through a charter renewal process and is assessed to make sure it is meeting the terms of its charter. River Valley is currently in its fifth charter term. A copy of the most recent charter renewal document and the annual report are available on the school’s website. Individuals can also request copies from the front office.

Individual student performance is assessed at River Valley through the following:

Standardized Assessments
The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests are administered in grades 3-8 each spring in subjects as required by the DESE. Results are distributed to parents/guardians the following fall. Student scores are placed in performance categories: Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Partially Meeting Expectations, Not Meeting Expectations. RVCS students take the MCAS assessment online. Our students’ performance on MCAS tests is generally similar to the local districts from which RVCS draws its students.

Analysis has demonstrated that students generally perform better the longer they remain at River Valley; affirming that older students work in the abstract better than younger children, as is required on both pencil/paper and computer-based assessments. This aligns with Montessori’s educational approach which purports it is appropriate for children to move from working concretely (with hands-on materials) to abstractly as they develop.

Internal Assessments
A cornerstone of Montessori education is keen observation of each student as they pursue their work. In addition to standardized assessments, we use a series of internal assessments to monitor individual progress including daily observation, individual learning plans, academic screeners, portfolios, and written assessments. These techniques are designed to provide a holistic assessment of student learning.

Formal and common assessments are also administered. Examples include the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Quick Phonics Screener, which are used to assess reading and/or comprehension skills. Formal writing prompts are given to students in the upper grades. Middle school faculty commonly administer quizzes and tests as well.

In addition to the classroom teacher, the student and family play a role in assessment as well. As each student matures, they play an increasingly integral role in setting their own goals, assessing their own work, and tracking their own progress. Parents/guardians participate formally three times a year in conferences.
School Administration
River Valley is comprised of a variety of members and groups. Each constituency plays an important role in the functioning of the school. In addition to the school administration, faculty and staff, there is a Board of Trustees, a Parents’ Alliance, and the River Valley Charter School Foundation.

The administration includes the Director of the school, Jonnie Lyn Evans, and the Assistant Director, Dan Bouchard. The Director and Assistant Director, along with the Special Education Coordinators, the Middle School Coordinator, the Technology Coordinator, and the Business Manager oversee the day-to-day operations of the school. In addition, the school employs a full-time School Nurse, School Counselor, and a part-time School Psychologist. This year administration is being supported by an Administrative Apprentice, Jane Patterson.

There is a Coordination Team designed to provide input and support communication between the teaching staff and administration. It meets with the Administrative Team on a regular basis to represent the perspective and needs of the four grade levels as well as other areas of the school (Kinderhaus, Elementary 1, Elementary 2, Middle School), special education, and the specialists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Directory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Jonnie Lyn Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
<td>Dan Bouchard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Coordinators</td>
<td>Patti Innes (K-3), Lisa Kelly (4-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Coordinator</td>
<td>Colin Vandenburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Administrator</td>
<td>Tricia O'Leary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Coordinator</td>
<td>Pam Dawe Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Katy Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Nurse</td>
<td>Kimberly Putney</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Jen Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>Deb McCrevan</td>
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Board of Trustees
Governance/Organizational Structure
River Valley Charter School is governed by a volunteer Board of Trustees. The Board has the ultimate responsibility for the success of the school and is accountable directly to the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to ensure that the terms of the charter are met. The Board sets policy for the school and hires a Director, who, in turn, hires the staff of the school. Working through the Director, the Board ensures that all laws and regulations are being followed and that day-to-day operation is consistent with the mission of the school. In consultation with the Director and staff, the Board develops and approves the budget for the school.

The Board of Trustees performs most of its work through committees. These committees, which include standing committees of Finance, Accountability, Development, and Trustees, along with ad hoc Complaint and Site committees, consist of trustees, parents/guardians, and members of the community. The Board has regular monthly meetings that are open to the public. The dates and times of all meetings are posted at the school and city clerks’ offices, on the school website, listed in local papers, and in the school’s email newsletter. The Board discusses issues, sets policy, and conducts their business for anyone to observe. Public comment is invited at the beginning and end of each meeting. Anyone with an interest in sharing in the governance of the school is invited to join a standing committee. Any board member or someone from the school administration can provide additional information about this process.
Board of Trustees Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>Pam Brockmeier Armstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice Chairperson</td>
<td>Albert Ting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer, Finance Committee Chair</td>
<td>Alfred Link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Anna Wetmore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee, Development Committee Chair</td>
<td>Tanya Murdy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee, Accountability Chair</td>
<td>Nina Keery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee, Committee on Trustees Chair</td>
<td>Amber Hewett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Catherine Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Erin Seaton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Kenneth Jackman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Mark Bishop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Erin Bradley Irose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Denise Herrera</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Eric Simone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Chris Whitford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Tim Letson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex Officio Member, School Director</td>
<td>Jonnie Lyn Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex Officio Member, Faculty Personnel</td>
<td>Lainie Ives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complaint Procedure

It is the policy of the River Valley Board of Trustees that all complaints be resolved as close to their source as possible. All members of the school community and all outside parties involved in a dispute are encouraged to deal directly with the other parties involved. A complaint should only move to a higher level of authority after direct communication between those initially involved has failed to produce a resolution.

The River Valley Board further holds that any party with a valid complaint should be able to find satisfaction in the resolution of their complaint. All members of the school community, as well as the Complaint Committee, will be expected to make all reasonable efforts to reach a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved. Any party bringing a complaint to the Complaint Committee will be made aware of all requirements for filing a complaint, as well as all avenues for resolving a complaint.

Parents’ Alliance

The Parents’ Alliance supports River Valley Charter School by:

- Serving the teachers and children through classroom assistance, and
- Strengthening the school community through school-wide activities.

The Parents’ Alliance is integral to the child-teacher-family triangle of learning. All caregivers of children enrolled at River Valley are members. As parent/caregiver involvement is known to have a direct correlation to student engagement,
every family is encouraged to contribute time to benefit the school. There are a number of ways to volunteer including the following:

**Service through Classroom Assistance**
Each classroom has one volunteer PAL (Parents’ Alliance Liaison) to communicate with the teacher and help organize classroom volunteers. Typical volunteer activities include:
- Chaperoning/driving for field trips;
- Sharing professional expertise and experience;
- Making classroom materials through laminating, cutting, photocopying, etc.;
- Assisting with classroom celebrations and Scholastic book orders;
- Reading with small groups;
- Book clubs; and
- Cooking projects.

**Strengthening School Community**
Families are encouraged to participate in school-wide activities such as:
- Celebrations, and social events;
- Parent/guardian education events;
- Volunteering to chair an event;
- Participating on subcommittees of the Board of Trustees;
- Assisting the Director or any staff member on short- or long-term projects.

The Parents’ Alliance continues to function differently during this school year due to the global pandemic. More information will be shared directly from the PA.

**River Valley Charter School Foundation**
The River Valley Foundation is its own independent organization whose mission is to protect and steward the assets of River Valley Charter School. The Foundation owns the school building (and rents it to the school) and oversees the investment and disbursement of donated funds to the school. Every year the Foundation commits to supporting educational programming at RVCS.
Going to School

School Calendar
School is in session for 180 days per school year. In addition to professional development days and early release days, River Valley typically has the following time off from school: Labor Day, Indigenous People’s Day, Veteran’s Day, Thanksgiving, Winter Break, Martin Luther King Day, President’s Day, February Break, Patriot’s Day, Spring Break, Memorial Day, and Juneteenth if it falls during the school year. Please refer to the 2022-2023 school calendar in the APPENDIX.

School Attendance

Please ensure your child’s social and academic progress by avoiding unnecessary absences, tardies, or dismissals. Attendance is one of the measures by which the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) holds River Valley accountable. Every absence, those that are excused, as well as those that are not excused, are included in the State’s accountability measure. Often, River Valley does not meet the State’s expectations for attendance. Our goal is to meet this measure every year. As such, we take absenteeism very seriously. When necessary, RVCS will address student absences by contacting the local Truancy Officer or by filing a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) report with the local court system. The purpose is to help families find support for chronic absenteeism.

We acknowledge that the school upholds a strict stay-home-when-sick policy. During the pandemic this was especially important and served to reinforce our commitment to this policy. In addition to reducing the risk of the spread of COVID-19, staying home while sick ensures that exposure to all colds and illness by students and faculty is reduced. It is especially important for us to keep teachers healthy so they can be in school teaching children, and other students in school so they can be learning.

Absences
Massachusetts General Law establishes the standards for school attendance, and River Valley is required to operate under these laws. Students at River Valley are expected to attend school each day of the school year unless there is an extreme emergency or personal illness. Excusable absences include: family emergencies, illness, COVID infection, religious holidays, and court appearances. All other absences are considered unexcused or truant by DESE. This includes absences for family vacations regardless of their educational quality and/or student work completed during the vacation. When in doubt, please keep a sick child home until you can confer with the school nurse about your child’s attendance.

Non-Medical Absences
When students miss school for non-medical or non-emergency reasons, it impacts both the teachers and the other students. Much of the classroom work at River Valley is collaborative and/or team-based and absences unfairly compromise the work of the entire team when one member is not at school. River Valley does not sanction family vacations during regular school days and believes that it is not appropriate for teachers to assume additional responsibilities when a family takes vacation during regular school days. RVCS teachers are not responsible for providing work, makeup assignments, or additional afterschool support should families remove their children from school for vacations.

Excessive absence is defined as absences that represent more than 10% of the school year. In the event a student will be out of school for any reason other than illness or a family emergency, the parent/guardian is requested to contact the front office. Whenever a student is absent for five consecutive days River Valley requires the student be escorted to school upon their return. If the absence was related to a non-COVID health issue, the parent/guardian will meet with the school nurse. If the absence is for a non-medical reason, the parent/guardian is asked to meet with school administration unless prior communication has occurred. Whenever a child is absent, and the front office has not received prior notification, the school will reach out to parents/caregivers. If your child is unable to attend school because of illness or for an appointment, please utilize our online notification system, PickUpPatrol. Absence data is recorded in student files and reported to future schools and DESE three times/year.
Arriving at River Valley
Please allow sufficient time for your child to arrive at school on time and not feel rushed. We believe that your child’s feelings as they enter class can set the tone for the day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Hours</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Care (fee-based)*</td>
<td>7:00 am – 8:10 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Day</td>
<td>8:30 am – 3:10 pm (Drop off begins at 8:10 am)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Care</td>
<td>Available through the Boys and Girls Club and Newburyport Youth Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arrival procedures begin at 8:10 a.m. Families that drive children to school should drive into the school parking lot no earlier than 8:10am, proceed around the back of the school, and drop off at the far-left hand corner (near the school gymnasium). See picture below.

Drop Off Procedure

Between 8:10 a.m. and 8:30 a.m., River Valley staff will greet students as they are dropped off from their cars and buses. All students will enter through the main school entrance. Children arriving at school prior to 8:10am must enter through the Sun Door located near the Elementary 2 Science Room (front of building, far left door) and must report to the Before Care Room. Students are not permitted to wait in the front lobby prior to 8:10 am, even in inclement weather. Children arriving after 8:30 a.m. are tardy and must be signed in at the front office immediately upon arrival. Please refer to the RVCS Attendance Policy in the APPENDIX.

Tardy Procedure
Students who arrive late to school negatively impact the flow and functioning of the classroom and the learning experience for everyone. Further, prompt attendance is a life-long skill that all individuals must learn. River Valley expects all children to arrive on time, ready to learn by 8:30 am.

Attendance is taken promptly at 8:30 am in the classroom. Any student arriving after 8:30 is registered as tardy. Whenever your child is tardy, the school will communicate with parents/caregivers, tracking the total number of late
arrivals for the year. Like absences, late arrivals are recorded in a student’s permanent files and are shared with future schools and DESE three times/year.

**Dismissal**

Regular dismissal is at 3:10 p.m. Please do not dismiss your child for reasons other than medical or emergency reasons and avoid picking up between 2:45 and 3:10 pm unless it is truly an emergency. From 2:45 pm to 3:25, the front office personnel and teachers are busy in end-of-the-day preparations and cannot answer phone calls or accommodate change of routine requests.

When picking up your child by automobile, please drive slowly around the back of the school building to the gym doors and wait for instructions from RVCS staff members. **DO NOT BE ON A MOBILE DEVICE.** Signage on your dashboard/in your windshield with the last name of the students you are picking up will expedite the dismissal process. If a bus is in the school parking lot **do not enter the parking lot and do not pass the bus.** Children are frequently within close proximity of a parked bus.

Bus children will exit the building and be escorted to the bus by a staff member. By regulation, **bus transportation** is available only to those students who reside in Newburyport. Families residing outside of Newburyport must provide their own transportation. Both the towns of Amesbury and Salisbury have public bus transportation. As a will-stop-on-call system, the bus will stop in front of RVCS. Please contact the school office if this transportation option of interest and we will work with you to determine if it is feasible. The Salter Bus Company publishes its Newburyport routes and schedules in The Daily News. Those wishing to ride the bus must pay a transportation fee and register with the Newburyport Superintendent’s Office. On early dismissal days, buses will pick up students at RVCS at approximately noon.

Expectations for conduct on the bus are the same as when the child is at school. Violations of bus etiquette can result in loss of bus privileges and/or other consequences. Issues related to conduct on the bus should be brought to the Assistant Director. Issues related to bus service are to be addressed with the Salter Transportation Company directly. Their phone number is (978) 462-6433.

**For Walkers and Bikers,** there is a place in the Data Verification Form to grant permission for your child to regularly leave the school, unaccompanied. River Valley posts a crossing guard at Low Street near Perry Way beginning at 8:00 in the morning and then again at 3:10 in the afternoon. If you have a child who crosses Low Street at this point, please review the safety measures concerning traffic with your child and the need to follow the crossing guard’s leadership. A lighted crossing marker exists at the intersection of Low and Johnson Streets. Note that this lighted marker is used for identification of individuals in the crosswalk only and is not a mandatory stop for vehicles. Please alert your child of this so that they will be aware of the dangers of crossing at all times.

If your child is bicycling to school, please accompany them on their initial trip to school. Students who bike must wear helmets. Bikes can be locked on the bike racks located adjacent to the front door or on the far side of the playground. River Valley is not responsible for the theft or damage of any bike or related equipment.

**Change of Routine**

When an early dismissal for your child is truly necessary, please use the online change of routine system, **PickUpPatrol.** Changes of routine must be submitted if your child will be picked up by someone other than the individual who typically picks up. Students will only be released to an individual listed on their emergency card **without** a Change of Routine if there is a true emergency.

**Before and After Care**

Before and After Care is available through a partnership with the **Boys & Girls Club of the Lower Merrimack Valley,** located in Salisbury, and **Newburyport Youth Services.** The Boys & Girls Club provides an inexpensive, safe place for grade K+ children to learn and grow, and experience life-enhancing programs. Newburyport Youth Services, NYS,
offers programming for grades 6 and up. Both programs are accessed via a bus in the afternoon. Both programs offer programming on half days and vacation weeks.

**School Closings**
Emergency weather notification of school closing will be announced in the media. **River Valley typically follows the Newburyport Public School District’s cancellation and delayed opening decisions for inclement weather** which are announced on Channel 4 WBZ, WBZ AM Radio 1030, Channel 7 WHDH, and Channel 5 WCVB. Under most circumstances, River Valley will also contact families directly via text, email, and phone. Should RVCS decide NOT to follow the Newburyport Public Schools, as might occur on days that Newburyport has a scheduled half day, or if the Newburyport schools had a school-specific incident requiring them to close, RVCS will communicate via the automated text, email, and phone system. Please be sure the school has your up-to-date contact information.

**Personal Property**
The Montessori classroom is an enriched “prepared environment” of specifically selected materials that lead children toward abstraction of the concepts being studied. We discourage children from bringing articles to school that may distract them from their learning experience, such as toys, electronic devices, trading cards, fidget spinners, and cell phones (see cell phone policy below). River Valley is not responsible for the loss of these items. We welcome books or other supplemental materials which have been discussed with the teacher and are related to the work of the classroom.

All students will need to bring a variety of supplies to school. Many items, such as paper and writing implements, may need to be replenished during the year. Teachers will send out a recommended supply list at the beginning of the year. Should a family have financial or another type of difficulty obtaining these items, please reach out to Katy Field, the school counselor, for assistance.

**Lockers and Cubbies**
Every student will be assigned a cubby, or in the case of Middle School, a locker, to store outdoor wear and personal items. Students are asked to keep these areas neat and tidy. Cubbies and lockers are the property of River Valley and the school reserves the right to search student cubbies/lockers and their contents if there is reasonable cause to believe that the locker contains tobacco, drugs, alcohol, stolen goods, or any other substances or materials prohibited on school grounds.

**Appropriate Dress**
Children need comfortable and appropriate clothing in order to participate fully in all classroom and outdoor activities. Many classrooms require “indoor” shoes be worn in the classroom to help keep classroom floors clean, where students often work. Personal appearance, dress, or grooming must not disrupt the educational process or threaten the health or safety of any individual. The Nurse maintains a small collection of clothing items for children deemed to be dressed inappropriately.

**Lost and Found**
Parents/caregivers should put name tags or labels on student clothing, supplies (lunchboxes, backpacks, water bottles, etc.) and other easily misplaced items. Lost items are regularly collected from key areas (such as the playground) and returned if labeled. Unclaimed lost and found items will be donated to a local charity on a regular basis, typically monthly. Teachers and other staff are not responsible for students’ items.

**Snacks and Lunch**
Each classroom has its own procedure for snack and lunch. Throughout the year, however, the teacher may choose a more managed approach to better accommodate the classroom academic activities. If you send a snack from home, **please refrain from sending in sweets such as candy and soda**. Please send your child with food items that do not need to be reheated. If your family is food insecure, please reach out to the School Counselor, Katy Field, for assistance.
Of important note - birthday celebrations are not to include food items.

Many students bring lunch from home to eat at school. We encourage families to join our commitment to holistic education and ecological stewardship and ask that families make healthy food choices and minimize trash by using reusable containers for lunches. River Valley does not have an onsite cafeteria, but a school lunch is available to every child in the school every day that the school is in session through a fee-based contract with an outside lunch provider, Pomodori in Newburyport. Pomodori has a custom menu specifically for River Valley students and makes this available for order online. Lunches are prepared and delivered daily.

A limited variety of substitute lunch items is maintained for emergency situations in which a student is in need. For example, if a lunch spills or is forgotten. Parents/caregivers and students should not depend on these substitute items. Parents/caregivers of any child who repeatedly requests a substitute lunch will be contacted.

River Valley will provide a free or reduced price lunch to any qualifying child based on the school’s Financial Hardship Policy guidelines. Financial hardship eligibility is determined by the Assistant Director, Dan Bouchard, in conjunction with the school counselor, Katy Field. Please contact him to have a confidential discussion about options available for your family. He can be reached at dbouchard@rivervalleycharter.org or at 978-465-0065, extension 142.

Food Allergies
River Valley Charter School has food allergy guidelines and a policy that informs how the school prevents and responds to incidences of life-threatening food allergy. The policy calls for all families to be mindful of life-threatening food allergies and the impact their food decisions can have on other students. The policy is summarized below to ensure that all families are aware of their role in the daily support of student safety.

For all Families:
- Be aware of the food restrictions in your child’s classroom.
- Ask your child’s teachers and/or the RVCS School Nurse for this information if you are not aware.
- Never send restricted allergens into school.
- If your child’s classroom has food restrictions, never prepare any food at home that will be shared with others.

All classrooms will have one of the following designations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Kinderhaus &amp; Elementary I</th>
<th>For Elementary II and Middle School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Child’s <strong>classroom is not designated allergen-free:</strong></td>
<td>My Child’s <strong>classroom is designated allergen-free:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I may send any healthy food (with the exception of sweets) into school for snack/lunch.</td>
<td>I may not send identified allergens into the classroom at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I may prepare healthy foods at home for classroom community meals and special events.</td>
<td>All food for community meals or special events must be approved by the School Nurse and prepared in the classroom or RVCS kitchen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I mistakenly send an allergen into the classroom it will be removed, and my child will be offered an alternative meal. I will be contacted by the teacher and/or School Nurse to review the RVCS FAMPP and my child’s classroom restrictions.</td>
<td>Classroom food restrictions apply to all field trips.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

River Valley Charter School
I may send any healthy food (with the exception of sweets) into school for snack/lunch. The School Nurse will inform me of the food restrictions for the classroom.

I may prepare healthy foods at home for classroom community meals and special events. All food for community meals or special events must be approved by the School Nurse and prepared in the classroom or RVCS kitchen.

If I mistakenly send an allergen into the classroom it will be removed from the vicinity of students with allergies and proper cleaning protocols will be followed. I will be contacted by the teacher and/or School Nurse to review the RVCS FAMPP.

Classroom food restrictions apply to all field trips.

For children with food allergies, the parent/caregiver is asked to work in conjunction with the School Nurse to develop an Individual Health Care Plan, called an IHCP, and Emergency Health Care Plan. In some instances, classrooms are deemed free from a particular allergen (e.g., peanuts or tree nuts). This information will be shared with classroom parents/caregivers and the room shall be clearly marked as such. It is imperative for the safety of our students that families are aware and abide by the restrictions in their child’s classroom. To read the full Food Allergy Policy, see the APPENDIX.

Technology Use
River Valley offers access to the Internet through networked computers in the classrooms for the purpose of supporting learning. Access to the Internet is a privilege. All students must adhere to the Acceptable Use Policy, which may be found in the APPENDIX. All parents/caregivers and grade 3-8 students are required to indicate their commitment to the Acceptable Use Policy before the child can access any RVCS-owned electronic devices and/or the school’s wireless internet access points. Violations of the Acceptable Use Policy are subject to lost privileges and additional consequences as appropriate.

Cell Phone Policy
With the technology available on many cellular phones today, students can be tempted to visit non-academic sites on the internet, use non-school related apps and/or communicate unnecessarily via text messaging, email, Snap Chat, Facebook, Instagram, Discord, etc. We have found, therefore, that cell phone use is often a negative influence on school culture and can distract students from their academic and community responsibilities. As such, RVCS prohibits the use of cell phones by students at school, unless specifically approved by a teacher for a specific project or assignment, typically for camera usage.

Cell Phone Policy
RVCS discourages students from bringing cellphones to school. The school recognizes, however, that for some families this is a necessity. RVCS will not be responsible for phones that go missing due to theft or loss. Further, RVCS limits cell phone use as follows:

- There will be no unauthorized use of cell phones for any purpose during school hours.
- Cell phones must be turned off during school hours.
- Cell phones must remain in student backpacks during school hours, including during recess and field trips.
If a student chooses not to follow the conditions outlined above, their phone will be confiscated. A parent/caregiver will be required to speak with school staff in order for the phone to be returned to the student.

Regarding this policy, we recognize that traveling to school to retrieve your student’s cell phone represents a significant inconvenience. Our intention is not to inconvenience parents/caregivers, but to remove the temptation to use a cell phone inappropriately during school hours. Any student who needs to call home is allowed to use a school phone. We ask that you speak directly with your child to be certain they understand this policy and how any violation will inconvenience their parents/caregivers.

**School Communications**

Effective communication supports the Montessori triangle of child, school, and parent/caregiver. River Valley provides a variety of ways to communicate to ensure a successful relationship including the weekly *Happenings Newsletter*, weekly communications from classroom teachers, the *PlusPortals*, and a school website.

The *Happenings Newsletter* is a weekly email notice with information about upcoming events. Parents/caregivers are urged to read this newsletter every week as it includes important and up-to-date information.

Every parent/caregiver and student automatically has a PlusPortal account. The Portal can be used by any parent/caregiver to access the school’s online family directory, calendar info, and other forms.

Additionally, River Valley’s website is updated periodically with public information about the school.

**Communication with Staff**

In the spirit of collaboration, if a teacher has a particular concern about your child, they will contact you directly to discuss it. Likewise, if a parent/guardian has a particular concern about their child, it is expected that the parent/guardian will contact the child’s teacher directly to discuss it. Family conferences are regularly scheduled three times per year and correspond with the distribution of Progress Reports. Additional conferences can be scheduled through your child’s teacher. Multi-family households are expected to participate in conferences together rather than in separate meetings.

The River Valley telephone system enables you to leave private messages for your child’s teacher on the teacher’s extension. Our goal is to return your call within 24 hours. Please do not communicate with staff via voice or text on their personal cell phones.

Mailed communication is sent to the child’s home address (though we don’t use postal mail that often). If you wish to have the information sent to an additional address, please contact the RVCS office in writing. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (*FERPA*), non-custodial parents have the same rights of access to school records as custodial parents/guardians unless a divorce decree includes a specific court order to the contrary. Therefore, if you are a non-custodial parent and wish to receive copies of your child's progress reports, please submit a request in writing.

In this day and age of electronic communication, it can be difficult to separate from work email at the end of the day. Please remember that faculty and staff have families of their own and we strongly encourage them to set boundaries on their work day. Expect a reply from faculty and staff when they have returned to their regularly scheduled work day.

**Classroom Observations**

As a Montessori school, River Valley recognizes the value and importance of classroom observations. Maria Montessori based her educational research and theories on careful observation, and this remains a central piece of the work of Montessori classroom teachers. We believe that our educational model has great value and significance in the 21st century educational climate. As a charter school, we strive to have a positive impact on efforts to improve teaching and learning, and we welcome the opportunity to demonstrate our unique public Montessori learning environments.
We host scheduled visits, including educators, prospective parents/guardians, and others to observe at any level of our school. Observations must be scheduled through the school’s front office in advance, and all observers will be given an Observation Form to assist them in taking notes on the environment they visit. The Observation Form explains in further detail the protocol for observations and is attached in the APPENDIX of this handbook.

**Curriculum Presentations and Parent/Guardian Education Forums**
Throughout the year, families are encouraged to participate in various curriculum activities, book clubs, and presentations offered by the staff, Board and/or PA. These sessions include specific components of the curriculum, Montessori philosophy, or informational forums. The purpose of these events is to educate families about Montessori education and design elements of the school.

**Traditions and Rituals**
In addition to music shares, education nights, classroom presentations, and dramatic performances, River Valley has two culminating annual traditions: the Eighth Grade Celebrations of Learning, and the Eighth Grade Graduation. The Celebrations of Learning (COLs) are a major element of the Middle School academic program and the culture of the school. They are a graduation requirement of all eighth graders and are the ultimate testament of what students learn academically as well as what they learn about themselves and their learning style from a River Valley education. During the COL presentations, the students articulate what they have learned and how they learn best, integrating high-level thinking and thoughtful reflection. Panel participants report admiration, respect and awe at the poise, eloquence and self-awareness of every eighth grade student. Any parent or guardian may attend a COL; the schedule will be available at the front desk in May of each school year. We strongly encourage parents/guardians of students in younger grades to attend at least one COL while their child is in a younger grade to gain a longer-range perspective about our Montessori program.

**Field Trips and Goings Out**
A central aspect of high quality Montessori education is providing students with opportunities to engage in learning experiences outside of the classroom walls. To this end, River Valley students frequently leave school grounds on outings and field trips. Field trips are planned to provide cultural, scientific, social or other educational experiences for the children and will be directly coordinated with an area of study or integrated into our curriculum.

“Going out” is a term unique to the Montessori philosophy in which the outside community becomes the classroom. Maria Montessori believed that these experiences encourage individual interests and responsibility for learning. Traditionally, the term applies to a subset of the classroom who plan the details of the trip.

Field trip notification varies depending on the type of trip. For example, walking trips and local van trips (within the Newburyport city limits) do not require notification for every trip. Parents/guardians will provide permission for these trips via the Online Data Verification Forms sent at the start of the school year.

For non-local field trips, parents/guardians will receive notification and be required to provide permission for all trips made by private automobile, bus, and van. In certain circumstances students may be scheduled to participate in recurring field trips. In these circumstances, parents/guardians will be asked to give permission prior to the first trip but not for each successive trip. (Please see the APPENDIX for the complete Field Trip Notification Policy.)

Field trips can be free, fee-based, or subsidized by River Valley Charter School, and parents/caregivers will be notified in advance of the anticipated cost of each trip. The River Valley Charter School Foundation, the school’s fundraising entity, recognizes the value of field trips and annually subsidizes a portion of our school trips. Families who find the cost of field trips to create a financial hardship are encouraged to speak to the School Counselor or the Assistant Director about their financial situation and River Valley will collaborate to find a mutual and confidential solution. Fees associated with field trips are not refunded for student absences and are non-refundable unless cancellation is initiated by the school.
Parents/guardians are frequently asked to help with driving on field trips. Drivers must participate in the Criminal Offender Records Information investigation before they are allowed to transport students. The Criminal Records Information requirements are described later in this handbook. Parents/guardians who volunteer to chaperone for field trips are expected to adhere to the Parent/Guardian Guidelines for Trips Outside the School. Please see APPENDIX.

Please note that while we place tremendous value on experiential learning, there can be times when participation on field trips and going outs is withheld and/or family supervision is requested. For example, students who have missed annual state-mandated testing (MCAS) may be required to miss a trip and finish testing, or students who have not completed work that is related to a trip may be asked to remain behind. In these circumstances, the classroom teacher will ensure there is an appropriate placement for your child during this time.

School Pictures
Annually River Valley contracts with an outside photograph service organization to take student photos for sale to families. Families will be provided with an order form in advance of Picture Day. For those who are absent on that day, there will be a make-up day, to be announced at a later date.

Student Directory Information and the School Directory
Directory information is information about your child that is generally not considered harmful or an invasion of privacy and that can be disclosed to outside organizations without a parent/guardian’s prior written consent. River Valley defines its Student Directory Information to include a student’s name, address, telephone number, email address, picture, parents'/guardians’ name, etc. Directory information is included in the school’s online Family Directory (via the PlusPortal) and available to every family in the school. If a parent/guardian does not want their child’s directory information to be included, then they must provide written notification to River Valley prior to the start of school. (See the APPENDIX for additional information about Directory Information.) The Online Data Verification Forms provide families an opportunity to indicate their preferences as well.

Student Work/Media/Photo Release
River Valley is eager to share the work of our students and staff. This means that students could be interviewed, photographed, filmed, or have their work publicly exhibited in the local newspaper, at local coffee shops, on the school’s website, on social media such as Facebook or Instagram, etc. River Valley gives families the opportunity to restrict the use of their child’s image via the Authorization section of the Online Data Verification Form. The school will take reasonable care to ensure adherence to restrictions. If a photo does appear contrary to family permission, RVCS will make every reasonable effort to cease publication or withdraw the photo as soon as the school is notified.

If a parent/guardian has not indicated a restriction (either via the Online Data Verification Form or in writing), then RVCS is free to use the student’s photograph in publications and media releases both inside and outside of the school. This policy does not apply to photos taken and published by individuals or organizations outside of the control of River Valley Charter School. River Valley is not responsible for photographs taken and published by other parents/caregivers, students, or outside organizations.

Parents/guardians can limit whether or not identifying information such as the student’s name, teacher, grade or age can be released with their image or work. With the exception of the local newspaper, the use of identifying information is typically limited to first name and last initial. If during the school year a parent/guardian wishes to change their authorization, they can do so by contacting the front office in writing.
Student and Family Support Services

Special Education Program
The Montessori educational model is well-suited to children with different needs and learning styles. There is an emphasis for all children to work at their own pace, using an individualized program and multi-sensory materials.

At River Valley, the Special Education Coordinators will ensure the special education programs are functioning according to an inclusion model, providing extra assistance in the classroom as defined by a child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). River Valley ensures that, for the maximum extent appropriate, students with identified disabilities are educated with their peers in the general education classroom. This requires ongoing consultation and collaboration between classroom teachers and special education staff. When necessary and determined by the IEP Team, and when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the general education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily, services may be delivered in a “pull-out” model.

Special Education Services include Learning Specialists, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Services, counseling, and any additional services as required by a student’s IEP.

In accordance with state and federal regulations, our inclusion program ensures students are provided with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The IEP developed through an IEP Team meeting includes the parents/guardians, a classroom teacher, and a special education teacher. Additional members of the team may include any related service providers, such as the occupational therapist, the speech and language pathologist, the psychologist, the school counselor, or a physical therapist and the Director.

If you have a concern about your child’s learning, please contact the Special Education Coordinators (Patti Innes for grades K-3, and Lisa Kelly for grades 4-8) directly to initiate the pre-referral process. A student may be referred for an evaluation by a parent/guardian or any person in a caregiving or professional position concerned with the student’s development.

When a student is referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education, the school district shall send a written notice to the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) within five school days of receipt of the referral. The notice will meet the standard requirement by both federal and state special education law (the Notice of Proposed Action and Evaluation Consent Form); it will seek consent of a parent/guardian for the evaluation to occur and will provide parents with the opportunity to express any concerns or to provide additional information on the student’s skills or abilities.

River Valley Charter School shall provide families with an opportunity to consult with the Special Education Coordinators or their designee to discuss the reasons for the referral, the content of the proposed evaluation and the evaluations to be administered.

In order to be eligible for special education services, a student must meet all of the following criteria:
● The student must have a documented disability.
● The disability must lead to a lack of effective progress in the regular education setting.
● The student must need specially designed instruction and/or related services to make effective progress.

District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP)
Massachusetts General Laws require the adoption and implementation of a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) which is intended to guide principals and general education teachers in ensuring that all possible efforts are being made to meet student’s needs in the general education classroom. The RVCS DCAP describes the school’s plan for addressing learning issues early, within the general education setting, and with a collaborative approach. A copy of the DCAP is included in the APPENDIX.
Student Support Team (SST)

A component of the DCAP is the RVCS Student Support Team (SST). The RVCS SST program serves as the school’s Response to Intervention (RTI) program. The SST team is an internal group of educators that supports classroom teachers in developing strategies for improved outcomes for struggling students. Following an intervention plan, the team reconvenes to evaluate whether the interventions were successful. The goal is to provide services within the general education classroom, abiding by regulations for the Least Restrictive Environment.

Should a classroom teacher, parent/guardian, or the SST team determine that a referral to special education is necessary, this can be done by contacting the Special Education Coordinator. Should an evaluation be appropriate, the school is responsible for completing the evaluation upon signed consent within thirty school days. Upon completion of the evaluation, the school will convene a team meeting to review the results and determine if the student meets the eligibility requirements for special education services. If the determination is yes, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed. Parents/guardians are important members of the decision-making team and their input is critical to the process.

Individual Education Programs (IEPs)

An Individual Education Program (IEP) is a legal document that specifies the services and accommodations necessary for the student to make effective progress. It is reviewed yearly by the team. At the annual team meeting, the team discusses the student’s progress, future goals and appropriate services and accommodations for the upcoming year.

The Notice of Procedural Safeguards document is given to each family with the Consent for Evaluation Form and is also available through our special education department, on the PlusPortal, and on the school’s website.

Special Education Advisory Council (SEPAC)

River Valley has a Special Education Parent Advisory Council, called SEPAC. The SEPAC is a group of parents/guardians who meet to discuss the special education services of the school. This group advises the Special Education Coordinators about services, education and the well-being of students with disabilities. It also serves as a resource for parents/guardians of River Valley children. All families are welcome to attend SEPAC meetings whether they have a child with a disability or not. Meetings are advertised to the entire RVCS community.

504 Accommodation Plans

If it is determined through evaluation that a disability is present, but the student is making effective progress in school, then a Section 504 Accommodation Plan could be warranted. This plan is a legal document that includes specific modifications and/or adaptations that will lead to student success. In order to be eligible for a 504 Plan, a student must have a disability which “substantially limits one or more major life activities” such as seeing, hearing, learning, etc. However, the student may still be making effective progress in the general education curriculum. The 504 Plan is sustained by the classroom teacher with the support and guidance of the 504 Coordinator. The plan is reviewed annually by the team.

School Counseling

The school counseling program at River Valley Charter School serves to support, encourage, and advocate for all students under the guidelines of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Using the framework of the ASCA National Model, the school counselor assists student growth in the areas of academic, career, and personal and social development using various individual, small group, and classroom guidance formats.

The RVCS counseling department encourages family involvement in their children’s lives and strives to promote positive relationships between students, family, faculty, and the community. Katy Field is RVCS’ main school counselor. She can be reached at extension 142 at the school.
English Language Learners
State and federal law require that students attending public school who do not speak English or whose home language is not English, and, who cannot perform ordinary classroom work in English, receive instruction that is specifically designed to assist them both in learning English and in accessing and learning subject matter content.

River Valley Charter School has a comprehensive plan for the implementation of an English Language Program. It includes policies, procedural guidance and forms for the identification, assessment, instruction, support and transition of English Language Learners enrolled at River Valley.

Regulation requires RVCS to provide school communications to families of English Learners to be written in a language understandable by the parent/guardian. As such, any parent/guardian in need of translation or interpreter services will be provided with said services. The Home Language Survey distributed to families upon enrollment is the mechanism for parents/guardians to indicate their request for school communications in a language other than English. At any time, should a parent/guardian request communication in another language in order to improve understanding, the school will accommodate the request.

Homelessness
The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act is a federal regulation that entitles students who are homeless to a free, appropriate public school education and requires that school remove barriers to enrollment, attendance and success at school. All children, including homeless children, have the right to receive an equitable and quality educational program including transportation, educational services, nutrition, and health services.
Expectations for Behavior

The RVCS Code of Conduct
At River Valley Charter School, our educational philosophy is to individualize instruction to the greatest extent possible. We recognize that every student undergoes a unique learning process, and that we must honor each student’s individuality. We also believe that our educational responsibility extends beyond academics to character development, including self-control, sound decision making and respect for others and the environment. In that spirit, we approach our Code of Conduct and disciplinary actions with the intention of providing an individualized response to each incident. Though illegal or egregious actions will require the school to abide by Massachusetts state law and due process guidelines, lesser infractions allow us to evaluate the circumstances of each situation and craft a disciplinary response that we believe best serves the educational interests of the student while protecting the safety and integrity of our learning environments.

As a Montessori school, our primary goal is to create a positive learning environment in which all students are provided an opportunity to grow academically, emotionally, and socially. In order to attain this goal, there must be a shared commitment among families, staff and students to understand and accept a balance between individual freedom and responsible behavior. As Dr. Montessori stated, “to let the child do as he likes when he has not yet developed any powers of control, is to betray the idea of freedom.”

The School’s Code of Conduct is intended to clarify student behaviors and actions that are encouraged, as well as those that are considered unacceptable in the RVCS community. The Major Discipline section of the Code also reflects the current status of Massachusetts law as it pertains to student conduct, and more specifically, the subsequent discipline that may be imposed when students engage in certain types of extreme or illegal behavior. The Code of Conduct has been reviewed and adopted by the River Valley Charter School Board of Trustees and supersedes any Code of Conduct previously issued by RVCS.

It is important to remember that the Code of Conduct applies to students in all school settings, including while at school, traveling to and from school, on school property, at school sponsored events and on school field trips. If misconduct occurs during any of these times and/or events, a student shall be subject to a disciplinary response from the school. Additionally, state law permits a school to respond to any incident that happens off school grounds or outside of school hours if that incident has a significant impact on the learning experience of students during the school day.

Students with disabilities and students in the pre-referral process are entitled to the rights and procedures afforded by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Respect, Grace & Courtesy
Mutual respect and a commitment to grace and courtesy among all members of our school community is the cornerstone of our interaction and behavior. We seek to acknowledge and honor the dignity and value of every school member. We strive to celebrate our differences and create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere through courtesy to others and respectful conduct.

A commitment to respect, grace and courtesy will ensure that RVCS is a physically and emotionally safe environment. In order to achieve this goal, all staff and students share several common core responsibilities:

- To act as kind individuals and refrain from physically or emotionally harming others
- To refrain from any actions that compromise the health or safety of others
- To accept differences and seek to resolve conflicts in a mutually agreeable manner
- To value and respect personal and school property
- To express opinions and emotions in a positive and constructive manner
- To always be honest
- To support other school members in their efforts to maintain a safe, positive and respectful school environment.
Student behavior that falls outside of these common core responsibilities is subject to a disciplinary response from teachers or administration.

Examples of behavior outside the common core responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Any disrespect toward staff members or students
- Mistreatment or abuse of school or personal property
- Abusive, profane, harassing or threatening language, either electronic, verbal or written
- Physical or emotional intimidation or aggression
- Minor physical assault, including hitting, shoving, kicking, biting, etc.
- Harassment, bullying or violations of civil rights
- Cheating
- Stealing
- Forgery or plagiarism
- Misuse of electronic devices or internet access
- Major physical assault with malicious intent
- Possession, use or distribution of tobacco products, drugs or alcohol (pursuant to M.G.L)
- Possession or use of any dangerous device or weapons (pursuant to M.G.L.)

School response to such behaviors may be informal or formal, depending upon the severity and/or frequency of the misconduct. The intention will always be to encourage growth and reflection on the part of the student in order to help them build the skills and judgment required to make better choices in the future.

Our procedure when responding to student discipline issues will always be grounded in a problem-solving approach. We will wait until students are not agitated or in crisis, and then hold a conversation seeking the facts of the situation and asking students to reflect on their actions. Below are some examples of the types of questions that may be asked during these conversations:

- “Can you share with me what happened?”
- “How do you feel about how you handled the situation?”
- “How could you have handled the situation differently?”
- “What impact do you think your actions had on the class/other student(s)?”
- “What do you think you can do to resolve this situation?”
- “What can you do differently in the future?”
- “What lessons have you learned from this experience?”

We value the voice of the student in resolving disciplinary situations and will encourage student participation in the process as warranted by each individual situation.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to keep the school and the child’s teacher informed about social, emotional, physical or medical events in the child’s life that may impact the child’s ability to abide by the common core responsibilities.

Repeated and/or significant misconduct will be recorded using an Incident Report Form. This form will be completed by the staff member most directly connected to the situation. A copy of the Incident Report form will be available for parent/guardian review and will also be kept in the student’s school file. A copy of the Incident Report Form is attached as Appendix B to this Code of Conduct.

**Minor Discipline**

Almost all of the disciplinary actions taken by RVCS staff are in response to minor infractions. Such informal discipline will often take the form of a logical consequence designed to discourage similar future behavior and encourage student growth, or to provide resolution of interpersonal conflict.

Examples of minor disciplinary responses include, but are not limited to:
- Facilitation of peer to peer discussions
- Limitations of classroom freedoms and/or privileges
- Restricted seating
- Temporary removal from the classroom or other educational setting
- Verbal reflections or apologies
- Written reflections or apologies
- In school or after school community service
- Meetings with school administration
- Meetings with parents/guardians and teachers
- Other appropriate disciplinary consequences

Teachers have the authority to use these types of consequences at their discretion. Our approach to discipline is to have the response match the circumstances, severity and frequency of the infraction, so each situation will be handled according to the discretion of the adults involved and the individual needs of the student(s).

A safe and positive learning community is best fostered when families support the school’s disciplinary response. However, should a student and/or parent/guardian disagree with any informal disciplinary response that is imposed; every effort should be made to resolve these concerns directly with the staff member who imposed the action. Nothing in this policy, however, should be construed as limiting the right of any student or parent/guardian to discuss concerns with appropriate school administrators.

For the complete Code of Conduct and information about how Major Discipline issues are addressed, see the Board-approved Code of Conduct in the APPENDIX. RVCS also has an expulsion policy that dictates how it responds to misconduct that involves weapons, drugs, assault on school staff, and student criminal or felony delinquency charges, findings, or admissions.

Special Education Students and Discipline
Students with disabilities have the same responsibilities and rights as other students and may be disciplined for the same behavioral offenses. However, certain Code of Conduct proceedings must be altered if the student being considered for suspension or expulsion is a special needs student.

The Administration and Special Education Coordinators are familiar with Chapter 766 Regulation 9 concerning serious discipline considerations. If the student facing a disciplinary hearing is a special needs student with an IEP or a 504 Plan, the Special Education Coordinator, the School Counselor or a trained special needs teacher will be included as a member of the discipline committee in order to ensure the student’s rights, and to make recommendations as to appropriate actions.

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
River Valley Charter School has a comprehensive Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan that describes the school’s approach to preventing, intervening and responding to incidents of bullying, cyber bullying and retaliation. Protection under this plan is afforded to all students regardless of their legal status as well as to members of the River Valley Charter School (including but not limited to educators, administrators, the School Nurse, bus drivers, support services personnel, coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals).

Some behaviors can be mistakenly reported as incidents of bullying. RVCS seeks to clarify the definition of bullying. Bullying is repeated, targeted behavior that causes harm, fear or property damage; creates a power imbalance; infringes on rights; or materially interferes or disrupts the learning environment or orderly operation of the school. Bullying is not teasing (if everyone is participating equally and no one is getting hurt), nor is it conflict (where there is an equal balance of power), nor is it a mean moment (when someone is hurting another on purpose in reaction to a strong feeling or emotion and it is an isolated event).

The Assistant Director oversees Bullying Prevention and Intervention and will promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyber bullying, and retaliation and take immediate action to eradicate the behavior and restore a
sense of safety for all students. RVCS is committed to supporting the entire community in understanding the expectations, implications and plans for dealing with bullying, cyber bullying, and retaliation. Please see the APPENDIX for the Board Approved Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

**Anti-Discrimination**
River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and federal law having to do with nondiscrimination. As such, all River Valley Charter School students and staff members are entitled to learn and work in an environment free from verbal, physical, or emotional harassment on the basis of age, ancestry, athletic performance, color, creed, ethnicity, gender (including pregnancy), gender expression, gender identity, homelessness, mental or physical disability, national origin (including language proficiency), race, religion, sexual orientation, special need, and military service.

**Sexual Harassment**
In May 2020, the US Department of Education released new Title IX regulations that establish how education programs that receive federal funding must respond to sex discrimination, including sexual harassment. River Valley follows all regulations as required by law.

River Valley does not tolerate any form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment can consist of, but is not limited to, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. If a student feels that he or she is being harassed because of their gender or sexual orientation, the student should speak immediately to their teacher, or to Katy Field, the School Counselor/ Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator, or another trusted adult in the community. Katy can be reached at kfield@rivervalleycharter.org or by calling the school at (978) 465-0065 extension 142.

See APPENDIX for guidelines and the RVCS Non-Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Policy and Notice of Civil Rights Coordinators.
Safety and Wellness

Health and Wellness
River Valley Charter School employs a full time Registered Nurse to:

- Provide nursing assessment and care for students who are ill or injured;
- Provide nursing support to staff and students with chronic health conditions;
- Maintain immunization and health records for all students;
- Oversee mandated screening programs consistent with Massachusetts General Law;
- Dispense required medication; and
- Act as a liaison to home, school, health care providers, and community.

In addition, a consulting physician is available on an as-needed basis.

Immunizations
Please be aware that River Valley Charter School must have a copy of your child’s immunizations on file before they can attend school. It is the policy of River Valley to enforce School Immunization Law, Chapter 76, Section 15 of Massachusetts General Laws. Section 15 states:

“No child shall, except as hereinafter provided, be admitted to school except under presentation of physician’s certificate that the child has been successfully immunized against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, measles and poliomyelitis and such other diseases as may be specified from time to time by the department of public health.”

For students who are new to the school, this information must be brought to RVCS before the first day of school.

For their own safety, as well as their peers, failure to comply with MDPH immunization law will result in exclusion from school if an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease occurs, to which the student or staff member was supposed to be vaccinated against, but was not. The length of exclusion will be dependent upon the specific disease outbreak and will be in accordance with MDPH regulations.

Medical Health Forms
At the beginning of each school year, families must provide updated health information to the School Nurse including information about allergies, medicines taken prior to and during school, concussion information, and recent illnesses or medical conditions. Massachusetts Immunization Regulations specify minimum immunization requirements for enrollment in public school. A physical examination must be on file with the School Nurse for each student entering kindergarten, first grade, fourth grade, and seventh grade.

Physical Examination and Concussion Education Requirements for After-School Competitive Sports Programs
In order for any RVCS student to compete in after-school sporting events against other schools, documentation from a physician of a physical examination that has occurred within one year must be on file with the School Nurse. Participation in intramural or enrichment sporting activities that involve only RVCS students, while they do not require proof of physical examination, is strongly encouraged. In alignment with MDPH, all school athletes (involved in after-school competitive sports programs) and their guardians are also required to complete annual training pertaining to concussion and sports safety.

Dispensing Medication
Medication may be dispensed by the School Nurse during the school day. However, school policy requires both parent/guardian and physician consent forms for long-term, regularly scheduled medicine. For short-term medication,
such as antibiotics, parent/guardian consent is required, and the prescription bottle is sufficient for physician consent. Over-the-counter medications can be dispensed in the health office provided they are received in the original container, and a formal medical order from a physician is in place. All medications and corresponding instructions must be delivered in person, by an adult, to the School Nurse or other authorized school employee. By law, the only exception for medication that may be legally carried by a minor is epinephrine or albuterol, and this is only permitted with advance written permission from a clinician.

Guidelines for Returning to School after Illnesses
RVCS requires that parents/guardians use the guidelines below in determining whether their child is well enough to be in school, with the ultimate deciding factors being the child's ability to participate fully in their work, and protection of fellow classmates and faculty/staff from infection. During the global pandemic, factors that impact whether to send your child to school have changed. Please DO NOT send your child to school under any circumstances if your child is ill. If childcare is a hardship for your family, please contact the school health office to determine if wearing a high quality, well fitting mask may enable attendance.

For guidelines on when to return after particular illnesses, the following standards are offered:

- **Bronchitis:** on antibiotics for a full 24 hours, free from fever for full 24 hours, significant reduction in cough
- **Upper Respiratory Infections:** free from fever for full 24 hours; resolution of cough
- **Chicken Pox:** when lesions are crusted over and new new lesions are not erupting (approximately one week)
- **Colds:** no presence of nasal discharge; resolution of congestion
- **Influenza (flu):** dependent upon specific strain and severity; generally 5-7 days, free from fever for full 24 hours, significant reduction in cough
- **Conjunctivitis:** when discharge from eyes has stopped;
- **For bacterial conjunctivitis,** full 24 hours after starting antibiotic eye drops; see physician for treatment guidance regarding viral and allergic conjunctivitis
- **Diarrhea:** free of diarrhea for at least 24 hours if caused by illness (this will be longer if additional symptoms are present)
- **Ear Infection:** on antibiotics for full 24 hours; free from fever for a full 24 hours
- **Fever:** fever-free for 24 hours without the use of antipyretic medications, (this will be longer if additional symptoms are present)
- **Strep Throat:** after treatment with antibiotics for full 24 hours, free from fever for a full 24 hours
- **Vomiting:** free from vomiting for full 24 hours, (this will be longer if additional symptoms are present)

**COVID Guidelines:**
Our unique learning style relies on shared Montessori materials in younger grades and close collaboration as the students grow. This regularly brings students and staff in close physical proximity, and can unintentionally result in transmission of illness in the classroom. At the time of publication, RVCS is aligned with Massachusetts recommendations for EEC and DESE regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. If any updates are necessary throughout the academic year, they will be disseminated via email, as in years' past, and posted to the school’s website.

**Concussions**
In compliance with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, River Valley Charter School has created a policy regarding the prevention and management of sports-related head injuries or concussions. Please see the Concussion Policy located in the [APPENDIX](#).

**Health Screenings**
The School Nurse provides various health screenings to students during the school year including posture, vision, and hearing, scoliosis, and SBIRT (for vaping, alcohol and drug use and abuse).
Medical Emergencies
In case of a medical emergency, the most expedient procedure for the safety of the child will be followed, with immediate attempts to reach the parent(s)/guardian, and then the emergency contact provided by parents/guardian. If the parent/guardian(s) cannot be reached within a reasonable timeframe, or if the severity of the situation warrants, 911 will be called and the child will be taken to the emergency facilities at Anna Jaques Hospital.

Controlled Substances
River Valley is committed to providing an alcohol-free, tobacco-free, and drug-free learning environment to its students. In order to protect the health and safety of our school community, River Valley Charter school prohibits the possession, use or consumption of alcohol, tobacco products, or drugs on school property or at any school function. A student shall not, regardless of the quantity, use, consume, possess, buy or sell, or give away any beverage containing alcohol; any tobacco product, including vapor or e-cigarettes; marijuana; steroids, or other controlled substances. Any student who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol prior to or during attendance and participation at a school-sponsored event or activity, is subject to disciplinary action. The Student Substance Use Policy is included in the APPENDIX.

Families are requested to refrain from the influence of alcohol, tobacco, or other drug-related substances when attending school events.

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting
Reporting suspected abuse or neglect is governed by MA General Laws and requires any staff member who has reasonable cause to believe that a child could be suffering from abuse or neglect to act as a mandated reporter. As a mandated reporter, the staff member must contact the Division of Children and Families to immediately communicate their suspicion. It is not the role of the staff member to make a judgment as to the validity of the suspicion. Rather, the Department of Children and Families decides how to proceed in a way that best supports the child and family.

Fire and Safety Drills
Fire drills are mandated by local authorities and are conducted in conjunction with the local police and fire departments. Drills will include randomly scheduled fire and emergency response drills. Teachers and students periodically review the drill procedures, which are stored in the emergency safety binder in each classroom. Every room in the school has an Evacuation Route posted near the door.

Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI)
In accordance with state law, River Valley Charter School must run criminal background checks on any volunteers (including parents/guardians) who may have unsupervised contact with students. The most common instance of this is when parents/guardians volunteer to drive for classroom field trips.

A CORI Request Form must be filled out in the presence of River Valley Charter School’s designated CORI-authorized employee. The individual requesting the CORI check must do so in person and be able to provide a photo ID at the time of the request. You will be notified by mail/email if the results of the CORI indicate an offense exists. CORI checks must be renewed every three years. Active volunteers whose status is up for renewal in the coming school year will be contacted by RVCS.

Fingerprint-Based Criminal History Record Information Checks (SAFIS/CHRI)
In 2013, a law went into effect requiring employees as well as any other individuals who have direct and unmonitored contact with students to be fingerprinted as part of their public-school involvement. River Valley Charter School has adopted a Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) Policy that requires all volunteers who will have unsupervised contact with students and/or will be attending overnight trips with students to participate in the CHRI background checks. Details about the law and information about the fingerprint process are included in the APPENDIX.
Emergency Evacuation Plan
Seabrook Station Nuclear Power Plant
The River Valley Charter School has developed a plan for the safety of students in the event of an emergency at Seabrook Station. This plan was developed in cooperation with the Newburyport Emergency Management Agency. If an immediate evacuation should be ordered for the general public when school is in session, students will be bused directly to the Reception Center located at Masconomet Regional School in Boxford, MA for monitoring and decontamination, if necessary, and then to the Host School facility located at Minuteman Vocational School in Lexington, MA to await pick up by parents/guardians or authorized individuals.

Minuteman Vocational School is located at 758 Marrett Road in Lexington.
- From Newburyport, take I-95 south toward Peabody/Boston for 36.3 miles to exit 30A.
- Merge onto Marrett Road/Rt. 2A East and travel 1.6 miles to the school.

Following the announcement by Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ authorities that an evacuation has been directed, parents/guardians are requested not to pick up their children at the school, but to meet their children at the Minuteman Vocational School. Students will remain under the supervision of River Valley Charter School staff until picked up by parents/guardians or authorized individuals. Parents or authorized persons must present identification and sign a release roster.

On-Site Emergency Response Plans
RVCS staff and substitutes are all trained on the RVCS Crisis Response and Emergency Preparedness Plan. This plan includes protocols for Evacuation, Reverse Evacuation, Shelter in Place, Lockdown, and Medical Emergency. All staff receive periodic training from the Newburyport Police Department regarding response protocols for armed intruders as well as annual on-site school-based training. RVCS has three official evacuation sites in close proximity to the school building.

Faculty advise and inform students about emergency procedures based on their developmental needs. In general, RVCS does not practice simulated active shooter drills or other drills that could cause unease and/or anxiety among students. Staff are trained and work closely with students to teach them that the number one priority in an emergency is to listen to the adult in charge.

Fire, Weapons, Illegal Substances, and Tobacco
Possession or use of fire, weapons of any kind, illegal substances, or tobacco products within the school building, school facilities, or on school grounds or school buses by any individual – including school personnel, students, and families – is prohibited at all times. For additional information, please see the APPENDIX.
Admission, Enrollment and Class Placement

Fair and Open Admissions
River Valley Charter School accepts applications from any child meeting the school’s age/grade completion requirements, in grades K-8 from Massachusetts. River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and federal law having to do with non-discrimination on the basis of age, ancestry, athletic performance, color, creed, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, homelessness, mental or physical disability, national original, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, prior academic achievement, race, religion, sexual orientation, and special needs in its educational programs and activities. In addition, Montessori experience is neither required nor used as a selection preference.

Lottery Process
River Valley Charter School is chartered to enroll a maximum of 288 students. Each year, River Valley Charter School offers admission mainly to students at the Kinderhaus level. However, the school may offer admission to older students from the waitlist, should an opening occur in grades 1 through 8. If the annual recruitment period produces more applications than there are openings in any grade, the school runs a public lottery, a random selection process that results in a completely unbiased ranking of applicants within each age/grade.

All applicants not selected in the enrollment lottery are placed on a waiting list in the order the names were selected while also taking into account sibling and resident preference. Anytime that the principal enrollment process fails to produce an adequate number of enrolled students, the lottery process may be repeated if a waiting list does not exist.

Waitlists
Whenever there is an opening in grades K-4, RVCS will backfill the position with a student from the waitlist of the same grade as the withdrawal, through February 15th of the school year. Whenever there are openings in grades K-4 after February 15th RVCS will fill the opening with a student in the same cohort at the start of the next school year. For example, if a 3rd grader withdraws on March 1st, the opening will be filled with a 4th grade at the start of the next school year.

Whenever there is an opening in grades 5-8 through February 15th, RVCS will only fill the position with a student from the waitlist taking into consideration the following: overall school enrollment, ideal cohort size (32 students), academic programming, staffing, and/or financial considerations. No student will be admitted ahead of other eligible students on the waitlist unless said student is either a sibling of a currently attending student or a resident of the chartered towns. Offers of admission will be made via phone or email and are valid for five school days during the school year and for five business days during the summer. If a parent/guardian does not respond to the offer within the time frame, the applicant’s name will be removed from the waitlist.

Students who are offered admission and accept the offer of admission but do not attend school within the first ten days of their anticipated start date (e.g., the first day of school), in accordance with the school’s attendance policy, will forgo their spot.

Siblings of future students, i.e., students who have been offered a position but have not yet attended RVCS, move to the sibling list for that age group once the enrollee begins attending River Valley Charter School.

Student Placement Process
The placement of students in a Montessori classroom at RVCS is a process that is important for the creation of a learning community that is balanced and representative of all types of learners and consists of mixed ages. Our professional faculty members are the most familiar with each child in the classroom settings and with a team approach are in the best position to recommend individual/teacher placements. The process requires consideration of current classroom
dynamics, the child’s work habits and learning style, and our overall classroom goal of creating a wholesome, heterogeneous environment representing the diversity of the community-at-large to the best degree possible in all classrooms.

Throughout our placement procedure, all children are given equal consideration in the placement process. In our Montessori classrooms, where each child benefits from the mixed age groupings and a multi-year placement, we anticipate that new friendships and academic work partners will develop.

The placement team consists of sending and receiving teachers, special education teachers, administration, and other professional faculty as deemed necessary by the placement team. Family input regarding any unique characteristics that the sending teacher is not already aware of may be submitted in writing by April 1st to the School Director to share at the team meetings. We ask that families do not request a specific teacher in this process. Families will be notified in writing about their child’s placement for the upcoming school year in August.

All classes are engaged in “move-up” events and activities during the last two months of school. Regardless of placement, students visit other classrooms and engage in sharing events that allow them to become familiar with other classrooms in our school. Parents/guardians are also given an opportunity to learn about the four levels in the school (Kinderhaus, Elementary 1, Elementary 2, and Middle School) during the school year. The Kinderhaus program hosts a Kinderhaus orientation in the spring prior to the start of the school year. Families of transitioning E1 and E2 students are invited in during the late winter/early spring each year to hear about what they can expect when their child transitions to a subsequent level. Middle school staff also host 6th grade families to an orientation to the middle school.

Promotion and Retention
River Valley Charter School is responsible for the educational placement of all its students, including both classroom and grade level assignments. Every effort will be given to ensure that each child will be placed in the most effective and suitable learning environment and will receive educational services in accordance with their academic, social and emotional development. Montessori education will be at the core of these environments and services, but the school provides and endorses a variety of educational services designed to promote success for all students.

Grade level retention at River Valley is seen as an option of last resort. Early identification of student learning struggles and active intervention and support on the part of River Valley staff will be employed to assure that every student is given the best opportunity for success each academic year.

Promotion and retention decisions will be made on an individual case basis. Retention deliberations and recommendations will be a collaborative team effort involving: family, teacher, the Director, and, when applicable, other professional staff and student input. The Director will make the final promotion/retention decision which may, if the family chooses, be appealed in writing to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Procedures and Timetable
1. If the student is failing to make normal academic or social/emotional progress, the parents/guardians will be notified at the November progress report conferences, so that the school and family may cooperate in helping them achieve greater success. This communication is not to discuss retention, but to facilitate working as a team to help the student succeed.

2. Prior to any student being considered for retention, the conditions and challenges faced by the student must be referred to the RVCS Student Support Team (SST) along with documentation supporting these concerns. This referral is communicated to parents/guardians. The SST will develop a series of intervention strategies that will be implemented and documented by the teachers. (See the SST process described in the previous section.)
3. If retention is being considered after these interventions, families will be notified at or by the March progress report conferences. Documentation will be provided to parents/guardians of the interventions implemented by classroom teachers, support staff and the SST.

4. In the case that retention is being considered, the Director or designee will direct that a student profile be developed. The profile will include at least the following:
   ● Student’s age appropriate grade level
   ● Student’s academic history (demonstrated through progress reports and/or other artifacts)
   ● Student’s attendance record
   ● Student’s conduct record
   ● Diagnostic, standardized and academic assessment record
   ● Parent/guardian, teacher and, if applicable, student comments outlining the primary reasons that retention is being considered.
   ● Intervention measures
   ● Brief history of home/school communications
   ● Other information as reasonably requested by the family, the Director or his/her designee.

5. After the March progress reports and prior to May 15th, a conference among teacher(s), the Director and family will be scheduled. A draft recommendation about retention will be made at the conference.

6. The Director will notify the family of their final retention decision in writing. This decision will be communicated to families no later than June 1st. Written and electronic communication will be added to the student’s record to document the decision-making process.

7. Parents/guardians have the right to appeal, in writing, the retention decision to the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) within thirty days of the written notification date. Details of this process will be provided to the family should such an appeal be considered.
WHAT OUR LOGO IS ABOUT

Montessori’s Five Great Lessons
Our logo is a representation of Montessori’s Five Great Lessons and was designed by Libby Delana, a Newburyport resident. The child, as the focus, is juggling five objects – the World representing the Story of Creation, the Shell representing the Coming of Life, the Hand representing the Story of Humans, the Hieroglyphics representing the Story of Language, and the Infinity representing the Story of Numbers. Montessori uses its Five Great Lessons as an introduction to all topics, providing a “Big Picture” to demonstrate how the sciences, art, history, language, and geography are interrelated. From that point, students are introduced to increasing levels of detail and complexity within these broad areas.

The Story of the Creation of the Universe describes how minerals and chemicals formed the elements; how matter transforms to three states of solid, liquid, and gas; how particles joined together and formed the earth; how heavier particles sank to the earth’s core and volcanoes erupted; how mountains were formed, and the atmosphere condensed into rain, creating oceans, lakes, and rivers. From this story, students are introduced to lessons in physics, astronomy, geology, and chemistry. For example, they learn about light, heat, convection currents, gravity, galaxies, planetary systems, the earth’s crust, volcanoes, erosion, climate and physical geography.

The Coming of Life explains how single-cell and multi-cell forms of life became embedded in the bottom of the sea and formed fossils. It traces the Paleozoic, Mesozoic, and the Cenozoic periods, beginning with the kingdom of trilobites and ending with human beings. The teacher indicates on a time line where vertebrates began, followed by fish and plants, then amphibians, reptiles, and birds and mammals. This lesson is the basis for lessons in chemistry, nutrition, categories of animals and plants, care and requirements of different animals, and their interrelationship with an ecological system. Students are introduced to formal scientific language of zoology, botany, and anthropology.

The Story of Humans introduces human beings and their unique endowments of intellect and will. The aim is for the children to imagine what life was like for early humans. This lesson is the basis for lessons in prehistory and the emergence of ancient civilizations. Students are introduced to an analytical tool to compare cultures. They learn how climate and topography influence culture and political geography.

The Story of Language describes the origin, structure, and types of writing and speaking. It begins with a discussion of the Egyptians, who had two kinds of symbols, one for ideas and one for sounds. The story goes on to describe the Phoenicians, who used the Egyptian’s sound pictures but not their idea pictures. Next, it describes contributions of the Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans. From this lesson, students use grammar materials, which help them examine how language is put together, and refine capitalization and punctuation. Students are introduced to the study of the origin of English words from other languages, the meanings of prefixes and suffixes and different forms of writing such as poetry, narrative, and plays. Older children may study Egyptian hieroglyphics or Native American picture writing.

The Story of Numbers emphasizes how human beings needed a language for their inventions to convey measurement and how things were made. The story describes how the Sumerians and Babylonians had a number system based on sixty, which is the reason for our sixty-second minute and sixty-minute hour. Greek, Roman and Chinese numbers are introduced. The story describes how our Arabic numerals are similar to numbers found in a cave in India from two thousand years ago. These Indian numerals had something that no other number system had, the zero. This story is the basis for the children’s learning of mathematics, which is integrated into all studies. For example, large numbers are needed in measuring time and space in astronomy, negative numbers are needed when measuring temperature changes; triangulation is needed to reestablish property boundaries after the Nile flooded ancient Egypt.
COMPLAINT POLICY
May 6, 2015

It is the policy of the RVCS Board of Trustees that all complaints should be resolved as close to their source as possible. All members of the school community and all outside parties involved in a dispute are encouraged to deal directly with the other parties involved. Any complaint should only move to a higher level of authority after direct communications between those initially involved fail to produce a resolution.

All members of the school community, as well as the Complaint committee, will be expected to make all reasonable efforts to reach a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved. Any party bringing a concern to the Complaint committee will be made aware of the requirements for filing a complaint, as well as all avenues for resolving a complaint.

Composition of the Complaint committee
The Complaint Committee shall be composed entirely of River Valley Charter School trustees. The Committee shall at all times include at least one officer of the Board. The Committee shall at all times be chaired by a trustee other than an officer of the Board. The committee shall have no fewer than five members. The Board will convene a complaint committee on an ad-hoc basis when a complaint is received.

Authority and Role of the Complaint Committee
The role of the Complaint Committee is to review a complaint that has not been resolved at the staff or administrative levels. The Committee must balance their duty to protect the interests of the Charter and the school as a whole with the concerns of the party filing the complaint. In general, it is the opinion of the Board of Trustees that the interests of the school and those of the individuals within should coincide if viewed from an appropriate distance. It is the job of this committee to find and take such a view. The committee can make recommendations to any party for corrective action. In cases where the committee feels the scope of the dispute warrants the opinion or review of the full board, the committee will prepare its conclusions, present them to the Board, and request a vote.

To these ends, the Complaint committee is authorized by the full Board to review the conduct, relative to a specific complaint, of all employees and representatives of the River Valley Charter School. The Complaint Committee shall be authorized to make recommendations designed to resolve existing complaints (and avoid future complaints) regarding staff conduct and educational policies. The Committee shall also have the authority to review the actions of any parent/guardian, student, or any other individual or group involved in a formal written complaint.

Notes Regarding the Nature of the Complaint Process
The Board of Trustees is aware that any complaint or issue that reaches the Complaint Committee level will naturally have a strong emotional element. It is the job of those on the committee to evaluate the issue in a thoughtful and respectful manner, without allowing the emotions involved to overwhelm their work. The Committee will be as impartial as possible and strive not to prejudge any individual or situation. Any party involved in a complaint should be prepared to present a factual account of the situation, to remain respectful of other people and other perspectives, and to allow the committee reasonable time to do its work.

Parties bringing a Complaint related to employment or involving an employee of the school should be aware that the School Director holds primary responsibility and authority for the oversight and employment of the school staff. The Board of Trustees is not involved directly in the normal hiring, firing, or other management of any school staff or employees other than the director themself. The Complaint Committee will respect this separation of responsibilities and may ask the parties to return to the Director to achieve a resolution of employee/employment related issues. This does not preclude the Complaint Committee, with a supporting vote from the Board, from making employment/employee related decisions in cases where such is warranted.
Steps of the Complaint Process

**Step One:** A parent, guardian, or other individuals or groups should contact those directly involved in the issue or decision. With concerns relating to students, begin by speaking with the head teacher. Communicate the complaint as clearly as possible and identify actions that will lead to a resolution of the issue. Work in a cooperative environment to resolve the complaint based upon the actions identified.

**Step Two:** If the complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction, speak with the Director of the River Valley Charter School and develop a plan to resolve the issue. Any such plan may require review and revision during the process.

**Step Three:** If your complaint remains unresolved after providing the School Director a reasonable amount of time to bring a solution to bear, notify the Chair of the Board of Trustees. You will be asked to file a formal written report detailing the specifics of your complaint and requesting that the Complaint Committee review your case. Your report must clearly document the efforts made to comply with steps one and two of this process. Each party named in your complaint will receive a copy of your report.

**Step Four:** Your written report will be reviewed by the Complaint Committee of the Board of Trustees. If the committee believes that more effort can reasonably be made to resolve the issue at the staff or Director level, it will return the complaint to the appropriate level. The committee will provide an initial response to your report within 10 days.

If the committee finds that steps one and two of this process have been exhausted, it will schedule meetings with all parties involved in the complaint. The purpose of these meetings will be to gather information, determine specific points of conflict, and identify possible solutions. The Complaint committee will review the conduct, decisions, and policies that were involved in the complaint.

The Complaint Committee may, if appropriate, schedule a meeting that includes all parties in order to mediate an acceptable resolution. Alternatively, the Committee may reach conclusions regarding merits of the complaint and present its own recommendations and conclusions. The committee will issue a formal written response to the complaint at the end of this process. The Complaint committee will attempt to issue its report within thirty days of receipt of the formal written complaint, but each complaint will warrant its own schedule.

**Step Five:** After completion of its work and the issuance of its final report, the Complaint Committee will report to the Board with an executive summary of the complaint and its resolution. If necessary, the Board may be asked by the Committee to vote on policy or other action items arising from the Committee’s conclusions.

A complaining party who believes their complaint has not been adequately addressed by the Complaint Committee of the Board of Trustees can submit the complaint in writing to the Commissioner of Education. The laws governing Massachusetts Charter Schools are M.G.L. c. 71 section 89, and 603 CMR 1.00. A copy of these laws will be provided by River Valley Charter School upon request.
SCHOOL CALENDAR 2022-2023

Aug 29: First Day of School

Sept 2: No School
Sept 5: No School - Labor Day

Oct 10: No School - Indigenous People’s Day
Oct 28: ½ Day - PD

Nov 10: No School - PD
Nov 11: No School - Veterans’ Day
Nov 21-22: ½ Days - Teacher Conferences
Nov 23-25: No School - Fall Break

Dec 22: Half Day
Dec 23-Jan 2: No School - Winter Break

Jan 3: No School - PD
Jan 4: School Resumes
Jan 16: No School - MLK Day

Feb 20-24: No School - Vacation Week

March 10: ½ Day - PD
March 23 & 24: ½ Days - Teacher Conferences

April 17-21: No School - Vacation Week

May 12: ½ Day - PD & K Screening
May 26: ½ Day - PD
May 29: No School - Memorial Day

June 8 & 9: ½ Days - Teacher Conferences
June 14: ½ Day/Last Day (w/o snow days)
June 19: Holiday (if extend)
June 22: ½ Day/Last Day (w/ 5 snow days) [change]

Please inform your child’s teachers if the calendar conflicts with your family’s religious observations.

River Valley Charter School
ATTENDANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Attendance
Regular punctual attendance at school is critical to a student’s academic and social success. At River Valley Charter School, we expect every student to arrive at school every day on time and prepared to learn. We also expect every student to remain at school for the entire school day. Only a partnership between the school, family and students will allow us to develop a culture that values the importance of education, and regular attendance is an essential element of this culture.

The RVCS school day begins at 8:30am and ends at 3:10pm. Students are expected to be in their classrooms by 8:30 am.

State law requires all public schools to collect and report student attendance data three times each year. This attendance information becomes a part of a child’s permanent record. Students with excessive unexcused absenteeism or tardiness may be considered truant and in violation of the school’s attendance expectations. State law defines truancy as unexcused absences totaling more than 7 full days or 14 half days in a 6 month period, or 18 full days in a school year (Massachusetts General Law 76: 1-2).

Absences from school will only be excused for the following causes:
- Personal illness
- Medical appointments
- Family bereavement or emergency
- Religious holidays
- Absences as approved by the Director

If your child is ill or contagious, please keep them home for the day.

RVCS is responsible to account for every student on a daily basis. All parents or guardians must notify the school before 8:30 if their child will be absent or tardy. using the online system, PickUpPatrol. If you do not notify the school of your child's absence you will be contacted by the school to inform you of your child’s absence and determine their whereabouts.

Students who are absent from school may not attend or participate in school events on the same day as the absence unless permission has been granted by the school principal or designee prior to the absence. This includes, but is not limited to: rehearsals, practices, athletic events, concerts, enrichment activities, and school sponsored social events.

Family Vacations
We do not condone family vacations when school is in session! In addition to compromising the attendance law, family vacations interrupt the educational process in each subject area in ways that make-up work cannot reverse. Teachers are not required to provide work in advance of a family vacation. Students should plan to complete all missed assignments on their own time upon their return.

Tardiness
Arriving to school on time is as important as regular school attendance. Tardiness results in an interruption of the learning process, often for the entire class. Morning routines and classroom meetings set the stage for what will occur throughout the day. A tardy student who is forced to play catch up begins the day at a disadvantage.

Please allow sufficient time for your child to arrive at school on time and not feel rushed. The feelings of the child as they enter class can set the tone for the day. Between 8:10 a.m. and 8:30 a.m., River Valley staff will greet the students as they are dropped off from their cars and buses. Carpool and bus students will use the main school entrance.
Children arriving at school after 8:30 a.m. are tardy, and they must be signed in at the front office immediately upon arrival. Late arrivals are recorded in a student’s permanent files and are shared with the DESE three times each school year. Students will not be marked tardy when the bus is late or there is a documented travel or traffic issue in the area immediately surrounding the school.

Tardiness caused by family emergencies, illness, religious or unavoidable circumstances needs to be accompanied by a note signed by the student’s parent or guardian. Tardiness caused by an appointment needs to be accompanied by a note from the respective doctor’s/dentist’s office. Students must be in school by 11:00am to receive credit for the day.

**Dismissals**

Please make every effort to have your child remain at school for the entire day. Doctor’s appointments and other outside obligations should be scheduled during out-of-school hours wherever possible.

Should you need to change your child’s dismissal time, or method of dismissal, RVCS must receive notification prior to 2pm on the day of the change in plans. This ensures that the office has enough time to get notification to the classroom teacher and your child.

**Consecutive Absences of Five or More Days**

Whenever a student is absent for five consecutive days, River Valley requires the student to be escorted to school upon their return. If the absence was related to a health issue, the parent/guardian will meet with the school nurse. If the absence is for a non-medical reason, the parent/guardian will be asked to meet with school administration unless prior communication has occurred.

**Excessive Absence or Tardy Procedures**

When excessive absences or tardiness occur, the following procedures will be followed:

- When a student is absent seven times, a meeting with parents/guardians will be held to evaluate what impact the absences are having on the child’s learning progress, and what efforts can be made to improve student attendance.
- When a student is tardy or dismissed early five times in a 30-day period, a meeting with parents/guardians will be held to evaluate what impact the absences are having on the child’s learning progress, and what efforts can be made to improve student attendance.
- For any student who is absent eighteen times or more at year end, a meeting will be held with parents/guardians to determine whether the student should repeat the grade and/or should be required to attend summer school.
- Massachusetts General Law provides public schools with options to address chronic absences and tardiness. Should a case of chronic absence or truancy occur at River Valley, the school reserves the right to pursue corrective action to the full extent of the law.

Advance communications with the school may prevent the necessity for these actions in most cases.
POLICY FOR THE MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION OF FOOD ALLERGIES

Food Allergy Policy
River Valley Charter School considers the safety and health of all students and employees to be of the highest importance. Due to the prevalence of food allergies and the health risks of an accidental reaction to a food allergen, the River Valley Charter School Food Allergy Policy is to:

- Support student & staff safety through protocols that minimize the likelihood of severe or potentially life-threatening allergic reactions
- Establish rapid and effective response protocols in the case of a severe or potentially life-threatening allergic reaction
- Conduct thorough professional development and training for staff
- Educate all RVCS students and families to help minimize food allergy risks
- Involve students in the management of food allergies
- Provide transparency regarding risks to the safety of students and staff
- Provide a positive and inclusive educational program for all students.

Food Allergy Management & Prevention Plan
In accordance with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and as advised by the United States Centers for Disease Control, River Valley Charter School (RVCS) has developed a Food Allergy Management and Prevention Plan (FAMPP) to apply all elements of the RVCS Food Allergy Policy.

The FAMPP is based upon the following five priorities:

- Active daily management of food allergies for individual children
- Preparation for food allergy emergencies
- Professional development about food allergies for staff members
- Education for children and family members about food allergies
- Creation and maintenance of a healthy, safe, and inclusive educational environment.

Priority 1: Create and Maintain a Healthy and Safe Educational Environment
River Valley Charter School will strive to minimize the risk to all students with life-threatening food allergies while also seeking to build student and staff skills regarding the management of food allergies. Prevention measures and food restrictions will be tailored to the severity of the allergy and the needs of the individual student.

As a Montessori school, RVCS holds student independence and sound decision-making as important life skills. Accordingly, we believe that students who are developmentally capable should be offered the support and trust to develop their judgment in choices to help manage their food allergies. Creating an implied bubble of complete safety within the walls of RVCS not only restricts the development of student skills in managing their own safety but can foster complacency if the allergen-free designation is seen as eliminating all risk. Since the school cannot guarantee the complete absence of known allergens, and since human error and accidental exposure will always exist as risk factors, we believe that creating an implied sense of complete safety could reduce daily vigilance and ultimately increases student risk.

The strengthening of student awareness and skills also brings added safety outside of the classroom since safety cannot be guaranteed on all field trips or life beyond the school walls. Since complete elimination of risk within the school walls is impossible, we believe that for our older students, an allergen-aware designation brings a higher level of vigilance than the false security of an allergen-free designation. This distinction between grade levels in the school is
designed based on the typical developmental abilities of children. In situations where a student’s developmental abilities fall below the typical range, additional precautions may be implemented that differ from those described above.

**Kinderhaus and Elementary I:** In general, for students with known life-threatening food allergies in grades kindergarten through grade three (Kinderhaus and Elementary I), their classrooms will be identified as free of known life-threatening allergens. This means that life-threatening food items will be prohibited from a classroom where a child has a life-threatening allergy. Classroom teachers will check food items brought into the classroom in student’s lunches/snacks. Although this approach and the allergen-free designation implies a completely safe food environment, the School Director, School Nurse and classroom teachers will provide additional information to all students and families in such classrooms regarding the remaining potential for contamination and allergic reactions. It is the belief of RVCS that transparency about possible risk is a critical element in maximizing student safety. Should a known allergen be identified within the classroom, that food will be removed from the room and an alternative meal will be provided to the student. The School Nurse and/or classroom teacher will contact the family who sent the allergen into the room to review the FAMMP protocols.

**Elementary II and Middle School:** In general, for students with known life-threatening food allergies in grades four through eight (Elementary II and Middle School), classrooms will be identified as allergy-aware, meaning that parents/guardians will be strongly advised to avoid sending life-threatening food items into a classroom where a child has a life-threatening allergy, unless an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) indicates otherwise. Families and students will be educated about the allergens and the potential risks to student health. Teachers and students will be expected to follow all procedures and protocols to minimize accidental exposure to known allergens. Should a known allergen be identified within the classroom, that food will be removed from the vicinity of any student with identified allergies, and proper cleaning protocols will be followed. The School Nurse and/or classroom teacher will contact the family who sent the allergen into the room to review the FAMMP protocols.

For all K-8 classrooms where multiple life-threatening food allergies exist, restrictions will be guided by severity and risk, with priority given to airborne allergies with a history of anaphylaxis. The School Nurse and Consulting School Physician, with input from the child's physician, will determine designations in the least restrictive manner possible while safeguarding the health of students.

For all K-8 classrooms, should the parents/guardians of children with life-threatening food allergies indicate in writing that they feel an allergen-aware designation is not warranted for their child, the school will have the option to use an unrestricted designation for that classroom.

Signs shall be posted in a conspicuous place at every entry point to the classroom and in the classroom advising that there are students with life-threatening allergies and indicating whether the classroom is designated as allergen-free or allergen-aware. The exact wording on the sign shall vary in accordance with the measures contained within students’ IHCPs and the school protocol.

**Community Food Sharing Protocol**  
The school-wide policy is that food sharing between students at lunch and snack times is prohibited.

The protocol for preparing foods to be shared with students with documented life-threatening food allergies as part of the curriculum or for community events, or for shared food activities that extend beyond one classroom, is as follows:

- No food may be prepared at home for the purpose of sharing with other students.
- All foods/recipes to be prepared in the RVCS school building will be reviewed for allergens by the School Nurse prior to ingredients entering the school.
- All ingredients brought into the school will be reviewed for allergens by the School Nurse prior to preparation.
- Staff, volunteers and students preparing meals will be required to wash hands, countertops, cooking utensils, cookware and bakeware with detergent prior to and after use.
Field Trip Protocol

- Teachers will notify the School Nurse of the date and specifics of the trip in a timely manner.
- All conditions relating to the field trip environment should be appropriate for the needs of students with food allergies. The location of the field trip should be assessed to be safe for the student with the allergy.
- Students with life-threatening food allergies will travel with their parent/guardian or a trained RVCS staff member for all field trip transportation.
- An RVCS staff member trained in the administration of epinephrine must accompany students with food allergies during the entire field trip.
- A registered nurse will be assigned to accompany the student if medically necessary.
- Eating is prohibited while transporting students on local or nearby field trips. Special arrangements and accommodations may be made by RVCS staff, in conjunction with the School Nurse, for extended trips or situations that necessitate the need for snacks or meals.
- Chaperones shall not purchase food for students while driving for field trips.

The student’s Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP) along with prescribed emergency medication will accompany the student when on a field trip or leaving the school grounds. No RVCS student with a life-threatening food allergy will be permitted to attend out-of-school field trips without a school-approved EHCP on file with the RVCS Health Office.

Maintaining a Positive Psychosocial Climate for Children with Food Allergies

All relevant aspects and provisions of the RVCS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and the RVCS Non-Discrimination Statement shall apply to all students, including those with food allergies. Through student and parent education, as outlined below, RVCS staff will make consistent efforts to provide emotionally, physically, and academically safe and supportive environments for all students and staff.

Priority 2: Procedures & Protocols to Support the Daily Management of Food Allergies

In alignment with the Montessori priority of developing independence and sound judgment in students, any RVCS child who has a documented food allergy will receive guidance and education from the School Nurse and classroom teachers regarding procedures and protocols designed to minimize risk of exposure to known allergens (i.e., the content of the student’s IHCP). This support will be tailored to the age and developmental abilities of each child.

At River Valley Charter School, each student at risk for anaphylaxis shall be allowed to carry an epinephrine auto-injector at all times, if the School Nurse and parents/guardians deem it appropriate. A medically-identified student may self-administer the epinephrine auto-injector if the School Nurse and parent/guardian deem it appropriate.

Procedures for Identifying Children with Food Allergies

- Parents/guardians are required to provide the RVCS School Nurse with a physician’s written diagnosis of each food allergy. If a child has more than one diagnosed allergy, a separate diagnosis is required for each allergy.
- Parents/guardians are required to give the RVCS School Nurse documentation from a physician about prior history and current risk of anaphylaxis. This information is critical to minimize risk of exposure to allergens. Documentation from a physician directs the actions staff must take if a food allergen exposure were to occur.
- Food allergy information must be provided to the RVCS School Nurse prior to the opening day of each school year. The RVCS Health Office will disseminate allergy information packets to all families, which will be due back to the health office, completed, one week prior to the start of each academic year. Allergy information packets will be issued at Kinderhaus screening for children with known allergies, and over the summer for returning students with allergies. A student’s Emergency Health Care Plan (described further below) will be reviewed after each reported allergic response, whether that event occurs at school or outside of school hours. Physician’s written instructions must be provided immediately after the diagnosis of an allergen for students already enrolled and whenever a student is newly diagnosed with an allergy.

Managing and Reducing Student Risk with Health Care Plans
An Emergency Health Care Plan and an Individual Health Care Plan shall be developed for every student identified with a food allergy with potentially serious health consequences. The EHCP shall be written by the child’s doctor and reviewed by the RVCS School Nurse. The IHCP shall be developed by the School Nurse and shared with the parents/guardians. This shall be done prior to entry into school for students previously diagnosed with an allergy; and it should be done immediately after diagnosis for students already enrolled but newly diagnosed with an allergy. No RVCS student with a life-threatening food allergy will be permitted to attend out-of-school field trips or any before or after school activities without a school-approved EHCP on file with the RVCS Health Office.

Emergency Health Care Plans
The purpose of a food allergy EHCP is to communicate known food allergy risks for a child and to establish a plan for responding to an allergic reaction. The EHCP, must be confirmed and signed by the child’s doctor and a parent/guardian. Each student’s EHCP will, at a minimum, include the following information:
- A recent photo of the child.
- Information about the food allergen, including a confirmed written diagnosis from the child’s doctor or allergist.
- Information about signs and symptoms of the child’s possible reactions to known allergens.
- Information about the possible severity of reactions, including any history of prior anaphylaxis (even though anaphylaxis can occur in children without a history of prior anaphylaxis).
- A treatment plan for responding to a food allergy reaction or emergency, including whether an epinephrine auto-injector should be used.
- Information about other conditions, such as asthma or exercise-induced anaphylaxis that might affect food allergy management.
- Contact information for parents and doctors, including alternate phone numbers for notification in case of emergency.

Individual Health Care Plans
The purpose of a food allergy IHCP is to establish and communicate day-to-day protocols for minimizing risk for a specific student with known life-threatening food allergies. The IHCP will be written by the RVCS School Nurse and shared with the child’s parent/guardian. In cases of life-threatening allergies, the IHCP must be completed prior to a student’s attendance at RVCS.

Depending on the nature and extent of the student’s allergy, the measures listed in the IHCP may include, but are not limited to:
- Implementing particular protocols for cleaning surfaces touched by food products.
- Implementing hand washing expectations, etc.
- Posting additional precautionary signs (e.g. in classrooms and classroom entryways).
- Posting and distributing prohibition notices for particular food items from certain classrooms.
- Prohibiting the sale or distribution of particular food items in the school.

Emergency Protocols and Standing Orders
At River Valley Charter School, the registered School Nurse shall prepare and update, as appropriate, but at least on an annual basis, written emergency protocols and standing orders in the event of injuries and acute illnesses, including anaphylaxis. These will be reviewed and approved by the Consulting School Physician at least annually. In addition, the Consulting School Physician shall also review at least annually the procedures for addressing incidents of anaphylaxis and the use of the epinephrine auto-injector. Such procedures must include accessing the community’s emergency medical system (i.e. “911”) and prompt transportation by a licensed ambulance/rescue service to an acute care facility for medical evaluation and follow-up.

The Consulting School Physician shall issue a standing order for the administration of an epinephrine auto-injector by the School Nurse for a student who has not been previously medically identified for prevention or treatment of anaphylaxis.
Priority 3: Food Allergy Emergency Response

In addition to the existence of Emergency Health Care Plans (described above), RVCS staff will be familiar with the following general plans for the preparation of known and unknown food allergy emergencies. Staff will be trained in the following communication protocol:

- Access the 911 emergency call system. Have an adult stay on the line until first responders arrive.
- Immediately contact the School Nurse (during school hours) or a School Administrator, by phone or in person.
- Collaborate with first responders to communicate with Anna Jaques Hospital and alert them of the pending arrival of a student.
- Contact parents/guardians to alert them of the emergency and subsequent actions.
- Remove other students from the environment.

River Valley Charter School is well situated to provide prompt response to a life-threatening allergic reaction. Newburyport’s ambulance company has a typical response time of four to six minutes, and Anna Jaques Hospital is located approximately one mile from the school.

Access to Epinephrine Auto-Injectors

Every child with a diagnosed life-threatening food allergy will have a designated epinephrine auto-injector in the School Health Office. Parents/guardians will have the option of providing an additional epinephrine auto-injector to be located in the student’s classroom. Teachers (or students, if appropriate) will carry an epinephrine auto-injector on all field trips.

Adult and junior-dose epinephrine auto-injectors will be permanently located in wall mounted medical boxes in two locations at RVCS:

- Outside the School Health Office (downstairs)
- In the “annex” hallway outside the second-floor school library/near the engineering room

Documenting Response to a Food Allergy Emergency

The RVCS Director, School Nurse, and staff will coordinate to take the following steps within 24 hours of a food allergy reaction:

- Call parent/guardian to follow up on student condition.
- Review anaphylactic or allergic episode with parent/guardian and student, and with student’s physician if appropriate.
- Identify allergen and route of exposure—discuss signs and symptoms with parent/guardian.
- Review actions taken.
- Discuss positive and negative outcomes.
- Discuss any needed revision to care plan(s) based on experience or outcome.
- Discuss school and home concerns to improve prevention, response, and student outcomes.
- Ask parent/guardian to replace epinephrine dose that was given, if needed.
- Ask parent/guardian to follow-up with the health care provider and share results with RVCS School Nurse.

Priority 4: Staff Training

The River Valley Charter School Director, in conjunction with the School Nurse, will train all school teaching staff, including Before & After Care staff, in emergency preparedness including response to anaphylaxis. Training shall be provided prior to the start of classes, and at least once during the school year for these personnel on the following topics:

- RVCS food allergy policies and practices
- An overview of food allergies
- Definitions of key terms, including food allergy, major allergens, epinephrine, and anaphylaxis
- The difference between potentially life-threatening food allergy and other food-related reactions
● Signs and symptoms of a food allergy reaction and anaphylaxis and information on common emergency medications
● Proper epinephrine auto-injector administration, including practice with simulators
● General strategies for reducing and preventing exposure to allergens (in food and nonfood items)
● Use of the “911” emergency medical system, and preparation for movement and transport of the student
● RVCS emergency plans, including who will be contacted in the case of an emergency, how staff will communicate during a medical emergency, and what essential information they will communicate
● RVCS policies on bullying and harassment and how they apply to children with food allergies.

At all times during normal school hours (8:10 am to 3:30 pm Monday through Friday) and at on-site school-sponsored activities, at least one trained RVCS person must be present and responsible for the administration of the epinephrine auto-injector, subject to Good Samaritan provisions. These personnel shall review emergency protocols on an annual basis. If trained school personnel are not available, any willing person may administer the epinephrine auto-injector. Good Samaritan provisions apply.

All staff will receive training on school protocol regarding food preparation and consumption including that no food shall be prepared or consumed by students outside of the general education classroom without the prior consent of the School Nurse.

In-Depth Training for Staff with High Risk Students
In addition to the general staff training outlined above, the School Nurse will review the IHCP and EHCP with the classroom teachers of each student, prior to the start of school, immediately after the diagnosis for students already enrolled who are newly diagnosed with an allergy, or prior to the enrollment of a new student during the school year. The School Nurse, in conjunction with the School Counselor, shall also provide training to these staff members on the following topics:
● Information about federal laws that could apply, such as the ADA, Section 504, and FERPA.
● Potential effects of food allergies on children’s behavior and ability to learn.
● Importance of giving emotional support to children with food allergies and to other children who might witness a severe food allergy reaction (anaphylaxis).

All staff who interact with a food-allergic student on a regular basis will be trained to understand the food allergy, recognize symptoms, know what to do in an emergency and work to minimize the risk of accidental exposure during meals, classroom and specialist projects, and at classroom-related field trips and social events.

The Director/School Administrator shall work with the transportation administrator to ensure that school buses are equipped with required communication devices and that drivers are properly trained to recognize symptoms of allergic reactions and know what to do in case of an emergency. A “no eating policy” should be enforced, with appropriate exceptions made to accommodate diabetic students and others with special dietary needs.

Training for Undiagnosed Allergic Reactions
In order to provide the most effective and rapid response to undiagnosed allergic emergencies, all RVCS staff will be trained to recognize anaphylaxis. Additionally, all staff will be trained in the administration of epinephrine auto-injectors, and to immediately seek the assistance of the School Nurse. (See also – FAMPP Staff Training Priority)

Making Outside School Users Aware of this FAMPP
RVCS will post a sign at its main entrance to alert visitors to become familiar with restrictions on classrooms that they will be visiting. In addition, any organization or entity that contracts to, or is otherwise approved by the School Director to use the RVCS facility, shall be required to provide written acknowledgement of receipt and review of the RVCS FAMPP, and agreement to abide by all allergen restrictions within the school building.
Priority 5: Student and Family Education

All RVCS students, whether they share learning environments with students with food allergies or not, shall receive age-appropriate instruction about the existence of life-threatening allergies and safe management of food allergies. This instruction may be provided by the School Nurse, classroom teachers and/or the School Counselor, and shall focus on increasing awareness and understanding of food allergies as well as building support and acceptance of people with food allergies. As a result of this instruction, all children, as developmentally appropriate, should be able to:

- Identify the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction.
- Know and understand the importance of finding a staff member who can help respond to suspected food allergy emergencies.
- Understand rules on hand washing, food sharing, allergen-safe zones, and personal conduct.
- Know and understand why it is wrong to tease or bully others, including people with food allergies.

RVCS staff members will be expected to model behaviors and attitudes that comply with student education, and will be expected to conform with the same classroom rules and guidelines as the students in order to minimize exposure to food allergens.

For students with known food allergies, RVCS teachers, in conjunction with the School Nurse, shall make explicit the following guidelines:

- Student should not share food with others.
- Student should not eat anything with unknown ingredients.
- Student should be proactive in the care and management of their food allergies and reactions based on their developmental level.
- Student should notify an adult immediately if they see or smell something they believe may contain a food to which they are allergic.
- Student should notify an adult immediately if they eat something they believe may contain a food to which they are allergic or if experiencing any signs or symptoms of an allergic reaction.
- Student should notify an adult immediately if they believe they are experiencing prejudice, discrimination or bullying related to their allergy.

All families of children with known life-threatening food allergies will be notified that the RVCS school kitchen is not an allergen-free facility.

Effective Communication & Education with RVCS Families

Successful implementation of the RVCS FAMPP requires support and participation from families of children with food allergies as well as from families of children without food allergies. In order to build such support, all RVCS families will annually receive the RVCS Food Allergy Policy and Food Allergy Management & Prevention Plan in the RVCS Family Handbook.

The RVCS Family Handbook will also include information to increase parental/guardian awareness and understanding of food allergies as well as the measures parents/guardians of children with and without food allergies can take to help minimize food-allergy risks within the classroom. Classroom teachers will provide information to all parents/guardians about what is being done to address food allergy risks in the classroom.

Confidentiality

Pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA), and other statutes and regulations, the National Association of School Nurses and National Association of Secondary School Principals’ School Guidelines for Managing Students with Food Allergies and other statutes and regulations, the confidentiality of students with food allergies shall be maintained, to the extent appropriate and as determined by the School and by the student’s parent/guardian.
Policy & FAMPP Evaluation and Review

This document shall be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, annually at a minimum, and after a serious allergic reaction has occurred at a school or at a school-sponsored activity.

***Important Information Regarding Life-Threatening Food Allergies***

The prevalence of food allergies may be increasing, affecting as many as 8% of children and 2.5% of adults nationwide. Food allergies result in about 30,000 emergency room visits and claim about 150 lives every year, with children and young adults being at greatest risk for having a fatal reaction. River Valley Charter School has students who have this severe, sometimes life-threatening condition. Schools are considered high risk areas for students with food allergies, with most incidents of accidental exposure occurring in schools. While schools will not be able to totally prevent allergic reactions, they can dramatically reduce both the likelihood of such reactions occurring and the severity of consequences if they do occur. Effective prevention and treatment plans, proper procedures, well-trained staff and clear communication can save lives.

The level of sensitivity and the types and severity of reactions vary considerably among individuals with food allergies. Accordingly, the school’s approach to preventing and treating food allergies must be tailored to those individual’s needs. At the same time, an undiagnosed student may experience an allergic reaction to food for the first time while at school and any allergic reaction can turn life-threatening. Therefore, the school’s approach must also be comprehensive.

Definitions and Background Information

Anaphylaxis is an acute allergic reaction that affects more than one system of the body. It is a life-threatening event. If someone exhibits difficulty breathing, a drop in blood pressure, or symptoms in more than one body system (cutaneous, respiratory, gastrointestinal, or cardiovascular) after possible exposure to an allergen, it should be considered anaphylaxis. Medical attention and treatment should be sought immediately.

Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP) is a set of procedural guidelines that provides specific directions about what to do in a particular emergency situation.

Epinephrine (also known as adrenaline) is the treatment of choice to prevent or treat anaphylaxis. It can help reverse the symptoms and prevent progression to other symptoms. It must be given by an individual trained in its proper administration. It should be given immediately. Any delay in treatment with epinephrine can be fatal.

Epinephrine auto-injector (sometimes called an EpiPen) is a device that is used for the automatic injection of epinephrine into the human body.

Food allergy is an abnormal, adverse reaction to a food that is triggered by the body’s immune system. The immune system responds to an otherwise harmless food as if it were harmful, resulting in the release of various chemicals, including histamines. The most common food allergies are to peanuts, tree nuts, milk, soy, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, and wheat.

Food allergy symptoms are manifestations of the allergic reaction in various parts of the body symptoms and may affect:
- The cutaneous system (skin inflammation, tingling, itching, hives, rash swelling of the lips, tongue and/or throat)
- The respiratory system (runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing)
- The gastrointestinal tract (abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea)
- The cardiovascular system (drop in blood pressure, dizziness, lightheadedness, heartbeat irregularities, fainting, shock)

Symptoms can begin immediately upon, or up to two hours after, exposure to an allergen. Some individuals exhibit initial symptoms followed by a second phase of symptoms two to four hours later. If more than one system is affected, it is considered anaphylaxis.

Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) is a comprehensive plan for the care of children with special health care needs, including food allergies. The IHCP is created by the School Nurse. IHCPs may include both preventive measures and treatment options.
Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP) is a student specific plan for the response to an emergency situation. The EHCP is created by the child’s physician. For a student with life-threatening allergies, EHCP’s identify the steps school personnel will take following an accidental allergen exposure.

Reference Materials

- Managing Life Threatening Food Allergies in Schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)
- School Guidelines for Managing Students with Food Allergies (NASN and NAESP)
- CDC FARE Program (Food and Allergy Research and Education)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA)
ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

A. Introduction
The use of River Valley Charter School computers, computer network, and Internet resources is a valuable element of
the curriculum and instruction in River Valley Charter School. The River Valley Charter School computer network is
intended for educational purposes. River Valley Charter School expects that staff will incorporate appropriate use of
computer network and Internet resources into the Montessori curriculum and will provide guidance and instruction to
students as to their uses.

Despite its tremendous educational potential, the Internet also presents the potential for security vulnerabilities and
user abuse. For safety purposes, River Valley Charter School employs both an Internet filter and a firewall. River
Valley Charter School maintains compliance with the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA). All employees and
students are expected to abide by the River Valley Charter School Acceptable Use of Computers, Computer Networks,
and Internet Resources Guidelines set forth below. Failure to follow the guidelines may result in revocation of
privileges and/or disciplinary action. River Valley Charter School is not responsible for ensuring the accuracy or
usability of any information found on external networks.

Parent(s)/guardian(s) will be given the opportunity to determine their child’s access to the Internet by annually agreeing
to the River Valley Charter School Acceptable Use Policy. River Valley Charter School will not be responsible for any
and all claims arising out of or related to the usage of this interconnected computer system.

B. Access
1. This Acceptable Use Policy applies to all technologies capable of accessing, inputting, or extracting
information/data from the school’s computer network, electronic mail (e-mail) and Internet.
2. Students and employees shall have access to Internet World Wide Web information resources through school
devices as well as devices brought to school.
3. Students must annually sign an Acceptable Use Consent Form to be granted access to the Internet via the
school’s computer network.
4. Via online Data Verification Form, parent(s)/guardian(s) must annually acknowledge and agree to have their
child(ren) abide by the Acceptable Use Policy.
5. The school shall provide each employee, where appropriate, an account within the school’s domain for storing
data/media as well as an email account.
6. Students will be provided accounts within the school domain for storing educational related data/media.
   Students will not be provided email accounts except in middle school.
7. The use of the school system and access to the Internet is a privilege, not a right. The school reserves the right
to limit or remove any user’s access to the school’s computer system, equipment, e-mail system, and Internet
access at any time for any reason. Depending on the nature and degree of the violation and the number of
previous violations, unacceptable use of the school’s system or the Internet may result in one or more of the
following consequences; suspension or cancellation of use or access privileges; payments for damages and
repairs; discipline under other appropriate school policies, including suspension, expulsion, exclusion, or
termination of employment; or civil or criminal liability under other applicable laws.
8. All student and employee electronic personal devices brought to school for use on the school’s internet must
be registered with the Technology Coordinator.
9. Student’s electronic personal devices, (including but not limited to: smart phones, cell phones, tablets, laptops), must be kept turned off at all times while on the River Valley Charter School premises unless given permission by a teacher or administrator.

C. Educational Purpose
1. The River Valley Charter School computer network has not been established as a public access service and is not an “open” or “limited open” forum. The term “educational purpose” includes, but is not limited to information management, classroom activities, media-center projects, educational research, career development, and curriculum activities using computers and Internet resources.
2. River Valley Charter School has the right to place reasonable restrictions on the material accessed or posted through the system into the intranet, e-mail, and Web sites. Students and employees are expected to follow the rules set forth in this policy and the law when using the River Valley Charter School computer network. The network will be monitored by staff to ensure educational utilization.
3. The River Valley Charter School prohibits use of recording devices by students or parents/guardians, except where the recording is associated with a class assignment or other approved school activity. This includes on-campus and off-campus school related activities.
4. The River Valley Charter School computers may not be used for political lobbying. It may be used to communicate with elected representatives and to express opinions to them on political issues.
5. River Valley Charter School email accounts, not your personal email accounts, are to be used for all school related communication with the outside world including, but not limited to, parents/guardians, students, co-workers, vendors, and partnerships.

D. Rights and Responsibilities
1) Free Speech - The River Valley Charter School computer network is considered a limited forum and, therefore, the school may restrict speech for valid educational reasons. The school shall not restrict speech on the basis of a disagreement with the opinions expressed.

2) Search and Seizure
   a) Students and employees should not expect any privacy in the contents of personal files on the school system. Administrators and faculty may review files and messages to maintain system integrity and ensure that users are acting responsibly.
   b) The school may examine all information stored on school technology resources at any time. The school may monitor staff and student technology usage. Electronic communications, all stored on the school’s technology resources, and downloaded material, including files deleted from a user’s account, may be intercepted, accessed, or searched by an administrator or designees at any time.
   c) Routine maintenance and monitoring of River Valley Charter School computer system may lead to discovery that this policy or the laws have been violated.
   d) An individual search shall be conducted if there is reasonable suspicion that this policy, school board policies, and/or the law have been violated. The investigation shall be reasonable and related to the suspected violation.
   e) Parent(s)/guardian(s) of students have the right at any time to request to see the contents of student’s data/media files.

3) Due Process
   a) The school shall cooperate fully with local, state, or federal officials in any investigation related to any illegal activities conducted through River Valley Charter School computer network.
   b) In the event there is a claim that employees or students have violated this policy they shall be provided with a written notice of the suspected violation and an opportunity to present an explanation.
E. Unacceptable Uses
The following uses of the River Valley Charter School computer network are considered unacceptable:

1) Personal Safety
   a) Students and employees shall not post or provide personal contact information about themselves or other people on the Internet. Personal contact information includes a student’s or employee’s home address or telephone number, a student’s school address, and an employee’s work address. It is not a violation of this policy to include the school’s return address on outgoing e-mail communications.
   b) Students shall not agree to meet with someone contacted or met online without a parent/guardian’s approval.
   c) Students shall promptly disclose to their teacher or other school employee any message received that is inappropriate or causes discomfort.

2) Illegal Activities
   a) Students and employees shall not attempt to gain unauthorized access to River Valley Charter School computer network or to any other computer system through River Valley Charter School computer network or go beyond authorized access. This includes attempting to log in through another person’s account or access another person’s files. These actions are illegal, even if only for the purposes of “browsing”.
   b) Students and employees shall not make deliberate attempts to disrupt the computer system or destroy data by spreading computer viruses or by any other means. These actions are illegal, and criminal prosecution and/or disciplinary action will be pursued.
   c) Students and employees shall not use the River Valley Charter School computer network system to engage in any act that is illegal; that facilitates gambling; or that violates any local, state, or federal statute.
   d) Students and staff shall not use the Internet or the school’s computer network to harass or threaten the safety of others.
   e) Misuse of the computer equipment or network including, but not limited to, deletion or violation of password protected information, computer programs, data, password or system files; inappropriate access of files, directories, Internet sites; deliberate contamination of system, unethical use of information, or violation of copyright laws is prohibited.

3) System Security
   a) Employees are responsible for their individual email accounts and should take all reasonable precautions to prevent others from being able to use their accounts. Staff should not provide their login identity and/or passwords to another person.
   b) Students shall immediately notify a teacher or the system administrator if they have identified a possible security problem. Students should not look for security problems, because this may be construed as an illegal attempt to gain access. Under no conditions should students provide other students with their login identity and/or network password.
   c) Students and employees shall avoid the inadvertent spread of computer viruses by obtaining system administrator’s approval of all downloaded or disk software.
   d) Students who gain access to teacher computer files, directory, programs, and websites without permission from a teacher will be disciplined.
   e) The school will assign specific staff with security, management, and account responsibilities associated with the school’s Internet resources and network accounts.
   f) Tampering with the school’s computer security system, and/or applications, and/or documents, and/or equipment, will be considered vandalism, destruction, and defacement of school property. Please be advised that it is a federal offense (felony) to break into any security system. Financial and legal consequences of such actions are the responsibility of the user and/or student’s parent or guardian.

4) Inappropriate Language
   a) Restrictions against inappropriate language apply to public messages, private messages, and material posted on Web pages.
b) Students and employees shall not use obscene, profane, lewd, vulgar, rude, inflammatory, threatening, or disrespectful language.
c) Students and employees shall not post information that could cause damage or danger of disruption.
d) Students and employees shall not engage in personal attacks or harassment, including prejudicial or discriminatory attacks.
e) If students or staff are reasonably requested by a person to stop sending them messages, they must comply with that request.
f) Students and employees shall not knowingly or recklessly post false or defamatory information about a person or organization.

5) Respect for Privacy
a) Student and employees shall not repost a message that was sent to them privately without permission of the person who sent them the message.
b) Students and employees shall not post private information about another person on the Internet. This does not prohibit staff from discussing private student information with each other or with a student’s parent or guardian via email, or other online communication in conformance with the Data Practices Act, Student Privacy Act, and applicable school policies.

6) Respecting Resource Limits
a) Students and employees shall use the system only for educational and career development activities and curriculum activities.
b) Students and employees will have access to limited space on the school’s computer server or cloud environment. Users are responsible for documents and files that are critical for their use.
c) Students and employees shall not post chain letters or engage in spamming. (Spamming is sending an annoying or unnecessary message to a large number of people.)
d) Students shall not deliberately or knowingly delete another student’s or employee’s files.

7) Plagiarism and Copyright Infringement
a) Students and employees shall not plagiarize works that are found on the Internet. Plagiarism is taking the ideas or writings of others and presenting them as if they were yours.
b) Students and employees shall respect the rights of copyright owners. Copyright infringement occurs when one inappropriately reproduces a work that is protected by a copyright. If a work contains language that specifies appropriate use of that work, follow the expressed requirements. If unsure whether or not work can be used, request permission from the copyright owner.

8) Inappropriate Access to Material
a) Students and employees shall not use the River Valley Charter School computer network to access material that is profane or obscene (pornography), contains viruses, network hacking programs, or similar programs that advocate illegal acts, or that advocates violence or discrimination toward other people (hate literature).
b) If students mistakenly access inappropriate information, they should immediately tell their teacher, Technology Coordinator, or another school employee. This will protect them against claims that they have intentionally violated this policy.
c) Parent(s)/guardian(s) should instruct students if there is additional material that they think would be inappropriate for them to access. The school fully expects that students shall follow their parent/guardian’s instructions in this matter.
d) Educators will monitor student use of the Internet in school and will take reasonable measures to prevent access by students to inappropriate materials on the Internet and World Wide Web and restrict access to materials harmful to students.
e) The school will monitor the online activities of employees and students, and operate technology protection (filtering/blocking devices or software) on all computers on the school’s computer network as required by law.
The filtering/blocking software will attempt to protect against access to visual depictions that are obscene, harmful to students, and child pornography, as required by law. Invasion or disabling of the filtering/blocking device installed by the school, including attempts to evade or disable, is a violation of the Acceptable Use Policy.

F. Limitation of Liability
The school does not assume and, hereby, expressly disclaims liability for the misuse of its computers, equipment, e-mail, and Internet programs that violate this policy or any applicable law. The school makes no guarantee that the functions or the services provided by or through the school system shall be error-free or without defect. The school is not responsible for any damage suffered through the use of its computer system, including but not limited to, the loss of data, interruptions in service, the accuracy or quality of information obtained through or stored in the system, damages or injuries from improper communications, damages to property used to access school computers or online resources, or financial obligations resulting from the use of school district resources.
CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Welcome to the River Valley Charter School. We are happy you are able to visit one of our classrooms, and we hope you will enjoy your time with us this morning. During the observation process, it is important that you act as a naturalist would, observing without interaction that would disturb and change the environment.

The following information may be of assistance to you in your observation:

- When you arrive in the classroom, you will be seated in an observation chair.
- Please do not bring food or drink into the classroom, with the exception of water.
- Please observe quietly without speaking to the children. If a child approaches you, be pleasant but brief. You might say something such as, “I came to see you work.”
- Classroom teachers may not always have the opportunity to answer your questions while you are in the classroom. In this case, please note any questions you have and bring them to the front office where someone can help you.
- Try to observe the entire class in order to see children working at all levels.
- Look for independence and self-direction (initiating and terminating own activities), self-discipline, responsibility (returning work to its proper place, caring for the environment and equipment), social sense (respecting the work of others, adapting to group needs, participating in group activities), concentration, and joy.

You will note the teacher has an awareness of class dynamics, is sensitive to individual children, helps children initiate work, provides requested assistance, and demonstrates use of materials.

Please complete the following and return to the office:

Name: _____________________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________________

Class: ___________________________________________________________

Comments and Questions (use back if you need more space):
FIELD TRIP NOTIFICATION POLICY

A central aspect of high quality Montessori education is providing students with opportunities to engage in experiences outside of the classroom walls. To this end, River Valley students frequently leave school grounds on outings and field trips. This policy is intended to clarify how the school will communicate with families regarding such outings.

Walking Trips and Local School Van Trips
It is the policy of River Valley Charter School that every family will have the opportunity to sign a release form for all walking trips and local school van trips from the school. Local school van trips will be limited to the Newburyport city limits. This release form will be included in the summer online package that all families are required to complete, and will read as follows:

I grant permission for my child to participate in all walking excursions and local school van excursions within the Newburyport city limits during the 20__ - 20__ academic year. I understand that by granting this permission I will not automatically receive additional notification prior to any walking trip or local van trip from the school.

- If a family indicates on the summer form that they give permission for their child(ren) to participate in all walking trips and local van trips, then the school will not be required to provide further notification prior to any such trip.
- If a family indicates on the summer form that they do not give permission for their child(ren) to participate in all walking trips and local van trips, then the school will provide further notification prior to any such trip. Notification and permission may take place by school telephone, through school email or through the use of the RVCS Field Trip Permission Form. The family may choose prior to each outing whether or not to grant permission for their child(ren) to participate.
- The school will not provide notification to any family prior to a walking trip to the Bradley Fuller Athletic Fields on Low Street, regardless of the parent/guardian response on the summer form.

Automobile, Bus and Non-Local Van Trips
It is the policy of the River Valley Charter School that families will be notified and asked to give their permission for their child(ren) to participate prior to any trip where a student will be traveling in a private automobile or school bus. The school will also notify parents/guardians of and seek permission for any school van trip beyond the Newburyport city limits. Notification and permission may take place by school telephone, through school email or through the use of the RVCS Field Trip Permission Form. If a student is not given permission to participate in a trip, the student is expected to attend school during the trip and will be provided with appropriate curriculum and instruction. The exception to this policy is recurring trips (see below).

Recurring Trips
In certain situations, students may be scheduled to travel in a vehicle on periodic trips as part of the regular school curriculum (e.g. volunteering weekly at a food bank or climbing at the local rock gym). It is the policy of the River Valley Charter School that in such situations families will be notified of these excursions and asked to give their permission prior to the first trip, but not for each successive trip. Notification and permission may take place through school email or through the use of the RVCS Field Trip Permission Form.
GUIDELINES FOR TRIPS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

“To go out of a classroom to enter the outside world, which includes everything, is obviously to open an immense door to instruction……When the child goes out, it is the world itself that offers itself to him. Let us take the child out to show him real things instead of making objects which represent ideas and closing them in cupboards.”

From Childhood to Adolescence by Dr. Maria Montessori

1. The children in your car are your responsibility for the duration of the entire trip.
   a. Encourage respectful interactions and conversational tones.
   b. Use secure seat belts or booster chairs, as required by law.
   c. No food is allowed to be consumed in the car. Choking and food allergies compromise the driver’s ability to keep everyone safe. Special arrangements and accommodations may be made by RVCS staff, in conjunction with the School Nurse, for extended trips or situations that necessitate the need for snacks or meals.
   d. Electronic games and other devices are not permitted for use by students, including cell phones.

2. To support the academic focus of these trips, non-enrolled siblings are not allowed to attend. During the car ride, the potential for them to distract may cause an unsafe driving situation.

3. When driving on a field trip, the insurance associated with the automobile driver serves as the primary insurance. The school’s insurance policy serves as the secondary insurance policy. RVCS may request verification of your automobile insurance and will require that the school has an up-to-date CORI.

4. Please do not allow students to use cell phones, to listen to or watch media (rap songs, news broadcasts, and movies) as the content may not be appropriate for all children.

5. Use cell phones only when parked and to contact the teachers in the event you are lost or become separated from the group. Driving and talking on cell phones is unsafe and we ask that you honor this request. However, please keep your cell phone turned on in the event that the teacher needs to contact you.

6. Upon arrival, please supervise this group of children during the entire program. Please do not stand in adult groups and talk. Some places provide special instructions for chaperones. Please respectfully follow their directives and do not use this opportunity to make cell phone calls.

7. Please do not stop at gift shops, restaurants, or coffee houses and provide food or shopping opportunities for the students in your car. This generates an inequitable situation between the other students on the trip. It also creates the potential for students with food allergies to be exposed to a difficult choice and health hazard.

8. If you ever have any question about a situation that occurs on the trip, please notify one of your teachers immediately, either personally or by cell phone if you are not in the same location.
CODE OF CONDUCT

River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and federal laws having to do with non-discrimination on the basis of age, ancestry, athletic performance, color, creed, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, homelessness, mental or physical disability, national origin, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, prior academic achievement, race, religion, sexual orientation, and special need in its educational programs and activities.

At River Valley Charter School our educational philosophy is to individualize instruction to the greatest extent possible. We recognize that every student undergoes a unique learning process, and that we must honor each student’s individuality. We also believe that our educational responsibility extends beyond academics to character development, including self-control, sound decision making and respect for others and the environment. In that spirit, we approach our Code of Conduct and disciplinary actions with the same intention of providing an individualized response to each incident. Though illegal or egregious actions will require the school to abide by Massachusetts state law and due process guidelines, lesser infractions allow us to evaluate the circumstances of each situation and craft a disciplinary response that we believe best serves the educational interests of the student while protecting the safety and integrity of our learning environments.

As a Montessori school, our primary goal is to create a positive learning environment in which all students are provided an opportunity to grow academically, emotionally and socially. In order to attain this goal there must be a shared commitment among families, staff and students to understand and accept a balance between individual freedom and responsible behavior. As Dr. Montessori stated, “to let the child do as he likes when he has not yet developed any powers of control, is to betray the idea of freedom.”

This Code of Conduct is intended to clarify student behaviors and actions that are encouraged, as well as those that are considered unacceptable in the RVCS community. The Major Discipline section of this Code also reflects the current status of Massachusetts law as it pertains to student conduct, and more specifically, the subsequent discipline that may be imposed when students engage in certain types of extreme or illegal behavior. This Code of Conduct has been reviewed and adopted by the River Valley Charter School Board of Trustees and supersedes any Code of Conduct previously issued by RVCS.

It is important to remember that the Code of Conduct applies to students in all school settings, including while at school, traveling to and from school, on school property, at school sponsored events and on school field trips. If misconduct occurs during any of these times and/or events, a student shall be subject to a disciplinary response from the school. Additionally, state law permits a school to respond to any incident that happens off school grounds or outside of school hours if that incident has a significant impact on the learning experience of students during the school day.

The Individuals and Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provide eligible students (those with disabilities and those in the pre-referral process) with certain procedural rights and protections in the context of student discipline. These rights are in addition to the due process rights applicable to all students as described below in this Code of Conduct. In addition, IDEA protections apply to a child who has not yet been found eligible for services under the statute if the district is “deemed to have knowledge” that the child was eligible for such services before the conduct that precipitated the disciplinary action occurred. The district is “deemed to have knowledge” if the child’s family had expressed concern in writing to district supervisory, or administrative personnel, or the child’s teacher, that they believe the child needs special education or related services; or if the child’s family had requested an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services; or the current teacher, or other district personnel, had expressed specific concerns about a pattern of behavior by the child to district personnel. The school district is not “deemed to have knowledge” if the student was determined not eligible for special education through an evaluation or the family refused an evaluation for the child or IDEA services. Should a request be made for evaluation to determine eligibility while a student is subject to disciplinary measures, the district will conduct an evaluation in an expedited manner. Pending these results, the student will remain in the educational placement determined by school authorities,
which may include suspension or expulsion without services. If determined eligible, the district will provide the student with special education and related services in accordance with IDEA. See Appendix A of this Code of Conduct for more information.

Respect, Grace & Courtesy
Mutual respect and a commitment to grace and courtesy among all members of our school community is the cornerstone of our interaction and behavior. We seek to acknowledge and honor the dignity and value of every school member. We strive to celebrate our differences and create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere through courtesy to others and respectful conduct.

A commitment to respect, grace and courtesy will ensure that RVCS is a physically and emotionally safe environment. In order to achieve this goal, all staff and students share several common core responsibilities:

● To act as kind individuals and refrain from physically or emotionally harming others
● To refrain from any actions that compromise the health or safety of others
● To accept differences and seek to resolve conflicts in a mutually agreeable manner
● To value and respect personal and school property
● To express opinions and emotions in a positive and constructive manner
● To always be honest
● To support other school members in their efforts to maintain a safe, positive and respectful school

**Student behavior that falls outside of these common core responsibilities is subject to a disciplinary response from teachers or administration.**

Examples of behavior outside the common core responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

● Any disrespect toward staff members or students
● Mistreatment or abuse of school or personal property
● Abusive, profane, harassing or threatening language, either verbal or written
● Physical or emotional intimidation or aggression
● Minor physical assault, including hitting, shoving, kicking, biting, etc.
● Harassment, bullying or violations of civil rights
● Cheating
● Stealing
● Forgery or plagiarism
● Misuse of electronic devices or internet access
● Major physical assault with malicious intent
● Possession, use or distribution of tobacco products, drugs or alcohol (pursuant to M.G.L., see below)
● Possession or use of any dangerous device or weapons (pursuant to M.G.L., see below)

School response to such behaviors may be informal or formal, depending upon the severity and/or frequency of the misconduct. The intention will always be to encourage growth and reflection on the part of the student in order to help them build the skills and judgment required to make better choices in the future.

Our procedure when responding to student discipline issues will always be grounded in a problem-solving approach. We will wait until students are not agitated or in crisis, and then hold a conversation seeking the facts of the situation and asking students to reflect on their actions. Below are some examples of the types of questions that may be asked during these conversations:

● “Can you share with me what happened?”
● “How do you feel about how you handled the situation?”
● “How could you have handled the situation differently?”
● “What impact do you think your actions had on the class/other student(s)?”
● “What do you think you can do to resolve this situation?”
● “What can you do differently in the future?”
● “What lessons have you learned from this experience?”

We value the voice of the student in resolving disciplinary situations and will encourage student participation in the process as warranted by each individual situation.

Families are encouraged to keep the school and the child’s teacher informed about extraordinary social, emotional, physical or medical events in the child’s life that may impact the child’s ability to abide by the common core responsibilities.

Repeated and/or significant misconduct will be recorded using an Incident Report Form. This form will be completed by the staff member most directly connected to the situation. A copy of the Incident Report form will be available for parent/guardian review and will also be kept in the student’s school file. A copy of the Incident Report Form is attached as Appendix B to this Code of Conduct.

**Minor Discipline**

Almost all of the disciplinary actions taken by RVCS staff are in response to minor infractions. Such informal discipline will often take the form of a logical consequence designed to discourage similar future behavior and encourage student growth, or to provide resolution of interpersonal conflict.

Examples of minor disciplinary actions include, but are not limited to:

- Facilitation of peer to peer discussions
- Limitations of classroom freedoms and/or privileges
- Restricted seating
- Temporary removal from the classroom or other educational setting
- Verbal reflections or apologies
- Written reflections or apologies
- In school or after school community service
- Meetings with school administration
- Meetings with parents/guardians and teachers
- Other appropriate disciplinary consequences

Teachers have the authority to use these types of consequences at their discretion. Our approach to discipline is to have the response match the circumstances, severity and frequency of the infraction, so each situation will be handled according to the discretion of the adults involved and the individual needs of the student(s).

A safe and positive learning community is best fostered when families support the school’s disciplinary action. However, should a student and/or parent/guardian disagree with any informal disciplinary action that is imposed, every effort should be made to resolve these concerns directly with the staff member who imposed the action. Nothing in this policy, however, should be construed as limiting the right of any student or parent/guardian to discuss concerns with appropriate school administrators.

**Major Discipline**

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Sections 37H, 37H govern due process for expulsion/removals from a public school and the services that a public school must provide during such removals. While such events are rare at RVCS, it is important for families to know their rights and the procedures that the school will follow in order to comply with state law. The school’s Expulsion Policy provides complete information regarding expulsions from a public school.

One aspect of formal procedures is worth noting. Every school district must have an appeal process in place for any disciplinary removals from school. In a typical district, appeals would be made to the superintendent. As a charter school, our Director serves as the superintendent, so the Director cannot also serve as the primary arbiter in disciplinary
decisions regarding suspension or expulsion. Consequently, the procedures that follow list the RVCS Assistant Director as the administrator who will hear and decide upon all disciplinary cases that may result in the removal of a student from school. This leaves the school Director available for any appeals that students or families may decide to pursue.

**Notice of Student and Parent 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 RVCS 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 in the Expulsion Policy.

In every case of student misconduct for which suspension may be imposed, the Assistant Director is required to 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 document outlines student and parent/guardian rights when the Assistant Director is considering and/or decides to implement a removal from 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 RVCS’s Education Service Plan which is described below. If the student withdraws from the RVCS 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 Assistant Director determines that an emergency removal is required (see Emergency Removals section below) or decides to implement an in-school suspension of ten or fewer consecutive days (and no more than ten (10) cumulative days per school year) (see In-School Suspension section below), the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director 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:

(a) the disciplinary offense;
(b) the basis for the charge;
(c) the potential consequences, including the potential length of the student's suspension;
(d) the opportunity for the student to have a hearing with the Assistant Director 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;
(e) the date, time, and location of the hearing;
(f) the right of the student and the student's parent/guardian to interpreter services at the hearing if needed to participate;
(g) if the student may be placed on long-term suspension following the hearing with the Assistant Director, the student’s short and long term suspension hearing rights and the right to appeal the Assistant Director's decision to the Director (see Hearing Rights section below).

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

**Emergency Removal**

The Assistant Director has the authority to remove a student from RVCS temporarily when a student is charged with a disciplinary offense and the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director's judgment, there is no alternative available to alleviate the danger or disruption. The Assistant Director is required to notify the 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 Assistant Director is required to:

(a) 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;
(b) Provide written notice to the student and parent/guardian;
(c) Provide the student an opportunity for a hearing with the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director, student, and parent/guardian.
(d) Render a decision orally on the same day as the hearing, and in writing no later than the following school day.

The Assistant Director 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**

**Assistant Director's Hearing under §37H¾: 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 Assistant Director is for the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director should consider in determining whether other remedies and consequences may be appropriate. Based on the available information, including mitigating circumstances, the Assistant Director shall determine whether the student committed the disciplinary offense, and, if so, what remedy or consequence will be imposed.

The Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director is required to send a copy of the written determination to the Director and explain the reasons for imposing an out-of-school suspension, before the short-term suspension takes effect.

**Assistant Director's Hearing under §37H¾: 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 single 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:

1. In advance of the hearing, the opportunity to review the student's record and the documents upon which the Assistant Director may rely in making a determination to suspend the student or not;
2. the right to be represented by counsel or a lay person of the student's choice, at the student's/parent/guardian's expense;
3. 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;
4. the right to cross-examine witnesses presented by the school district; and
5. the right to request that the hearing be recorded by the Assistant Director, and to receive a copy of the audio recording upon request. If the student or parent/guardian requests an audio recording, the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director shall provide the parent/guardian, if present, an opportunity to discuss the student's conduct and offer information, including mitigating circumstances, that the Assistant Director should consider in determining consequences for the student.

Based on the evidence, the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director and the parent/guardian. If the Assistant Director decides to suspend the student, the written determination will:

1. Identify the disciplinary offense, the date on which the hearing took place, and the participants at the hearing;
2. Set out the key facts and conclusions reached by the Assistant Director;
3. Identify the length and effective date of the suspension, as well as a date of return to school;
4. Include notice of the student's opportunity to receive education services to make academic progress during the period of removal from school;
5. Inform the student of the right to appeal the Assistant Director's decision to the Director or designee (only if the Assistant Director 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:
   a) the process for appealing the decision, including that the student or parent/guardian must file a written notice of appeal with the 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 Director an extension of time for filing the written notice for up to seven (7) additional calendar days; and that
   b) the long-term suspension will remain in effect unless and until the Director decides to reverse the Assistant Director's determination on appeal.

If the student is in a public preschool program or in grades K through 3, the Assistant Director shall send a copy of the written determination to the Director and explain the reasons for imposing an out-of-school suspension, whether short-term or long-term, before the suspension takes effect.
**Appeal and Director's Hearing under §37H¾**

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

In order to appeal the Assistant Director’s decision to impose a long-term suspension, the student or parent/guardian must file a notice of appeal with the Director within five 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 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 Director may deny the appeal, or may allow the appeal in their discretion, for good cause.

The Director shall hold the hearing within three 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 Director shall grant the extension.

The 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 they have attempted to find a day and time for the hearing that would allow the parent/guardian and Director to participate. The Director shall send written notice to the parent/guardian of the date, time, and location of the hearing.

The 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 Assistant Director's hearing for long-term suspension, as detailed above in the sections entitled Assistant Director's Hearing under §37H¾: Short-term Suspension and Assistant Director's Hearing under §37H¾: Long-term Suspension.

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

**In-School Suspension under §37H¾**

The Assistant Director may use in-school suspension as an alternative to short-term suspension for disciplinary offenses.

The Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director determines that the student committed the disciplinary offense, the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director decides to impose an in-school suspension, the Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director
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 Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director, if such meeting has not already occurred). The Assistant Director 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 Assistant Director and the parent/guardian.

**Removal from Privileges and Extracurricular Activities**

The Assistant Director 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 ¾**

Students serving an in-school suspension, short-term suspension or long-term suspension 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 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 local requirements, through the school-wide Education Service Plan.
Appendix A Discipline for Students with Disabilities

Students identified as having special needs

1. All RVCS students are expected to abide by the guidelines as set forth in this Code of Conduct. Chapter 71B of the Mass. General Laws, formerly known as Chapter 766, requires that additional provisions be made for students who have been found by an evaluation team to have special needs and whose individualized program is described in an Individualized Educational Program (IEP).

   a. Students with Special Needs may be suspended for up to ten (10) consecutive days, and may also be suspended in excess of ten (10) cumulative days, as fully outlined under M.G.L.c. 71B, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Such suspensions may be carried out without any further or additional process.

   b. Suspensions or exclusions in excess of ten (10) consecutive days or ten (10) cumulative days may also occur, provided that the conduct for which the student is being disciplined is not a manifestation of their disability, and the District provides educational services which will allow the student to access the general curriculum and to make progress toward their goals.

2. The Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) and M.G.L. c. 71B allow school personnel to move a student with disabilities to an Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES) for up to 45 school days, if that student is in possession of a dangerous weapon at school or a school function or on school property, is in possession or uses a controlled substance or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance while at school or a school function or on school property, or inflicts serious bodily injury on a person, including themselves. The appropriate interim alternative educational setting shall be determined by the IEP team.

3. The IDEA and M.G.L. c. 71B also allows school personnel the option of asking a hearing officer or a court to move children with disabilities to an interim alternative educational setting for up to 45 school days, if they are substantially likely to injure themselves or others in their current placement.

4. When a special needs student has been suspended for more than ten (10) consecutive or cumulative days in a school year, such that a substantial change in placement is occurring or will occur, the IEP TEAM will meet to conduct a manifestation determination. Relevant members of the TEAM meet for the manifestation determination, and they answer two questions, after reviewing relevant documents and the misconduct of the student:

   - Is the misconduct the result of failure to implement the student’s IEP? And
   - Is the misconduct caused by, or does it have a direct and substantial relationship to the student’s disability?

A summary of the manifestation determination review will be written, and a copy provided to the Parent(s)/guardian(s) as soon as possible after the review, but no later than five (5) school days after the review.

5. If the IEP team finds that the misconduct was not a manifestation of the student’s disability, then the student may be disciplined according to the discipline policy in the RVCS Code of Conduct. The student will receive educational services during this period of suspension or exclusion. If the IEP Team finds that the misconduct was a manifestation of the student’s disability, then the school may still be able to implement an IAES (see # 2 and 3 above). If the IAES is not possible, then the student will remain in their current placement, and the team will arrange for a functional behavioral assessment (if one has not been conducted on the student) and the development or modification of a behavior intervention plan.

6. The Director (or designee) will notify the Special Education Office of offenses that warrant a suspension of a special needs student and a record will be kept of such notices.
Students identified as having a disability and provided with a Section 504 plan

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal statute which prohibits a qualified individual with a disability from being excluded from the participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance because of their disability. 29 U. S. C.-- 794 and its implementing regulations, 34 C. F. R. 104 et seq.

1. All RVCS students are expected to abide by the guidelines as set forth in this Code of Conduct. A student on a Section 504 plan may be disciplined like any other non-disabled student. However, if the student is going to be suspended for ten (10) or more consecutive days, expelled or suspended for more than ten (10) cumulative days (and there is a change in placement as a result), then a manifestation determination review shall be conducted. The student’s 504 team shall convene, and answer two questions after reviewing relevant documents and the misconduct of the student:
   ● Is the misconduct the result of failure to implement the student’s 504 plan?
   ● Is the misconduct caused by, or does it have a direct and substantial relationship to the student’s disability?

A summary of the manifestation determination review will be written, and a copy provided to the parent(s)/guardian(s) as soon as possible after the review, but no later than five (5) school days after the review.

2. If the 504 team finds that the misconduct was not a manifestation of the student’s disability, then the student may be disciplined according to the discipline policy in the RVCS Code of Conduct. The student will receive educational services during this period of suspension or exclusion. If the 504 Team finds that the misconduct was a manifestation of the student’s disability, then the school may still be able to implement an IAES. If the IAES is not possible, then the student will remain in their current placement, and the team will arrange for a functional behavioral assessment (if one has not been conducted on the student) and the development or modification of a behavior intervention plan.

When a student with a disability is reported to the police for an alleged crime, special education and disciplinary records may be furnished to the police.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Regulations at 34 CFR 300.535 state the following:

Nothing in this part prohibits an agency from reporting a crime committed by a child with a disability to appropriate authorities or prevents State law enforcement and judicial authorities from exercising their responsibilities with regard to the application of Federal and State law to crimes committed by a child with a disability.

An agency reporting a crime committed by a child with a disability must ensure that copies of the special education and disciplinary records of the child are transmitted for consideration by the appropriate authorities to whom the agency reports the crime. An agency reporting a crime under this section may transmit copies of the child’s special education and disciplinary records only to the extent that the transmission is permitted by the Family Educational Right and Privacy Act. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1415(k)(6).
Placement in Disciplinary Procedures

Under IDEA 2004: Section 615(k)

A Principal may consider any unique circumstances on a case-by-case basis when determining whether to order a change in placement for a student with a disability who, after a disciplinary hearing, has been found to have violated a school code of conduct.

Student with a disability violates a school code of conduct.

*DEFINITIONS & ACRONYMS can be found on the next page

Removal not more than 10 days:
Principal may exclude a student with a disability from the current placement without obligation to provide FAPE. This includes suspension, removal and assignment to an IAES*. Disciplinary decision same as for students without disabilities.

Notify parents of decision to take disciplinary action not later than the date the decision is made, and of procedural safeguards under IDEA.

Removal Exceeds 10 Days:
Notify parents of decision to take disciplinary action not later than the date the decision is made, and of procedural safeguards under IDEA. Obligation to provide FAPE continues.

Manifestation Determination: Within 10 school days of decision to change placement, the district, the parent, and relevant members of the IEP Team review relevant information and make a manifestation determination (MD)*.

Does the conduct have a direct and substantial relationship to the disability? OR is it the direct result of the district's failure to implement the IEP?

NO Student's conduct is not a manifestation of disability.

Special Circumstances: Does the offense fall under "special circumstances" related to weapons, illegal drugs, controlled substances, or serious bodily injury?

NO Student's conduct is not a manifestation of disability.

YES Student's conduct is a manifestation of disability.

NO Return student to placement from which removed unless parent and district agree to less restrictive alternative.

YES May remove student to IAES for up to 45 school days. The IAES must be determined by the team.

Special Circumstances:

Apply relevant disciplinary procedures applied to students without disabilities.

Order a change in placement to an appropriate IAES for not more than 45 school days if determined that current placement is substantially likely to result in injury to the child or others.

Hearing Officer makes determination within 10 school days of the hearing.

Provide educational services that enable child to participate in general curricula and progress toward goals on IEP. Any IAES must be determined by the team.

Provide as appropriate, FBA* and implement EIP*.

While appeal is pending parent and district agree to another placement or student remains in disciplinary placement.

Appeal to SEPA:
A parent may request a hearing on manifest determination or placement decision.

A district may request a hearing if concerned current placement is substantially likely to result in injury to child or others.

The hearing must occur within 20 school days from date of request.

Time period for placement expires.

Return student to the placement from which the child was removed.

River Valley Charter School

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*DEFINITIONS & ACRONYMS*

**IAES** - interim alternative educational setting

**FAPE** - Free and Appropriate Public Education – the student continues to receive educational services while in an IAES in order to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the student’s IEP

**FBA** - Functional Behavioral Assessment

**BIP** – Behavioral Intervention Plan for dispensing Behavior Intervention Services

**LEA** – Local Educational Agency

**Manifestation Determination** – a meeting to determine if the conduct in question was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the student’s disability; or if the conduct in question was the direct result of the LEA’s failure to implement the IEP.

**Special Circumstances** – carries or possesses a weapon to or at school, on school premises, or to or at a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or Local Educational Agency (LEA); 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 has inflicted 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.

**Serious Bodily Injury** – 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.
EXPULSION POLICY

River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and federal law having to do with non-discrimination on the basis of age, ancestry, athletic performance, color, creed, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, homelessness, mental or physical disability, national origin, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, prior academic achievement, race, religion, sexual orientation, and special need in its educational programs and activities.

Major Discipline
Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Sections 37H and 37H govern due process for disciplinary removals from a public school (suspensions or expulsions) and the services that a public school must provide during such removals. While such events are rare at RVCS, it is important for families to know their rights and the procedures that the school will follow in order to comply with state law.

One aspect of these formal procedures is worth noting. Every school district must have an appeal process in place for any disciplinary removals from school. In a typical district, appeals would be made to the superintendent. As a charter school, our Director serves as the superintendent, so the Director cannot also serve as the primary arbiter in disciplinary decisions regarding suspension or expulsion. Consequently, the procedures that follow list the RVCS Assistant Director as the administrator who will hear and decide upon all disciplinary cases that may result in the removal of a student from school. This leaves the school Director available for any appeals that students or families may decide to pursue.

Provisions Governing Due Process for Disciplinary Removals and Services during Removals
Student disciplinary offenses resulting in removal from the school setting (i.e., suspensions and expulsions) are subject to due process procedures, including notices, hearings, appeals, and educational services during removals. The following sections provide 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/guardian’s expense, at any and all hearings concerning student discipline. If you wish to bring an attorney to any hearing or meeting at the school, please inform RVCS immediately. If you fail to inform the school prior to bringing an attorney to a hearing, and RVCS’s attorney is not present, then RVCS 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. RVCS hereby notifies you that it may have its legal counsel present at any hearings and meetings involving student discipline.

Notice of Student and Parent Rights Under G.L. c. 71 §37H
This Notice of Student and Parent Rights applies to student misconduct that involves weapons, drugs or 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 Assistant Director. 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 Assistant Director. Any student who assaults the Director, Assistant Director, teacher, teacher’s aide or other educational or administrative staff on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, may be subject to expulsion from the school by the Assistant Director.

Any student who is charged with any of the misconduct detailed above will be given written notification of their right to a hearing before the Assistant Director prior to the expulsion taking effect. Notice will include the date, time, and location of the hearing. At the hearing, the student will have their parent/guardian present; and may have representation.
at his or her own expense; and will have the opportunity to present evidence and witnesses at said hearing before the Assistant Director. After said hearing, the Assistant Director may, in their discretion, decide to suspend rather than expel a student who has been determined by the Assistant Director to have committed the misconduct detailed above.

Any student who is expelled from a school district pursuant to GL c. 71 §37H shall be given written notification of the right to appeal to the Director, the process for appeal and the opportunity for educational services. The expelled student shall have ten days from the date of the expulsion in which to notify the Director of his appeal. The student has the right to counsel, at their own expense, at a hearing before the 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. The student shall have the right to present oral and written testimony, the right to counsel and the right to confront and cross examine witnesses presented by the school. The Director has the authority to overturn the Assistant Director’s decision including recommending an alternative educational program. The Director shall render a decision on the appeal within five (5) days of the hearing. That decision is the final decision of the district.

Students who are suspended or expelled under §37H are entitled to receive educational services during the period of suspension or expulsion under RVCS’s Education Service Plan, which is described below. If the student withdraws from the RVCS 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.

Notice of Rights under G.L. c. 71 §37H½
This Notice of Student and Parent Rights applies to student misconduct that involves student criminal or felony delinquency charges, findings, or admissions.

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 Assistant Director of the school in which the student is enrolled may expel said student if the Assistant Director determines that the student’s continued presence in 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 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 Director.

The student shall have the right to appeal the expulsion to the Director. The student shall notify the Director, in writing, of his request for an appeal no later than five calendar days following the effective date of the expulsion. The Director shall hold a hearing with the student and the student’s family within three calendar days of the expulsion. At the hearing, the student shall have the right to present oral and written testimony on their behalf and shall have the right to counsel. The Director shall have the authority to overturn or alter the decision of the Assistant Director or designee, including recommending an alternate educational program for the student. The Director shall render a decision on the appeal within five calendar days of the hearing. The Director’s decision shall be the final decision of RVCS with regard to the expulsion.

Students who are expelled under §37H½ are entitled to receive educational services during the period of suspension or expulsion under RVCS’s Education Service Plan, which is described below. If the student withdraws from the RVCS 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.
Services during Removals and School-Wide Education Service Plan
RVCS has developed a school-wide Education Service Plan for all students who are expelled from school to ensure that expelled students have an opportunity to make academic progress during the period of expulsion. RVCS will provide the student and the parent or 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 or guardian, the school or school district shall facilitate and verify enrollment in the service.

RVCS’s Education Service Plan is subject to change, and may include, but is not limited to, tutoring, alternative placement, Saturday school, and online or distance learning.
BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

Preamble

The mission of River Valley Charter School is to offer a rigorous academic program based on the Montessori philosophy and rooted in the history, culture and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley.

With the Montessori philosophy as the center of River Valley Charter School’s mission, we strive to create a positive educational environment that places priority on a child’s learning. We seek to provide a positive, safe and nurturing environment wherein children grow socially and emotionally, as well as academically. We promote respect for ourselves, respect for others and respect for the educational community.

A key element of the Montessori philosophy is the Grace and Courtesy curriculum which guides children to become thoughtful and caring members of the community. In this Montessori community, students are given personal freedoms that directly correlate to their willingness and ability to take responsibility for their own words and actions. They are continuously provided with opportunities to hone these skills and to develop as ethical, independent thinkers. In circumstances where children are not able to exist peacefully in our school community, a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan exists.

Following is River Valley Charter School’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (BPIP). The plan describes a comprehensive approach to preventing, intervening, and responding to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. Protection under this plan is afforded to all students regardless of their legal status as well as to members of the River Valley Charter School (including, but not limited to, educators, administrators, the School Nurse, bus drivers, support services personnel, coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities and paraprofessionals).

Introduction

It is well known that bullying and cyberbullying interfere with the educational process and can result in a hostile environment for students and teachers. Bullying can create unnecessary anxiety that affects the ability or desire of a student to attend school; learn in school; travel on the school bus; feel safe in school areas such as the playground or classroom; or participate in special or extracurricular activities. The failure to address bullying behavior also gives other students the message that it is permissible to engage in negative conduct.

River Valley Charter School (RVCS) is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment that is free from bullying, cyberbullying and/or retaliation. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning, and to prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process. As such, RVCS will not tolerate any form of bullying, cyberbullying and/or retaliation by school staff or other students in the school building, on school grounds, or at school-related activities. All members of the school community are expected to treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences. This plan applies to all students and members of the school staff, including, but not limited to, the educators, the administrators, the School Nurse, the custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities and paraprofessionals. RVCS will promptly investigate all reports and complaints of bullying, cyberbullying and retaliation and take immediate action to eradicate the behavior and restore a sense of safety for all students. RVCS is committed to supporting the entire RVCS community in its understanding of the expectations, implications, and plans for dealing with bullying, cyber bullying, and retaliation.

The Assistant Director (AD) is responsible for the implementation and oversight of the BPIP, except when a reported bullying incident involves a staff member or the AD as the alleged aggressor. In such cases, the Director shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged target. If the Director is the alleged aggressor, the Board of Trustees, or its designee, shall be responsible for investigating the report, and other steps necessary to implement the plan, including addressing the safety of the alleged target.
The AD will receive reports on bullying; create a process for recording and tracking incident reports and assessing information related to targets and aggressors; develop new or revise current policies and protocols under the BPIP including an internet safety policy; amend student and staff handbooks and codes of conduct to make clear that bullying will not be tolerated; review and update the BPIP each year, or more frequently. In conjunction with the appropriate personnel, the AD will also ensure the planning of supports that respond to the needs of targets and aggressors.

The Director, in conjunction with the administrative team, is responsible for periodically collecting and analyzing school-wide data on bullying to assess the presence of a problem and to measure improved outcomes; ensuring ongoing professional development that is required by the law; choosing and implementing the curricula to be used; leading the parent or family engagement efforts; and drafting parent information materials.

RVCS understands that members of certain groups, including but not limited to race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnancy or parenting status, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristic, may be more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying, harassment, or teasing. RVCS will take specific steps to create a safe, supportive, environment for vulnerable populations in the school community, and to provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies to prevent or respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. In addition, for students whose IEP (Individualized Educational Program) Team determines that the student has a disability that affects social skill development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing because of his/her disability, the IEP Team will include appropriate measures to develop the student’s skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment or teasing.

The scope of this plan does not include negative or disruptive behaviors not defined as bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation. Behaviors that are not considered acts of bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation are addressed through the school’s Code of Conduct.

**Prohibition against Bullying and Retaliation**

Acts of bullying, which include cyberbullying, are prohibited at River Valley Charter School:

- On school grounds and property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased, or used by RVCS; or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by RVCS, and
- At a location activity, function, or program that is not related to RVCS through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by RVCS, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the target or witnesses, infringe on their rights at school or materially and substantially disrupt the education process or the orderly operation of RVCS.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited. As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, §37O, nothing in this plan requires RVCS to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

Knowingly making false accusations of bullying and retaliation are also prohibited and will result in disciplinary action consistent with the RVCS Code of Conduct and M.G.L. c. 71, §37O.

**Bullying Prevention and Intervention Definition and Terms**

Bullying, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, means the repeated use by one or more students or by a member of the 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 of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that: 
(i) causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target’s property;
(ii) places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or damage to their property;
(iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
(iv) infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
(v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Bullying shall include cyberbullying.

**Cyberbullying**, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyberbullying shall also include:

(i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person, or
(ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.
(iii) the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution of posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

For the purposes of this plan, terms are defined as follows:

**Aggressor**, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, means a student or a member of the school staff who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation towards a student.

**Hostile environment**, as defined in M. G. L. c. 71, §37O, 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.

**Local law enforcement agency** means a local police department, county district attorney, or any other public entity charged with investigation, apprehension, detention or prosecution of individuals suspected or convicted of a crime.

**Parent** means a student’s father or mother, or legal guardian.

**Plan** is an established bullying prevention and intervention plan.

**Perpetrator** is a student or a member of the 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. (At RVCS the term aggressor, as defined above, is typically used in place of the term perpetrator.)

**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 grounds** are defined as the property on which the school facility is located.

**School staff** includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, School Nurses, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.
Student record has the meaning set forth in the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, 603 CMR 23.02.

Target, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, means a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Victim is defined as the student against whom bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation has been perpetrated. (At RVCS the term target, as defined above, is typically used in place of the term victim.)

Promoting a Positive Culture through Teaching
River Valley Charter School honors and supports a school culture that encourages students, teachers, and parents to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behavior, both experienced and witnessed. As such, all students will be taught the key dynamics of bullying and how to react appropriately and respectfully through modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social and healthy behaviors.

RVCS uses the evidence-based Open Circle social-emotional learning program as a component of our overall bullying prevention strategy for all Kinderhaus and Elementary 1 (grades 1-3) classrooms. The tenants of Open Circle are to help foster a caring classroom community where children feel supported by the adults around them and empathic toward others, reducing the likelihood that bullying behavior occurs. Open Circle provides a common language to discuss these often difficult social issues. There are specific lessons tailored to prevent bullying, which are taught and reviewed within the classroom as an element of routine instruction.

The Elementary 2 (grades 4-6) teaching teams meet regularly with students to discuss issues of community, respect, and responsibility, following the Open Circle guidelines, both in their Morning/Community Meetings as well as within smaller groups. An anti-bullying message is a component of these discussions. Further, incorporated into the E2 technology classes is explicit instruction in the definition and prevention of cyberbullying. Each E2 classroom develops core values or a classroom bill of rights that further encourages healthy relationships.

The Middle School (grades 7-8) Advisor Groups meet regularly and focus on character development, including strategies for positive relationships with each other. The discussion-based Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) middle school advisory curriculum, which focuses on bullying and cyberbullying prevention, will be incorporated into these group meetings.

On a daily basis, all students at River Valley Charter School are encouraged to take the following actions to prevent bullying:

- Treat each other respectfully
- Include everyone, especially those who may feel left out
- Respect and follow the Code of Conduct
- Report any observed bullying.

Reporting Bullying, Cyberbullying, and/or Retaliation
River Valley Charter School maintains an open reporting system in which any concerned person (staff member, student, parent/guardian, or other) may report an incident of bullying or retaliation either experienced or witnessed. The school is committed to addressing these incidents and empowering students to be part of the solution and expects students, parents or others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation to report it immediately.

Reports of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation are made to the AD (or to the Director when the AD is the alleged aggressor or to the Board of Trustees when the Director is the alleged aggressor) and are accepted from students,
teachers, parents, community members, or others. Reports may be made in oral or written form. All reports will be recorded in writing on a Bullying Incident Report Form (copies are made available to every family at the beginning of the school year and then remain available during the year in the front office, the AD’s office, the counselor’s office, the nurse’s office as well as on the RVCS website). A school staff member is required to report immediately to the AD any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. Students, parents, guardians, or others may request assistance from a staff member to fill out the form. Individuals may make an anonymous report of an experienced or a witnessed incident; but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor based solely on an anonymous report. Consequently, a student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action.

At the beginning of each school year, RVCS will provide the school community, including, but not limited to students, educators, administrators, school nurses, bus drivers, advisors to extracurricular activities, paraprofessionals, and parents or guardians, with written and/or oral notice of its policies for addressing acts of bullying and retaliation. A description of the reporting procedures and resources, including the name and contact information of the AD, (and the Director and Board of Trustees when the AD is the alleged aggressor), is part of this BPIP and will also be included in student and staff handbooks, and on the school website. Reports of bullying may also be made via postal mail at the school’s address, via a dedicated bullying-reporting email address, or by voicemail.

Insofar as is legally allowed by state law, confidentiality will be maintained with respect to the parties involved in the report, however the party reporting the incident will be notified that it has been investigated and results will be shared as appropriate and to the extent permissible by law.

The requirement to report incidents of bullying to the Assistant Director does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with the Code of Conduct or described in a behavior intervention plan.

**Responding to Reports of Allegations of Bullying by a Student**

River Valley will respond to allegations of bullying by first, assessing the need to restore safety to the alleged target, and to protect the target from possible further incidents; and second, notifying parents of the target and the aggressor.

**Student Safety**

Prior to any investigative procedures, the AD will implement appropriate strategies for protecting and maintaining safety of all involved parties from further bullying or retaliation including the target, a student who reported or witnessed the alleged incident and/or a student who provides information during the investigation. The safety process will involve designating a trusted adult and may include creating a personal safety plan or pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target; and/or altering the aggressor’s schedule and access to the target. The AD will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

**Notifications**

*Notice to parents or guardians-* Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the AD will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the student aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding to it. There may be circumstances in which the AD contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations at 603 CMR 49.00.

*Notice to another school-* 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 AD or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the principal or designee 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 AD has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the student aggressor, the AD will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency.

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 AD shall contact the local law enforcement agency if they have a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the student aggressor. In making this determination, the AD will, consistent with the plan and with applicable school policies and procedures, consult with the school resource officer, and other individuals the AD deems appropriate.

Investigating Reports of Bullying
The AD will promptly investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation and speak privately with the target and the aggressor in order to determine the severity and intent of the situation. Factors to be considered will include: age, maturity level, surrounding circumstances, nature of the behavior, special needs, patterns of behavior, and any past incidents. If necessary, the school will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

During the investigation, the AD will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. Interviews may be conducted by the AD, other staff members as determined by the AD, and in consultation with the school counselor, as appropriate. The AD (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged student aggressor, target, and witnesses of the importance of the investigation, their obligation 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.

The investigation will be documented through the use of the Bullying Incident Report Form, and there will be ongoing communication with the target and aggressor. The safety of these individuals is first and foremost. To the extent practicable, and given their obligation to investigate and address the matter, the AD will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. Progress monitoring in the form of goal setting and follow-up conversations will be maintained through the AD.

If the AD or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student may be subject to disciplinary action. Students who are not primary participants in the reported act of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation but join in, may be subject to disciplinary action or consequences as if they were primarily involved. “Joining-in” is a form of endorsing the behavior.

Determinations
If the findings reveal lack of intent to bully then the student will be directed to complete a peer mediation session with the other student(s) involved. This will be facilitated by appropriate school personnel until it is sufficiently resolved. The parents of all parties will be contacted prior to dismissal or as soon as possible on that same day.

If the findings reveal intent, the process will continue. The AD will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. The AD will determine what remedial action is required, if any, and determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

The AD will notify the parents of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notifications will comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations.

Regardless of the determination, the AD will inform the parents/guardians about the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s problem resolution system and the process for accessing that system.
**Disciplinary Action**

If the Assistant Director determines that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be based on the facts from the investigation, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behaviors. The actions will be consistent with the River Valley Charter School Code of Conduct. Possible disciplinary actions include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following: verbal and/or written warnings, reflective writing assignments intended to educate the aggressor, detentions, in-school or out-of-school suspensions as determined by the school administration, subject to applicable procedural requirements. These actions may escalate in severity for repeated offenses or with the severity of the conduct.

The AD will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation, and what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the AD cannot report specific information to the parent or guardians of the target about disciplinary action taken unless it involves a “stay away” order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

Actions may be accompanied by the referral to counseling/other therapeutic support or outside services to meet the needs of the individual student/family. When appropriate, the Assistant Director and School Counselor/Psychologist will collaborate to a) identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying behavior and to assess the level of need for social skills development (including the consideration of special groups), and b) assess the school’s capacity to provide services for the target, aggressor and their families. The review will include consideration of the current staffing and programs that support the creation of a positive school environment.

Alternatively, a student/family could be referred for community-based treatment services on an as-needed basis. Student referrals may include the target, the aggressor, and/or witnesses of an incident. The School Counselor/Psychologist will provide the student (both target and aggressor) and their parents with written notice of the name, address and telephone number of the recommended outside agency. River Valley Charter School will contact the parents and/or agency to ensure that a connection has been made and support is in place.

River Valley will also make sure that counseling and other services are available appropriate to the cultural and linguistic needs of its community members.

**Students with Disabilities**

River Valley Charter School supports collaboration between special education and general education administrators and teachers, which is necessary to address proactively and effectively the needs of students with disabilities relative to bullying. Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). Considerations will be made for students whose disability

(a) is on the autism spectrum, or
(b) affects social skills development, or
(c) makes the student vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing.

For students on the autism spectrum, protection under the law will be automatic.

**Follow Up**

The AD will work with the administrative team to consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target’s sense of safety and that of others as well, including any student who reported an incident, or was part of the investigation. One strategy that may be used is to increase adult supervision at transition times and in locations where bullying is known to have occurred or is likely to occur.

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the AD 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 AD will work with appropriate school staff to implement them immediately.

a) All student(s) involved will have regular check-in sessions with appropriate school personnel.
b) There may be a follow-up session with the whole class (or classes) to discuss and reinforce community values.
c) Individualized skill-building sessions based on RVCS’ anti-bullying curricula may be offered to the aggressor.
d) The AD will meet with the involved personnel to debrief the incident, identify additional resources for the student(s), the teacher(s) or the school and refine the system.
e) Continued efforts to meet with parent(s) or guardian(s) to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home.
f) Behavioral plans may be adopted to include a focus on developing specific social skills.

Responding to Reports of Allegations of Bullying by a Staff Member

Procedures for investigating and responding to reports of bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation of a student by a staff member will follow the steps outlined above under the direction and oversight of the Director (or the Board of Trustees when the Director is the alleged aggressor).

- Prior to and during any investigative procedures, the Director (or Board of Trustees) will implement appropriate strategies for protecting and maintaining safety of all involved parties from further bullying or retaliation. Most River Valley classrooms have at least two teachers present but additional support in the form of staff “safe persons” for the target may be provided when warranted.

- Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Director (or Board of Trustees) will notify both the staff aggressor and parents or guardians of the target, and of the procedures for responding to it and what actions are being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation.

- If at any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, the Director or Board of Trustees has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the staff aggressor, the Director (or Board of Trustees) will notify the local law enforcement agency.

- Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency.

- During the course of investigation, the Director (or Board of Trustees) will remind the alleged staff aggressor, student target, and witnesses of the importance of the investigation, their obligation 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.

- Disciplinary actions and/or adjustments to the school environment to enhance the student target’s sense of safety will be implemented at the Director (or Board of Trustee’s) discretion and will be based on facts from the investigation.

Training and Professional Development

Student and parent training will involve awareness of bullying behavior and model examples of behavior that promote caring, compassionate, and responsible students.

Written Notice to Staff

RVCS will provide all staff with an annual written notice of this plan, including sections related to staff duties and bullying of students by school staff, within the Faculty Handbook, along with the Code of Conduct. An online version of the plan will be available on the River Valley Charter School Website.
Annual Staff Training on the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
Annual training will include staff duties under the plan, an overview of the steps that the AD will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered (e.g. Open Circle, MARC). Staff will be trained in how to use the Incident Report Form and the potential resulting actions following an investigation. Staff members hired after the start of the school year will be required to participate in school-based training within the year, unless they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last two years.

Ongoing Professional Development
The RVCS staff will participate in mandatory training as it relates to specific information about age-appropriate curricula and building the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. The goal is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes the safety and security of all students while establishing a respect for differences. This professional development 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 an aggressor, 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;
- Engaging staff and those responsible for implementation and oversight of the plan to distinguish between acceptable managerial behaviors designed to correct misconduct, instill accountability in the school setting, etc. and bullying behaviors.

Professional development will also address ways to prevent or 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.

Written Notice to Families
River Valley Charter School will annually offer educational programs for parents and guardians that are focused on the parental components of bullying prevention and how to support actions at home.

Notification
A copy of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will be included in the Family Handbook. The handbook will be made available in hard copy, electronic formats, and will be available in each requested home language. RVCS will also post the plan and related information on both the school website and the PlusPortals, which acts as our home and school communication system.

Reinforcing the Curricula at Home
River Valley Charter School will support school-wide initiatives which include relevant presenters, useful curricula, and ongoing discussion. RVCS will also provide parents with information from the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC), which is posted in the “Counseling Center” section of the RVCS website. This information includes practical strategies for helping a child cope, and how to effectively work with a child’s school.
Resources will be provided ongoing, through posted resources, discussions through teacher and parent open houses, and parent education events. The goal is to develop a common language, common understandings, and partner in supporting students as they learn to be ethical, tolerant and kind community members.

**Ongoing Review and Reporting of School-Based Bullying**
River Valley Charter School will administer a student survey developed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education every four years to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature and severity of bullying in the school. The survey will be used to assess the effectiveness of the bullying curricula and instruction occurring in the school.

Last, River Valley Charter School will collect and report the following data to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as required by Chapter 86 of the relevant law:

1) The number of reported allegations of bullying or retaliation;
2) The number and nature of substantial incidents of bullying and retaliation;
3) The number of students disciplined for engaging in bullying or retaliation;
4) Other information as required by the Department.
BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION INCIDENT REPORTING FORM

1. Name of Reporter/Person Filing the Report:
(Note: Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report.)

2. Check whether you are the: ☐ Target of the behavior ☐ Reporter (not the target)

3. Check whether you are a: ☐ Student ☐ Staff member (specify role) ☐ Parent ☐ Administrator ☐ Other (specify)

Your contact information/telephone number:

4. If student, state school if other than RVCS: __________________________ Grade: __________

5. If staff member, state school/work site: __________________________

6. Information about the Incident:

   Name of Target (of behavior): __________________________
   Name of Aggressor (Person who engaged in the behavior): __________________________
   Date(s) of Incident(s): __________________________
   Time When Incident(s) Occurred: __________________________
   Location of Incident(s) (Be as specific as possible): __________________________

7. Witnesses (List people who saw the incident or have information about it):

   Name: __________________________ ☐ Student ☐ Staff ☐ Other __________________________
   Name: __________________________ ☐ Student ☐ Staff ☐ Other __________________________
   Name: __________________________ ☐ Student ☐ Staff ☐ Other __________________________

8. Describe the details of the incident (including names of people involved, what occurred, and what each person did and said, including specific words used). Please use additional space on back if necessary.

9. Signature of Person Filing this Report: __________________________ Date: __________
(Note: Reports may be filed anonymously.)

10. Form Given to: __________________________ Position: __________ Date: __________

   Signature: __________________________ Date Received: __________
ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

I. Introduction
River Valley Charter School is committed to maintaining an educational environment and workplace where bigotry and intolerance, including discrimination on the basis of age, ancestry, athletic performance, color, creed, ethnicity, gender (including pregnancy), gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, homelessness, mental or physical disability, national origin, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, prior academic achievement, race, religion, sexual orientation, and special need are not tolerated and where any form of intimidation, threat, coercion and/or harassment that insults the dignity of others and interferes with their freedom to learn or work is unacceptable. This policy is intended to help each member of the community to be unencumbered by unwelcome comments or gestures that would interfere with his/her feeling of safety while at school.

River Valley Charter School strictly enforces a prohibition against harassment and discrimination, sexual or otherwise, of any of its employees, students, or parents by anyone, including any fellow student, teacher, supervisor, co-worker, vendor, parent, or other third party, as such conduct is contrary to the mission of the River Valley Charter School and its commitment to equal opportunity in educational programs and employment.

Discrimination and harassment consist of unwelcome conduct, whether oral or physical, that is based on a characteristic protected by law, such as age, ancestry, color, creed, ethnicity, gender (including pregnancy), gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, mental or physical disability, national origin, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, race, religion, sexual orientation, and special need. River Valley Charter School will not tolerate harassing or discriminatory conduct that affects employment or educational conditions, that interferes unreasonably with an individual’s school or work performance, or that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or school environment. Discrimination and/or harassment of employees, students, or parents occurring in the school or workplace is prohibited by law and will not be tolerated by River Valley Charter School. For purposes of this policy, “workplace” or “school” includes school-sponsored social events, trips, work-related travel or similar events connected with school programs or employment.

Further, any retaliation against an individual who has complained about discrimination, harassment or any retaliation against any individual who has cooperated with an investigation of a discrimination, harassment or retaliation complaint is similarly unlawful and will not be tolerated.

River Valley Charter School takes allegations of discrimination and harassment seriously and will respond promptly to complaints. Where it is determined that inappropriate conduct has occurred, the River Valley Charter School will act promptly to eliminate the conduct and will impose corrective action as necessary, including disciplinary action where appropriate, which may include termination of employment, school-related discipline, or reporting to state/federal agencies.

II. Definition of Discrimination and Harassment
“Discrimination” and “Harassment” is defined as unwelcome conduct, whether oral, written, or physical, that is based on age, ancestry, color, creed, ethnicity, gender (including pregnancy), gender identity, gender expression, mental or physical disability, national origin (including language proficiency) race, religion, sexual orientation, and special need. Discrimination and/or harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Display or circulation of written materials or pictures that are degrading to a person or group described above.
- Oral abuse or insults about, directed at, or made in the presence of an individual or group described above.
- Any action or speech that contributes to, promotes or results in a hostile or discriminatory environment to an individual or group described above.
- Any action or speech that is sufficiently severe, pervasive or persistent that it either interferes with or limits the ability of an individual or group (as described above) to participate in or benefit from employment or a program or activity of the River Valley Charter School; or creates an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational or working environment.
Many forms of harassment and discrimination have been recognized as violations of the civil rights laws (including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VI and Title IX) by federal courts, state courts, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination.

“Sexual harassment” is defined as sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and oral or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submission to or rejection of such advances, requests, or conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly as a term or condition of employment, academic standing, school-related opportunities or as a basis for employment decisions.
- Such advances, requests, or conduct have the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s academic or work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, or sexually offensive work or educational environment.

Under the definition stated above, direct or implied requests by a teacher, supervisor, parent, or any individual in a position of work or school authority for sexual favors in exchange for actual or promised job or school benefits such as favorable reviews, salary increases, promotions, increased benefits, continued employment, better grades, recommendations or other advantages constitutes sexual harassment.

While it is not possible to list all circumstances that may be considered sexual harassment, the following are examples of conduct that are inappropriate and that, if unwelcome, may constitute sexual harassment. In each case, such a determination will depend upon the totality of the circumstances, including the severity of the conduct and its pervasiveness.

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Unwelcome sexual advances, whether they involve physical touching or not.
- Unwelcome leering, whistling, brushing against the body, sexual gestures, suggestive or insulting comments.
- Sexual epithets, jokes, written or oral references to sexual conduct, comments about an individual’s body, comments about an individual’s sexual activity, deficiencies, or prowess.
- Discussions of one’s own sexual activities or inquiries into others’ sexual experiences.
- Displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures, cartoons.

The definitions of discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment are broad. In addition to the above examples, other unwelcome conduct, whether intended or not, that has the effect of creating a school or work environment that is hostile, offensive, intimidating, or humiliating to either male or female employees, students or parents also may constitute discrimination, harassment and/or sexual harassment.

III. Reporting Complaints of Discrimination and Harassment

If any River Valley Charter School employee, student, or parent believes, in good faith, that they have been subjected to sexual harassment or any other form of harassment or discrimination described above, the individual has a right to file a complaint with River Valley Charter School through the Sexual Harassment and/or Civil Rights Officer, Katy Field. This may be done orally or in writing. Teachers or other staff members who observe incidents of harassment involving students should report such incidents immediately to the Officer. The Officer, being aware of harassment involving any employee or student, is obligated to follow the school policy for documenting and resolving the situation.

If another school community member wishes to file a complaint, they may do so with the Civil Rights Officer, Katy Field, at (978)465-0065.
IV. Complaint Investigation

When the Officer receives a complaint of discrimination or harassment, they will investigate the allegation in a fair and expeditious manner. The investigation will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable under the circumstances. The investigation may include an interview with the person filing the complaint and also may include interviews with witnesses or other individuals who the Officer believes would be useful to the investigation. The Officer also will interview the person alleged to have committed the discrimination or harassment. When the Officer has concluded their investigation, the Officer will, to the extent appropriate, inform the person filing the complaint and the person alleged to have committed the conduct of the results of the investigation. The Officer will keep confidential written records of the pertinent information and the investigative process.

The complaint investigation procedures are designed to promote the sensitive handling of harassment and discrimination issues, the thorough investigation of complaints, facilitation of a prompt and expeditious internal review, and a fair and equitable resolution of the complaint.

An employee, student, or parent may select any of the routes identified below to discuss a concern or file a complaint of discrimination or harassment. School community members are encouraged to attempt resolution personally at the onset of the unwanted behavior by telling the offending party to stop. The school community member may seek advice and help from appropriate individuals within the administrative office without being required to file a formal complaint.

Please note that while these procedures relate to the River Valley Charter School policy of promoting a workplace and educational setting free from discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, as detailed further in this policy, these procedures are not designed nor intended to limit the River Valley Charter School’s authority to discipline or take remedial action for workplace and educational conduct which the River Valley Charter School deems unacceptable.

A. General Policies

1. No reprisals or retaliation shall be invoked against any employee, student, or parent for processing, in good faith, a complaint, either on an informal or formal basis, or for participating in any way in these complaint procedures.

2. No reprisals or retaliation shall be invoked against any employee, student, or parent who, in good faith, has testified, assisted or participated in any manner in any investigation, proceeding, or hearing of a complaint or for otherwise participating in any way in these complaint procedures.

3. Whenever possible, a conference should be scheduled during a time that does not conflict with regularly scheduled work and/or school programs.

4. River Valley Charter School will work with an individual who files a complaint of discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, in order to fairly and expeditiously resolve the complaint.

5. When a student has filed a complaint, counseling services will be offered individually to any students involved to support them as they participate in the investigative process.

B. Procedures

1. Informal Resolution of Discrimination and Harassment Concerns.

Before initiating the formal procedure, the school community member should, if possible, resolve any complaint regarding an alleged discriminatory practice on an informal basis.

a. The student or parent can raise the issue with the teacher or the Sexual Harassment or Civil Rights Officer, Katy Field of River Valley Charter School who is located in the school office at 2 Perry Way, Newburyport, MA (telephone: 978-465-0065). The name of the Officer is posted in the public areas of the school and in other school publications, including the Family Handbook.
Family Handbook 2022-2023

b. The employee can raise the issue with the Sexual Harassment or Civil Rights Officer, Katy Field at the school office, which is located at 2 Perry Way, Newburyport, MA 01950 (telephone: 978-465-0065). The name of the Officer is posted in employee areas, in the public areas, and in other school publications, including the Faculty Handbook.

c. The Officer shall attempt, within their authority, to work with the individual to resolve the complaint fairly and expeditiously within ten (10) school days of receiving the complaint. Attempts will be made to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the employee, student, or parent who has made the complaint. If the employee, student, or parent is not satisfied with the resolution, or if the employee, student, or parent does not choose informal resolution, then he/she can begin the formal complaint process.

2. Formal Resolution of Discrimination and Harassment Concerns.

a. The employee, student, or parent may file a written complaint to the Sexual Harassment or Civil Rights Officer of the school located at 2 Perry Way, Newburyport, MA 01950. The name of the Officer is posted in public and employee areas of the school and in publications by the school, namely the Family Handbook and Faculty Handbook. The employee, student, and parent are expected to file a written complaint no later than twenty (20) school days after the alleged discriminatory practice occurred in order for an expeditious investigation to be conducted, unless extenuating circumstances exist. The employee, student, or parent shall write a letter that will state the name of the individual and the location of the school where the alleged discriminatory practice occurred, the basis for the complaint and the corrective action that they are seeking.

b. After receipt of a filing of the formal written complaint, the Officer shall promptly give written notification to the appropriate school member identified in the complaint. This written notification shall include a copy of the complaint letter filed with the Officer.

c. The Officer will conduct the necessary investigation promptly after receiving the complaint. In the course of its investigation, the Officer shall contact those individuals that have been referred to as having pertinent information related to the complaint. This process shall include, at a minimum, contacting the complainant and the person against whom the complaint was filed. If further documentation is needed, the Officer shall present to the appropriate individuals, written requests for additional information pertaining to the complaint.

d. Strict timelines cannot be set for conducting the investigation because each set of circumstances is different. For example, sometimes the employees, students, or parents that are involved in the complaint are not immediately available. The Officer, however, will try to facilitate the process so that the complaint is handled as quickly as is feasible and will strive to complete the investigation within twenty (20) school days. When more than twenty (20) school days is required for the investigation, the Officer shall inform the school community member who filed the complaint that the investigation is still ongoing.

e. After completing the formal investigation of the complaint, the Officer shall request a meeting with the person against whom the complaint was filed to discuss the findings, and, at the same time, to give the person against whom the complaint was filed an opportunity to respond to the findings, and to seek to resolve the complaint.

f. When feasible and appropriate, the Officer will make every attempt to resolve the issue within the time parameters of this initial meeting; however, more than one meeting may be necessary. The Officer shall strive to complete both the investigation and the resolution of the complaint within twenty (20) school days. When more than twenty (20) school days is required for the investigation and resolution process, the Administration shall inform the school community members involved in writing that additional time is needed for the resolution process.

g. If no satisfactory resolution can be reached through the informal or formal resolution procedures detailed above, the employee, student, or parent has the right to appeal the decision by filing a grievance according to the guidelines specified in the River Valley Charter School Grievance Policy.
h. If, after completing the procedures set forth in the River Valley Charter School Grievance Policy, the employee, student, or other school community member is not satisfied with the outcome, he/she may file a complaint with an appropriate state or federal agency. Moreover, it should be noted that using the River Valley Charter School’s complaint process does not prohibit the individual from filing a complaint with these agencies. For student or parent complaints may be taken to: For employees or applicants for employment, complaints may be taken to:

**U. S. Department of Education**
Office for Civil Rights
33 Arch Street, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02110
Tel: 617-289-0111
Fax: 617-289-0150

**Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination**
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 994-6000

**Program Quality Assurance**
The commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148-5023
Tel: 781-338-3300

**Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**
JFK Federal Building
475 Government Center
Boston, Massachusetts 02203
617-565-3200 or 800-669-4000

**The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**
1801 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20507
202-663-4900

Each agency has a specific time period for filing a claim. The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) allows at least 180 days (may be longer in some circumstances) to file a complaint, and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) allows at least 300 days to file a complaint.

**V. Disciplinary Action**
If it is determined that inappropriate conduct has been committed by a River Valley Charter School teacher, student, parent, supervisor, co-worker, vendor, or other third party, the River Valley Charter School will take action that is appropriate under the circumstances. Action may range from counseling to termination of employment, discipline, up to and including expulsion, or reporting to state and/or federal agencies.
NOTICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS COORDINATOR DESIGNATION

This notice provides information regarding legislation that guides the school in its employment and educational policies. These laws are promulgated by the River Valley Charter District to insure the equal enjoyment of all opportunities and privileges regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. River Valley is an equal opportunity employer that complies with provisions of Chapter 622/282, Title IX and the Drug Free School Act of 1988.

Title IX
No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972). In compliance with these regulations, The River Valley Charter District has a designated Title IX Coordinator: School Counselor/Sexual Harassment Officer, Katy Field.

McKinney-Vento, Section 725(2)
Children and youth in a state care or custody who are identified as homeless have the same rights as other homeless students to fully attend and participate in all school activities classes, educational opportunities, meals, social and athletic events, clubs, teams, and other services. For attendance at River Valley, the child has the right to apply for enrollment according to the school’s Enrollment Policy. For further information please contact: School Counselor/Homeless Liaison, Katy Field.

Title VI
Title VI, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq., was enacted as part of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. In compliance with these regulations, The River Valley Charter District has a designated Title VI Coordinator: Katy Field, School Counselor/Civil Rights Coordinator.


Section 504
No otherwise qualified individual shall solely by reason of handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973). In compliance with the above regulation, the River Valley Charter District has designated a Coordinator of 504 activities. If there are any questions regarding River Valley’s compliance with Section 504, please contact: Katy Field, School Counselor/504 Coordinator, River Valley Charter School, 2 Perry Way, Newburyport, MA 01950 (978-465-0065, ext. 234)

Special Education
603 CMR 28.00 governs the provision by Massachusetts public schools for special education and related services to eligible students and ensures that they receive individual educational opportunities in the least restrictive environment in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. If there are any questions regarding River Valley’s compliance with Special Education benefits, please contact: Jonnie Lyn Evans, School Director, River Valley Charter School, 2 Perry Way, Newburyport, MA 01950 (978-465-0065, ext. 3119).

Inquiries regarding compliance with any of the above laws may also be directed to: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Director of Civil Rights, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 or Department of Health, Education & Welfare, Boston, MA 02114.
CONCUSSION POLICY
Pending approval by the Board of Trustees

Introduction
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has directed schools to develop a Concussion Policy. It is not subject to MDPH review but must be in accordance with MDPH regulations.

River Valley Charter School (RVCS) seeks to prevent concussions and to provide a safe return to activity for all students after an injury, particularly after a head injury. In order to effectively and consistently manage these injuries, the school community abides by the following procedures that have been developed to aid in ensuring that concussed athletes (students) are identified, treated and referred appropriately, receive appropriate follow-up medical care during the day, including academic assistance, and are fully recovered prior to returning to athletic activity.

RVCS students participate in extracurricular school sports programs such as Track and Field in the Spring and Cross Country in the Fall. Many of our students are also involved in community supported sports programs. This policy will be utilized for all concussion related incidents at school, i.e. playground, physical education class, and extracurricular school sports and other school-related events. This policy also applies to RVCS students who receive a concussion outside of school hours or events, particularly policy guidelines specific to re-entry, reporting, and participation in school-based activities.

Persons Responsible for Implementation of Policy and Procedures
Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(1): Designation, by the superintendent or headmaster, principal or school leader, of the person responsible for the implementation of these policies and protocols, either the Athletic Director or other school personnel with administrative authority.

The Director of River Valley Charter School has designated its School Nurse as having administrative authority to oversee the implementation of these policies and protocols governing the prevention and management of sports-related head injuries. In addition, the School Nurse will be responsible for:

(1) Supporting and enforcing the protocols, documentation, training and reporting outlined in this policy;
(2) Assuring that all documentation is in place;
(3) Reviewing, updating and implementing this policy every two years.

Annual Training Requirement
Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(2): Annual training of persons specified in 105 CMR 201.007 in the prevention and recognition of sports-related head injury, and associated health risks including second impact syndrome, utilizing Department-approved training materials or program, and documentation of each person’s completion of such training.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires annual safety training on prevention, identification and management of a sports-related injury including head trauma and second impact syndrome for school personnel as well as parents or legal guardians of children who participate in any extracurricular athletic activity. This annual safety training shall be required for River Valley Charter School’s school nurse(s), school physician, and faculty, including the physical education teacher.

Our student athletes also need to know the importance of reporting a concussion to their coaches, parents, athletic trainer and other school personnel. Each year, middle school students will participate in an educational training on concussions through our Health Education program. The following resources will be used:

The River Valley Charter School Nurse is responsible for ensuring that the training requirements for staff and students are met, recorded, and records are maintained.

The written verification of completion of the annual training (either the certificate of completion from the online courses or a signed verification that written materials have been read and understood) will be kept on file for faculty.

**Documentation of Physical Exam**

*Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(3): Documentation of physical examination prior to a student’s participation in extracurricular athletic activities on an annual basis, consistent with 105 CMR 200.100(B)(3) and information for students participating in multiple sports seasons that documentation of one physical examination each year is sufficient*

Consistent with regulatory requirements, RVCS requires that all students who are participating in an extracurricular athletic activity to have documentation of a current physical examination on file with the school. The current RVCS annual medical examination form is submitted to the school nurse and is kept in the student’s medical record. The school nurse will ensure that all student athletes that are competing in extracurricular school sports have been medically cleared annually.

**Documentation Requirements prior to Participation**

To protect the safety of students, River Valley will not allow a student to participate in an extracurricular athletic activity until all required paperwork has been returned and reviewed by the School Nurse or the School Doctor, and concussion training is complete, and certification has been received.

**Head Injury Reporting Forms Submission and Review**

*Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(7): Procedure for reporting head injuries or suspected concussions sustained during extracurricular athletic activities to the school nurse and certified athletic trainer, if on staff.*

**Concussion History Form Submission and Review**

The Massachusetts concussion law requires athletes and their parents to inform coaches about prior head injuries at the beginning of each sports season. This reporting is relayed via the registration form. It must be submitted prior to the start of the activity.

The decision to allow a player who reported a history of multiple concussions on her/his pre-participation form should be made only after consultation with the student’s physician or primary care provider; the sports medicine or concussion specialist, if involved; the neuropsychologist, if involved, and the appropriate school athletic staff and the parent. Current evidence indicates that youth who have suffered one or more concussions are more likely to suffer a subsequent one. The focus of RVCS will always be on protecting the health and safety of the student and avoiding long term consequences that can occur from repeated concussions.

**Medical/Nursing Review of Pre-Participation Forms**

*Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(5): Procedure for medical or nursing review of all Pre-Participation Forms indicating a history of head injury.*

**Review of Health Information Form**

At the start of the school year, the school nurse will review all health information forms submitted. The school nurse will be responsible for communicating with the classroom and physical education teachers, following up with parents and students as needed prior to extracurricular athletic activities, and requesting review by the school physician of completed forms that indicate a prior concussion history.

**Procedure for Reporting Head Injuries to School Nurse and/or Certified Athletic Trainer**

*Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(7): Procedure for reporting head injuries or suspected concussions sustained during extracurricular athletic activities to the school nurse and certified athletic trainer, if on staff.*
Student head injuries or suspected concussions (after a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body) sustained during extracurricular athletic activities must be reported as soon as possible to the school nurse, classroom teacher, and physical education teacher.

**Removing Athletes from Play and Medical Evaluation**

*Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(8): Procedure for identifying a head injury or suspected concussion, removing an athlete from practice or competition and referring for medical evaluation.*

**Identifying Head Injury or Suspected Head Injury and Removing from Play**

In the event that a student athlete receives a head injury, or is suspected of having a head injury, the student will be removed from play and will not be returned to play or practice that day. The faculty/staff member will report the head injury to the school nurse as soon as possible, for medical assessment and management and for coordination of home instructions and follow-up care. The school nurse will be responsible for contacting the student athlete’s parents/guardians and providing follow-up instructions. If the athlete is injured at an away or after-hours event, the faculty/staff member is responsible for notifying the athlete’s parents of the injury and, if warranted, calling for emergency care. If the athlete is able to be sent home (rather than directly to MD):

- The nurse or faculty/staff member will ensure that the athlete will be with a responsible adult, who is capable of monitoring the athlete and understanding the home care instructions, before allowing the athlete to go home;
- or
- The nurse of faculty/staff member will continue efforts to reach the parents/guardians.

If there is any question about the status of the athlete, or if the athlete is not able to be monitored appropriately, the athlete will be referred to the emergency department for evaluation. The school nurse or faculty/staff member will accompany the athlete and remain with the athlete until the parent/guardian arrives, and athletes with suspected head injuries will be referred to their primary care physician or if unavailable, emergency room.

**Medical Clearance for Return to Play**

*Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(9): The protocol for medical clearance for return to play after a concussion that at a minimum complies with 105 CMR.201.011.*

105 CMR 201.011: Each student who is removed from practice or competition for a head injury or suspected concussion, or loses consciousness, even briefly, or exhibits signs and symptoms of a concussion, shall obtain and present to the Athletic Director, unless another person is specified in school policy or procedure, a Department Post Sports-Related Head Injury Medical Clearance and Authorization Form (Medical Clearance and Authorization Form), or school-based equivalent, prior to resuming the extracurricular athletic activity. This form must be completed by a physician or one of the individuals as authorized by 105 CMR 201.011(A). The ultimate return to play decision is a medical decision that may involve a multidisciplinary approach, including consultation with parents, the school nurse and teachers as appropriate.

The RVCS School Nurse may consult with the School Physician regarding the return-to-play decision. Medical clearance is meant to be provided AFTER a student has completed his or her graduated return-to-play plan. The medical provider giving medical clearance for returning to play should include:

- Student’s name, sex, date of birth, grade
- Date of Injury
- Symptoms and their duration
- Diagnosis
- If a concussion was diagnosed, date of completion of graduated RTP plan
- Past history of previous concussion
- Health provider’s name, address, phone #
- Health provider’s designation as physician, CAT, NP or neuropsychologist
- If not physician, name of physician providing consultation or coordination
Signature and date

Student athletes may not return to practice until furnishing the school with the required medical clearance information (as listed above). The school nurse will review this information and inform the school physician. The medical clearance will be filed in the student's health record in the school health office. If symptoms are observed after a student resumes physical activity, the student will remain out of sports until re-evaluated. The athlete must be completely symptom-free at rest before beginning a graduated return-to-play process.

Each athlete will likely have their own course of recovery, which may depend upon prior medical history of concussion. Each student who is removed from practice or competition shall have a written graduated reentry plan for return to full academic and extracurricular athletic activities. Input for development of this plan may be sought from:

- the student’s teachers,
- the student’s guidance counselor,
- school nurse,
- certified athletic trainer if on staff,
- neuropsychologist if available or involved,
- parents,
- members of the building-based student support and assistance team or individualized education program team as appropriate

The reentry plan will be developed in consultation with the student’s primary care provider or the treating physician.

This written plan shall include instructions for students, parent/guardian(s) and school personnel addressing physical and cognitive rest, graduated return to academics and athletics, estimated time intervals for resuming activities, assessment frequencies, as appropriate, by the school nurse, physician, team physician, athletic trainer if on staff, or neuropsychologist if available until full return to academics and athletics is authorized. A plan for communication and coordination shall also be put into place with the above individuals who are managing the student’s recovery. The student must be completely symptom-free at rest in order to begin graduated reentry (stepwise program) to activities. Final authority for return to play shall reside with the student’s physician or the physician’s designee.

Providing Information, Forms and Materials to Parents and Athletes

Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(11): Procedure for providing information, and necessary form and materials, to all parents and athletes including the: (a) annual training requirement, (b) procedure for the school to notify parents when an athlete has been removed from play for a head injury or suspected concussion sustained during an extracurricular athletic activity, (c) protocol for obtaining medical clearance for return to play and academics after a diagnosed concussion, (d) parent’s responsibility for completion of the Pre-participation Form, or school-based equivalent, and (e) parent’s responsibility for completion of the Report of a Head Injury Form, or school-based equivalent.

Parents/guardians and students who plan to participate in any extracurricular athletic program at River Valley Charter School are informed of their responsibility to complete the Heads Up online training. Parents/guardians will register, complete course, and receive a completion receipt which should be provided to the school nurse as documentation. The online course is available through the Centers Disease Control at: https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/youthsports/training/index.html.

At River Valley Charter School, parents and students are notified of the protocol for obtaining medical clearance to return to play after a diagnosed concussion. Parents and students can call the health office at 978-465-0065, Ext 214 to get further clarification or ask questions. No student will be allowed to return to play athletic activities until the medical clearance form is signed by authorized medical professional, submitted and reviewed by the school nurse and/or school physician.
Sharing Concussion-Related Health Information

Regulation 105 CMR 201.006(A)(15): Procedure for sharing information concerning an athlete’s history of head injury and concussion, recuperation, reentry plan, and authorization to return to play and academic activities on a need to know basis consistent with requirements of 105 CMR 201.000 and applicable federal and state law including but not limited to the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, 603 CMR 23.00, and the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Regulations, 34 CFR Part 99.

Informal collaboration among school personnel occurs on a temporary, as-needed basis to protect the wellbeing or safety of the student. For example, when the school nurse informs (while adhering to protocols for confidentiality) the physical education teacher that a particular student may not participate in athletic activities because of a recent injury.

There may be circumstances in which there is a need to share information with authorized school personnel either to enhance the educational progress of the student or to protect their safety or well-being. For example, staff may need to be alerted to signs or symptoms of a medical problem and offered a course of action. This type of disclosure should be made only to those authorized school personnel who work directly with the student in an instructive (academic or athletic), administrative, or diagnostic capacity.

Finally, authorized school personnel should be instructed not to re-disclose the information. If there is any question about the sensitivity of the information, the school nurse should seek the permission of the parent/guardian and student, if appropriate, prior to disclosure to authorized school personnel. Ultimately, however, federal regulations permit information in the student health record to be seen by authorized school personnel on a need-to-know basis.

Resources

Additional materials and resources about sports-related concussion are listed below, with links where they can be downloaded.

Centers for Disease Control Brain Injury Basics webpage offers education on signs and symptoms of concussion: https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/index.html


Approved Training for Sports Related Concussion: https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/youthsports/training/index.html


Board of Trustees, Approved September 19, 2017

STUDENT SUBSTANCE USE POLICY
FEBRUARY 2017

River Valley Charter School
Statement of Prohibition
River Valley Charter School is committed to providing an alcohol-free, tobacco-free, and drug-free learning environment to its students. In order to protect the health and safety of our school community, River Valley Charter School prohibits the possession, use, or consumption of alcohol, tobacco products, or drugs on school property or at any school function. A student shall not, regardless of the quantity, use, or consume, possess, buy or sell, or give away any beverage containing alcohol; any tobacco product, including vapor or e-cigarettes; marijuana; steroids; or other controlled substances.

Additionally, any student who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol prior to, or during attendance or participation in a school-sponsored event or activity, is subject to disciplinary action.

Education & Professional Training Relating to Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs
River Valley Charter School (RVCS) believes in fostering a healthy learning environment for all students and staff. RVCS understands that substance use prevention requires education and collaboration. In accordance with state and federal law, RVCS shall provide developmentally-appropriate health and wellness education programs to its students with the addition of specific, evidence-based alcohol, tobacco, and drug prevention education programs for students in grades 5-8. Such programs shall address the legal, social, and health consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, with emphasis on non-use by school-age children. The curriculum, instructional materials, and outcomes used in this program shall be recommended by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP).

Faculty and staff interact with students on a daily basis and are well-situated to recognize changes in student behavior, performance, demeanor, and appearance. These changes could suggest whether a student is in possession of, using, or at risk of possessing, consuming, and/or using alcohol, tobacco products, marijuana, steroids, or other controlled substances. RVCS faculty and staff will therefore receive information from the Health Office that supports them in identifying students who are at risk as well as in supporting the implementation of this policy. Faculty and staff will be made aware of the school’s policies, procedures, and protocols for the prevention, intervention, and follow-up related to substance use and abuse. In addition to the elements of this policy, training will include early warning signs, building-based referral programs, and general protocols to follow when they are suspicious of, or made aware of student use, possession, or consumption of prohibited substances.

Families are also an essential partner in the effort to prevent substance use. River Valley will collaborate with families to ensure a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to substance use prevention and education. In addition to sharing resource information regarding outside support agencies with families in need, the Health and/or Counseling Offices will share relevant information with parents and guardians about substance use and prevention on an annual basis.

Substance Use and Abuse Verbal Screening
As recommended by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, and subject to Department of Elementary and Secondary School appropriation, River Valley will verbally screen students in grade seven annually using SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral for Treatment in Schools). Parents and guardians will be notified at the beginning of the year of the school’s plan to screen and will be provided with an opportunity to opt out of the screening. The opt-out option will require written notification to the school.
Information collected during the verbal screening shall be considered confidential and shall not be disclosed without the written consent of the student, or parent or guardian, except in cases of immediate medical emergency or when disclosure is otherwise required by state law.

Emergency Treatment and Access to Resources and Services.
Should education not prevent substance use among our students, the River Valley Charter School Counseling and Health offices will be available to support students. RVCS maintains full time health and counseling staff to treat
students with medical emergencies, whether they are physical or emotional in nature. Students who appear to be under the influence of a substance will first be triaged for medical intervention. Should narcotic or heroin use be suspected or observed, and it deemed medically necessary, River Valley Charter School will have Naloxone available. (Naloxone is the reversal agent for opioid overdose.)

If immediate medical intervention is not necessary, students believed to be under the influence will be referred to the School Counselor. RVCS counseling and health personnel will maintain information for accessing referrals to community service agencies and will work in collaboration with outside substance use counseling professionals and mental health specialists when appropriate.

River Valley Charter School recognizes that substance use and health are closely related, and we endeavor to support all students in their journey toward well-being.

**Disciplinary Response**

Any student who is found to have violated the above prohibitions shall be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or expulsion. In accordance with our philosophy of tailoring our disciplinary response to the needs of the individual student, each case of substance use infraction shall be given serious consideration within the context of the specific situation. Substance related infractions will, in some circumstances, necessitate disciplinary removal. Disciplinary removals will follow the rights granted to students and parents under G.L. c. 71 §37H and §37½.

In accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, section 96, this policy shall be posted on the RVCS website and notice shall be provided to all students and parents. Additionally, RVCS shall file a copy of this policy with DESE in accordance with law and in a manner requested by DESE.
FINGERPRINT-BASED CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORD INFORMATION CHECKS POLICY

Fingerprint based criminal history record information requirements were introduced during the FY14 school year. River Valley Charter School is adopting this policy to ensure compliance with the law. Briefly stated, the policy requires that all employees, student teachers, substitute teachers, individuals providing transportation services as well as volunteers and anyone else who has direct and unmonitored contact with a student, submit to the national fingerprint-based criminal history record check as a provision of employment or service.

I. Requesting CHRI checks

Fingerprint-based CHRI checks will only be conducted as authorized by M.G.L. c. 71, §38R and 42 U.S.C. § 16962, in accordance with all applicable state and federal rules and regulations, and in compliance with M.G.L. c. 6, §§ 167-178 and 803 CMR §§ 2.00, et seq. If an applicant or employee is required to submit to a fingerprint-based state and national criminal history record check, they shall be informed of this requirement and instructed on how to comply with the law. Such instruction will include information on the procedure for submitting fingerprints. In addition, the applicant or employee will be provided with all information needed to successfully register for a fingerprinting appointment [e.g., the IdentoGO website address is http://www.identogo.com/FP/Massachusetts.aspx and the River Valley Provider Identification Number is 04820000].

II. Access to CHRI

All CHRI is subject to strict state and federal rules and regulations in addition to Massachusetts CORI laws and regulations. CHRI cannot be shared with any unauthorized entity for any purpose, including subsequent hiring determinations. All receiving entities are subject to audit by the Massachusetts Department of Criminal Justice Information Services (DCJIS) and the FBI, and failure to comply with such rules and regulations could lead to sanctions. Title 28, U.S.C, § 534, Pub. L. 92-544 and Title 28 C.F.R. 20.33(b) provide that the exchange of records and information is subject to cancellation if dissemination is made outside of the receiving entity or related entities. Furthermore, an entity can be charged criminally for the unauthorized disclosure of CHRI.

III. Storage of CHRI

CHRI shall only be stored for extended periods of time when needed for the integrity and/or utility of an individual’s personnel file. Administrative, technical, and physical safeguards, which are in compliance with the most recent CJIS Security Policy, have been implemented to ensure the security and confidentiality of CHRI. The CJIS Security Policy can be found here: http://www.mass.gov/eopss/law-enforce-and-cj/cjis/fbi-cjis-security-policy.html. Each individual involved in the handling of CHRI is to familiarize himself/herself with these safeguards.

In addition to the above, each individual involved in the handling of CHRI will strictly adhere to the policy on the storage, retention and destruction of CHRI.

IV. Retention and Destruction of CHRI

Federal law prohibits the repurposing or dissemination of CHRI beyond its initial requested purpose. Once an individual’s CHRI is received, it will be securely retained in internal agency documents for the following purposes only:

- Historical reference and/or comparison with future CHRI requests,
- Dispute of the accuracy of the record
- Evidence for any subsequent proceedings based on information contained in the CHRI.

CHRI will be kept for the above purposes in a computer folder designated specifically for this confidential information and labeled as such.

When no longer needed, CHRI and any summary of CHRI data must be destroyed by shredding paper copies and/or by deleting all electronic copies from the electronic storage location, including any backup copies or files. The
shredding of paper copies of CHRI by an outside vendor must be supervised by an employee of the River Valley Charter School.

**IV. CHRI Training**

An informed review of a criminal record requires training. Accordingly, all personnel authorized to receive and/or review CHRI at River Valley Charter School will review and become familiar with the educational and relevant training materials regarding SAFIS and CHRI laws and regulations made available by the appropriate agencies, including the DCJIS.

**V. Determining Suitability**

In determining an individual’s suitability, the following factors will be considered:

- a. Nature of the position held or sought
- b. Nature and gravity of the crime
- c. Time period that has passed since the offense
- d. Conviction or completion of sentence
- e. Age at time of offense
- f. Number of offenses
- g. Evidence of rehabilitation

A record of the suitability determination will be retained. The following information will be included in the determination:

- a. The name and date of birth of the employee or applicant;
- b. The date on which the school employer received the national criminal history check results; and,
- c. The suitability determination (either "suitable" or "unsuitable").

A copy of an individual’s suitability determination documentation must be provided to another school employer, or to the individual, upon request of the individual for whom the school employer conducted a suitability determination.

**VI. Relying on Previous Suitability Determination.**

River Valley Charter School may rely on another school’s suitability determination, consistent with 603 CMR 51.06. The decision to rely on an outside suitability determination will be based on the following relevant factors:

- date of previous suitability determination,
- type of organization that conducted the previous determination (public school district, private school),
- state of residence of subject of suitability determination

**VII. Adverse Decisions Based on CHRI**

If inclined to make an adverse decision based on an individual’s CHRI, River Valley Charter School will take the following steps prior to making a final adverse determination:

- Provide the individual with a copy of their CHRI used in making the adverse decision;
- Provide the individual with a copy of this CHRI Policy;
- Provide the individual the opportunity to complete or challenge the accuracy of their CHRI; and
- Provide the individual with information on the process for updating, changing, or correcting CHRI.

A final adverse decision based on an individual’s CHRI will not be made until the individual has been afforded a reasonable time of one week depending on the particular circumstances to correct or complete the CHRI.
VIII. Secondary Dissemination of CHRI
If an individual’s CHRI is released to another authorized entity, a record of that dissemination must be made in a secondary dissemination log. The secondary dissemination log is subject to audit by the DCJIS and the FBI. The following information will be recorded in the log:

1. Subject Name;
2. Subject Date of Birth;
3. Date and Time of the dissemination;
4. Name of the individual to whom the information was provided;
5. Name of the agency for which the requestor works;
6. Contact information for the requestor; and
7. The specific reason for the request.

IX. Reporting to Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
Pursuant to M.G.L. ch 71, § 71R and 603 CMR 51.07, if River Valley Charter School dismisses, declines to renew the employment of, obtains the resignation of, or declines to hire a licensed educator or an applicant for a Massachusetts educator license because of information discovered through a state or national criminal record check, River Valley Charter School shall report such decision or action to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education in writing within 30 days of the employer action or educator resignation. The report shall be in a form requested by the Department and shall include the reason for the action or resignation as well as a copy of the criminal record check results River Valley Charter School shall notify the employee or applicant that it has made a report pursuant to 603 CMR 51.07(1) to the Commissioner.

Pursuant to M.G.L. ch 71, § 71R and 603 CMR 51.07, if River Valley Charter School discovers information from a state or national criminal record check about a licensed educator or an applicant for a Massachusetts educator license that implicates grounds for license action pursuant to 603 CMR 7.15(8)(a), River Valley Charter School shall report to the Commissioner in writing within 30 days of the discovery, regardless of whether River Valley Charter School retains or hires the educator as an employee. The report must include a copy of the criminal record check results. The school employer shall notify the employee or applicant that it has made a report pursuant to 603 CMR 51.07(2) to the Commissioner and shall also send a copy of the criminal record check results to the employee or applicant.
DISTRICT CURRICULUM ACCOMMODATION PLAN
JULY 2018

The Mission of the River Valley Charter School is to provide a rigorous academic program based on the Montessori philosophy and rooted in the history, culture, and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley. Students will reach their full potential as scholars and as self-reliant, productive members of society. They will be adept at critical thinking and creative problem solving and will be fully prepared to succeed in future schools, careers and civic life.

INTRODUCTION
Massachusetts General Laws, Laws C. 71, & 38Q1/2, require the adoption and implementation of a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP). The plan is intended to guide principals and general education teachers in ensuring that all possible efforts have been made to meet student’s needs in the general education classroom and to support teachers in analyzing and accommodating a diverse range of student learning styles. The DCAP describes the school’s systemic plan, rather than an individualized student plan, and it supports the idea that the best results are achieved when learning issues are addressed early, within the general education setting, and with a collaborative approach. It includes strategies and resources available to teachers in their quest to address the diverse learning styles of their students, outside of the special education arena.

The DCAP ensures that all efforts have been made to meet the diverse learning needs of students in the general education classroom.

The RVCS DCAP lays out both formal and informal routes for supporting all learners at River Valley Charter School. In some instances, communication between parents and teachers will be effective in identifying issues and agreeing upon strategies to be implemented. In other situations, the Student Support Team (SST) will be involved in the process and a more formal written plan may result. In conjunction with SST, the DCAP provides a framework for the identification of accommodations, learning supports, and interventions that can lead to improved learning outcomes in the general education classroom. The range of interventions may include, but are not limited to, adjustments in curriculum and/or teaching strategies, enhanced support services within the classroom or from an external resource, the addition of different teaching materials, etc. For all students, universal screeners may be used in support of the process for data-based identification of students and for progress monitoring.

The targeted areas for the DCAP, as defined by the statute are:
- Analysis of diverse learning styles within gen-ed classroom
- Accommodations to meet diverse learning needs with the gen-ed classroom
- Provision of support and services in the gen-ed classroom
- Services for children whose behavior may interfere with learning
- Encouragement of parental involvement
- Encouragement of teacher mentoring and collaboration
- Assistance to gen-ed staff through professional development and collaboration
CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR PUBLIC MONTESSORI CLASSROOMS

River Valley Charter School (RVCS) provides a high-quality Montessori program within the public-school arena. The school maintains its commitment to the Montessori pedagogy by hiring Montessori-trained and/or certified teachers in every classroom whenever possible. Every classroom in grades K through six has a full-time lead teacher and a full-time assistant teacher, which is a core component of the Montessori approach. Our classrooms are outfitted with genuine Montessori learning materials and furniture, which are essential to creating a prepared Montessori learning environment. We offer individualized instruction, hands-on learning, extended daily learning periods, multi-age classrooms, frequent student collaboration and student-directed learning; all hallmarks of the Montessori philosophy and well suited to support the needs of all learners within the general education classroom.

Montessori education is centered upon a whole-child approach to learning. Our primary goal is to help children reach their full potential both academically and personally, while instilling in them a sense of their place in the world and their responsibilities as productive members of society. To the maximum extent possible, our public educational program seeks to meet children where they are developmentally rather than requiring students to follow a standardized timeline for learning. To achieve this, we use level-based Learning Goals that describe what students should know and be able to do by the end of a level, i.e., by the end of kindergarten, third grade, sixth grade, and eighth grade. The curriculum is designed to develop the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive elements of each student, and our commitment is to all of these areas of student development.

Individualized Instruction: With two teachers in every classroom, instruction is individualized to the greatest extent possible. Teachers provide lessons based on both their Montessori training and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Lessons are given in small group settings and are customized to meet the learning needs of each student. Our individualized approach to instruction allows teachers to customize curriculum and assessment for every child, assessing each student’s readiness to learn, and to respond to academic, personal, social or emotional concerns directly. Work is assigned to students based on their current level of achievement and their readiness to learn new concepts and skills. By having a second adult in the classroom, enhanced learning supports can be implemented more easily within the classroom.

Hands-on Manipulatives: Maria Montessori pioneered the now widely-accepted principle that the work of the hand informs the learning of the mind. Given this fundamental belief, Montessori classrooms are designed to provide active learning to all students. All of our grades K-6 are stocked with the appropriate Montessori learning materials to support learning in literacy and mathematics, as well as other core subjects. Montessori materials allow students to manipulate learning materials in order to experience the concrete representation of a given concept.

Extended Blocks of Learning Time: The River Valley curricular approach is one of mastery learning rather than of simply covering concepts. Our Curriculum Maps identify all learning goals for each level, yet our teachers have the flexibility to present concepts in various manners to suit the learning pace and style of each student. Rather than structuring the day to assign a limited amount of time to each subject area, our Montessori approach provides both students and teachers complete flexibility in the time they choose to devote to any given pursuit. When a student, or group of students, demonstrates a particular interest in exploring a concept, question, or issue more deeply, the Montessori philosophy calls for teachers to facilitate such interest.

Multi-age Classrooms enrich the curriculum options by offering students the opportunity to learn from and teach each other as well. It also increases the breadth of curriculum being taught within the classroom thus providing opportunities for remediation, without stigma, for students who need it. Similarly, for students who are able, it provides opportunities for students to advance, eliminating behavioral issues that often occur when
students are bored. Much of the student work is project-based, and students frequently have a voice in the topics they research.

**Multi-modal Teaching and Learning:** Students are physically active during classroom learning periods, allowing kinesthetic learners to access their strengths, and all students to develop independence and remain engaged in their learning. Students are free to move about the classroom; they rarely learn in a sit-and-listen format. Our place-based learning focus also provides students multiple opportunities to actively engage in learning experiences outside the school walls. Curricular content is related to other parts of the curriculum to ensure connections are made and learning is reinforced.

**Student Collaboration:** Much of the learning that happens at River Valley happens between students. Though direct instruction is provided to every student every day, students spend a large portion of the learning time working with each other. Classrooms are furnished with group tables and provide open floor space for group work, and all students are encouraged to work together on many assignments. This approach not only fosters collaboration, but also provides students the opportunity to articulate their thinking to others, which helps to deepen their comprehension. River Valley students regularly work in groups (often multi-aged) to explore concepts in science, history and humanities. Project work expectations typically include both reporting and presentation (often multi-media), and our students are responsible for collaborating to assure successful execution of these expectations, modeling the skills required for success beyond the school environment.

**Behavioral Expectations:** At all levels, lessons are given on “grace and courtesy,” a Montessori expression used to help students reflect on and learn how to be respectful and at peace with themselves and with others. Each of our classroom communities also develops social contracts at the beginning of each school year defining the expectations and conditions for peaceful, respectful, and productive learning environments. Classrooms for our younger students contain “peace corners,” where students can go for a quiet moment to help them feel centered and ready-to-learn, or where two students can speak together to resolve differences.

**ADDRESSING DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES**

Even with the high quality teaching strategies described above, some students will struggle to acquire the knowledge or requisite skills to meet learning goal expectations. Research suggests that using the Response to Intervention (RtI) approach offers teachers a way to identify, assess, and work more effectively with struggling learners. RVCS follows the Response to Intervention three-tiered system of instruction for all students in which there is a greater level of intervention provided depending on where the student falls within the tiers.

Response to Intervention offers a framework that focuses on providing interventions that leverage student strengths and match student needs. Effective RtI models call for the early identification of student learning and behavioral needs and provides students with timely support. Interventions are implemented, results are monitored through the collection of student progress data. If progress is made, the student is discharged from the RtI process. If progress is not made, additional, enhanced or more intensive interventions are implemented. Ultimately, if a student shows insufficient progress, the student may be referred for further evaluation.

Response to Intervention models are often represented as a pyramid. Each level of the pyramid represents a tier, or a percentage of students generally found at that level. Tier 1 students are students who are meeting the expectations in the general education classroom without targeted support. Tier 2 students are not performing at the same level as their peers and are beginning to show skill deficits. Tier 3 students are those who need specialized instruction to make effective progress. It is generally expected that 80% of students in a classroom are in Tier 1, 10-15% are in Tier 2, and approximately 5% are in Tier 3. The RVCS DCAP primarily targets students in Tier 2 and seeks to do so within the general education classroom.
Student Study Team and the RtI Process

River Valley has a Student Study Team (SST), led by the School Counselor, and comprised of the following professionals:

- Classroom teachers
- Special education coordinator
- Literacy interventionist
- School counselor
- School psychologist
- Speech and language pathologist
- School nurse (if appropriate)
- Others (as appropriate)

The team meets by classroom whenever there is a need to discuss student concerns. After the initial meeting, the team reconvenes within 6-8 weeks. The steps to bring a student to a Student Study Team meeting is described below.

1. Student experiences difficulties, as noted by classroom teachers, OR as indicated by universal screeners. Referrals can also come from faculty/staff observation, MCAS data, kindergarten screening results, etc. All students transferring into RVCS beyond the kindergarten program are also initially included in the SST process.

2. Parent/guardian is informed that the student has been referred to SST.

3. Teacher fills out the SST Form.

4. Vision, hearing, and in-house health screening is conducted if appropriate.

5. Relevant screeners are administered (math, literacy, SAEBRs), if not recently done.

6. Observations/assessments can be conducted by appropriate individuals (speech pathologist, school counselor, literacy interventionist, Assistant Director, special education teachers, school psychologist, OT/PT, etc.) if necessary.

7. Student information is prepared for the SST meeting:

   - The Assistant Director prepares general data (date of birth, family history, attendance, MCAS scores, past progress reports, info from previous teachers, visit to the nurse, etc.)
   - The classroom teacher or the Assistant Director checks in with specialists to determine if the behavior is isolated to the classroom or generalized across all curricular areas.
   - The classroom teacher collects relevant work samples.

8. The SST Team meets to make intervention recommendations. The team agrees on a plan for progress monitoring.
Family Handbook 2022-2023

9. Interventions are implemented with fidelity within the general education setting by the general education teachers and assistant teachers unless noted otherwise.

10. The SST reconvenes approximately 6-8 weeks later, with progress monitoring data, observations, etc., to determine success of interventions.

11. If progress is not being made, the team will create enhanced strategies and recommendations and revisit in another 6 weeks.

12. If progress continues not to be made, the team will consider the referral process.
AVAILABLE SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES
A list of general academic and behavioral interventions is listed below. Any, or all of these interventions can be used in the general education classroom setting by the classroom teacher(s).

### SAMPLE SUPPORTS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

- Repetition
- Individualized instruction
- Multi modal instruction
- Differentiated instruction
- Repeat/reteach concepts
- Explicit teaching of expected behavior
- Pre-teaching
- Modeling and teaching learning strategies
- Partnering the student with students from other levels to reinforce learning
- Graphic organizers
- Strategic seating
- Breakdown assignments into manageable tasks
- Use of technology
- Integrated curriculum projects that capitalize on student interests
- School to home communication logs
- Workplan adjustments
- Teach study skills
- Title 1 support
- Student/teacher contracts
- Behavior modification plans
- Positive incentives/reinforcements
- Counseling
- Motor breaks
- Peer teaching/learning
- Individualized instruction
- Small group instruction
- Access to technology
- Alternative forms of assessment

* See the Behavioral Intervention Manual and the Pre-Referral Intervention Manual for additional academic and behavioral intervention strategies.

### HUMAN RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS AVAILABLE WITHIN THE SCHOOL SETTING

- Student teachers
- Literacy interventionist
- Speech and language pathologist
- School counselor/school psychologist
- Specialist teachers/classes
- School Nurse
- Librarian
- Front Office staff
- Advisor (for MS student)
- Paraprofessionals
- Outside agencies (counseling, etc.)
Professional Mentoring and Collaboration Opportunities

River Valley has a formal mentoring and induction program that partners new and new-to-RVCS teachers with teachers who have a minimum of three years’ experience at RVCS. Mentors receive training and keep a log of their meetings with their protégés.

The daily schedule of the school is arranged so that all teaching levels have four+ hours each week available for common planning time during the school day. Additionally, staff meetings are held weekly after school. Student support and best practices in pedagogy are frequent topics at these meetings.

Additionally, faculty members support one another to address certain issues with a child. The River Valley faculty is organized into small teams that set professional practice goals and observe in each other’s classrooms to provide feedback on progress toward achieving those goals. In this manner they can offer their perspective of the dynamics of the classroom, teaching strategies, or other contributing factors. This experience strengthens the professional culture in the building and leads to improved support for diverse learners.

Professional Development Opportunities

The school allocates funds each year to support the professional growth of its staff. This money has been used for staff to pursue advanced degrees, take graduate courses, and enroll in Montessori training courses that focus on the individualized approach to learning that is the basis of the methodology. Professional development funds are regularly used to support staff attendance at a wide variety of professional conferences and workshops, many of which are dedicated to differentiated instruction and meeting the needs of diverse learners. Funds also support in-house programs to strengthen faculty skills in core areas such as teaching literacy.

Closing Statements

River Valley Charter School students benefit from a small community approach to education that strongly binds all constituencies together to provide individualized instruction for all children. Our holistic approach to education honors the learning style, and strengths and challenges of each student, and fosters a supportive approach to learning. Extensive parental involvement, a tested component of a child’s success in school, supports the faculty and administration to ensure that the school continues to meet the individual student’s needs. Our SST program, low student-to-teacher ratio, support staff and hands-on approach to learning all result in an educational model that allows students to achieve success in the general education setting and avoid unnecessary referrals to special education. Through the RVCS Accountability Plan and requirements of the Annual Report, the school is in a continuous process of assessment that addresses the elements of the River Valley District Accommodation Plan.

River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and Federal Law having to do with non-discrimination and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion or creed, sex, 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 in its educational programs or activities pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 151B and 151C, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; M.G.L. c76,s5, Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Americans with Disabilities Act, and regulations promulgated thereunder, 34 C.F.R. Part 100 (Title VI), Part 106 (Title IX) and Part 104 (Section 504).
MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS EDUCATION ASSISTANCE ACT

Legal Reference: Title I, Part C
No Child Left Behind Act, 2002

INTRODUCTION
River Valley Charter School serves students from four districts which include the towns of: Amesbury, Newbury, Rowley, Newburyport, Salisbury, Groveland, Merrimac, and West Newbury. The school reports to the Massachusetts Department of Education as a district and therefore is responsible for all policies that are required of all districts in the Commonwealth, including those located in River Valley’s region.

PURPOSE OF THE HOMELESS EDUCATION ASSISTANCE ACT
The purpose of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is to ensure that each homeless child or youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths. The River Valley Charter School shall ensure that every effort is made to comply with this legislation for its students and to cooperate and collaborate with other district schools to remove barriers to enrollment of homeless students.

DEFINITION
River Valley Charter School is in compliance with the Massachusetts Department of Education which has adopted Section 725 (2) of the Act regarding the definition of homeless children and youth:
- Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or have a primary nighttime residence in a supervised, publicly or privately, operated shelter for temporary accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), an institution providing temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- This definition shall include:
  - children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
  - children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
  - children and youth who are living in cars parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
  - unaccompanied youth—a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian; and
  - migratory children living in conditions described in the previous examples.

LIAISONS
The McKinney-Vento Act requires the River Valley Charter School along with every school district to designate a staff person to serve as the Homeless Education Liaison whose role it is to assist homeless students to enroll in school and to ensure that they receive the educational services for which they are eligible. This liaison may have other duties within the school district.

The liaison for homeless students and their families shall coordinate with:
- local social service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youths and their families;
- other school districts on issues of transportation and records transfers; and
- state and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.
This coordination includes providing public notice of the educational rights of homeless students in school, family shelters and soup kitchens. The district’s liaison will also review and recommend amendments to district policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless students.

**ENROLLMENT**

Parents or guardians of homeless students may request enrollment in any school in the attendance area in which the student is actually living and eligible for, including River Valley Charter School, rather than remaining in the school of origin.

Homeless students wishing to enroll in River Valley Charter School and are sheltered in any of its eight towns (four districts) shall submit an application and participate in the lottery process to acquire a position on the waitlist according to the guidelines of the school’s Enrollment Policy. If the student’s name is next for an enrollment position and the student does not have immediate access to the documents usually required for enrollment such as school records, immunization records or proof of residency, the student shall be admitted under a personal exception. Students and families will be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible.

Furthermore:
- homeless students have a right to either remain in their school of origin or to attend school where they are temporarily residing;
- students who choose to remain in their school of origin have the right to remain there until the end of the school year in which they get permanent housing;
- Homeless Education Liaisons must assist students who arrive without records by contacting the previously attended school system to obtain the required records;
- emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with district policies, including compliance with the state’s address confidentiality program when necessary.

**TRANSPORTATION**

Homeless students are entitled to transportation to their school of origin or to the school where they are to be enrolled. To the extent practical and as required by law, River Valley Charter School will work with homeless students and their families to provide stability in school attendance and other services.

Furthermore:
- If the homeless student continues to live in the area served by the district in which the school of origin is located, that district must provide or arrange transportation.
- If the homeless student moves to an area served by another district, though continuing their education at River Valley, that district and River Valley must agree upon a method to apportion responsibility and costs for transportation to school.
- If the districts cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs must be shared equally.

**ACCESS TO COMPARABLE SERVICES**

Homeless students are to be provided services and education programs comparable to those received by other students and for which they meet eligibility criteria, such as services provided under Title I or similar state or local programs; programs for students with disabilities; programs for students with limited English proficiency; and school nutrition programs.

Note: *To expedite the delivery of nutritional benefits, River Valley may accept documentation that students are homeless from a local district educational liaison or the director of the homeless shelter where the students reside as the determination of eligibility for free lunch.*
ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL
An important goal of McKinney-Vento is to afford homeless preschoolers the same opportunity to enroll, attend and succeed in preschool as non-homeless preschoolers, thereby minimizing their educational disruption due to homelessness. The River Valley Charter District Homeless Education Liaison must coordinate and collaborate with community resources to assist homeless families with students attending River Valley and who also have children of preschool age to remove barriers to the enrollment of these homeless children in child care and early education programs.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION
If a dispute arises over the enrollment decision of a homeless student, River Valley Charter School must provide the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth with both a written statement of the school enrollment policy and a notice of the right to appeal the decision. The homeless student will remain enrolled in the school pending resolution of the dispute. River Valley Charter School shall refer the student to the Homeless Education Liaison, who will expeditiously carry out the dispute resolution process. The final decision in such a situation resides with the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education or a designated representative.

UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH & CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN STATE CARE OR CUSTODY
Unaccompanied youth are youth who are homeless; not in the physical custody of a parent/guardian; and not in the custody of a state agency. This definition includes youth living on the street, in inadequate housing, denied housing by their families, those who have left home voluntarily, even when their parent/s want them to return home, and youth doubled up with friends or relatives. Also, in collaboration with the Department of Social Services, the Massachusetts Department of Education has determined that children and youth in state care or custody who have been placed out of their homes into temporary, transitional, or emergency living placements while awaiting foster care placement are therefore homeless.

Unaccompanied youth or students in state care or custody who are awaiting foster care are entitled to the same educational rights and services, including transportation, under McKinney-Vento as any homeless child or youth in the care of their parent/s or guardian/s.

Approved by the Board of Trustees on September 13, 2005
RIGHTS UNDER FERPA FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords parents and students over 18 years of age ("eligible students") certain rights with respect to the student's education records. These rights are:

1. The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days of the day RVCS receives a request for access.

   Parents or eligible students should submit to the RVCS Assistant Director a written request that identifies the record(s) they wish to inspect. The RVCS official will make arrangements for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.

2. The right to request the amendment of the student's education records that the parent or eligible student believes are inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the student's privacy rights under FERPA.

   Parents or eligible students who wish to ask RVCS to amend a record should write the Assistant Director/Director, clearly identify the part of the record they want changed and specify why it should be changed. If RVCS decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, RVCS will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and advise them of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

3. The right to privacy of personally identifiable information in the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent.

   One exception, which permits disclosure without consent, is disclosure to RVCS officials with legitimate educational interests. A RVCS official is a person employed by RVCS as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel); a person serving on the RVCS Board of Trustees; a person or company with whom RVCS has outsourced services or functions it would otherwise use its own employees to perform (such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist); a parent or student serving on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee; or a parent, student, or other volunteer assisting another RVCS official in performing their tasks.

   A RVCS official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

   Upon request, RVCS discloses education records without consent to officials of another RVCS district in which a student seeks or intends to enroll or is already enrolled if the disclosure is for purposes of the student's enrollment or transfer. [NOTE: FERPA requires a school district to make a reasonable attempt to notify the parent or student of the records request unless it states in its annual notification that it intends to forward records on request.]

4. The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by RVCS to comply with the requirements of FERPA. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA are:

   Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education
   400 Maryland Avenue, SW
   Washington, DC 20202-852020
FERPA NOTICE FOR DIRECTORY INFORMATION

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a Federal law, requires River Valley Charter School, with certain exceptions, to obtain your written consent prior to the disclosure of personally identifiable information from your child's education records. However, RVCS may disclose appropriately designated "directory information" without written consent, unless you have advised RVCS to the contrary in accordance with RVCS procedures. The primary purpose of directory information is to allow RVCS to include this type of information from your child's education records in certain school publications. Examples include:

- A playbill, showing your student's role in a drama production;
- The annual yearbook;
- Honor roll or other recognition lists;
- Graduation programs; and
- Sports activity sheets, such as for Track & field, showing the age and grade level of team members.

Directory information, which is information that is generally not considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if released, can also be disclosed to outside organizations without a parent's prior written consent. Outside organizations include, but are not limited to, companies that manufacture class rings or publish yearbooks. In addition, two federal laws require local educational agencies (LEAs) receiving assistance under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to provide military recruiters, upon request, with the following information – names, addresses and telephone listings – unless parents have advised the LEA that they do not want their student's information disclosed without their prior written consent.

If you do not want River Valley to disclose directory information from your child's education records without your prior written consent, you must notify RVCS in writing by August 25. RVCS has designated the following information as directory information:

- Student's name
- Address
- Telephone listing
- Electronic mail address
- Photograph
- Date and place of birth
- Dates of attendance
- Participation in officially recognized activities and sports
- Degrees, honors, and awards received
- The most recent educational agency or institution attended
- Student ID number, user ID, or other unique personal identifier used to communicate in electronic systems that cannot be used to access education records without a PIN, password, etc. (A student's SSN, in whole or in part, cannot be used for this purpose.)
RIGHTS UNDER THE PROTECTION OF PUPIL RIGHTS AMENDMENT (PPRA)

PPRA affords parents certain rights regarding our conduct of surveys, collection and use of information for marketing purposes, and certain physical exams. These include the right to: Consent before students are required to submit to a survey that concerns one or more of the following protected areas ("protected information survey") if the survey is funded in whole or in part by a program of the U.S. Department of Education (ED)-

1. Political affiliations or beliefs of the student or student's parent;
2. Mental or psychological problems of the student or student's family;
3. Sex behavior or attitudes;
4. Illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior;
5. Critical appraisals of others with whom respondents have close family relationships;
6. Legally recognized privileged relationships, such as with lawyers, doctors, or ministers;
7. Religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or parents; or
8. Income, other than as required by law to determine program eligibility.

Receive notice and an opportunity to opt a student out of -

1. Any other protected information survey, regardless of funding;
2. Any non-emergency, invasive physical exam or screening required as a condition of attendance, administered by the school or its agent, and not necessary to protect the immediate health and safety of a student, except for hearing, vision, or scoliosis screenings, or any physical exam or screening permitted or required under State law; and
3. Activities involving collection, disclosure, or use of personal information obtained from students for marketing or to sell or otherwise distribute the information to others.

Inspect, upon request and before administration or use -

1. Protected information surveys of students;
2. Instruments used to collect personal information from students for any of the above marketing, sales, or other distribution purposes; and
3. Instructional material used as part of the educational curriculum.

These rights transfer from the parents to a student who is 18 years old or an emancipated minor under State law.

River Valley Charter School has adopted policies, in consultation with parents, regarding these rights, as well as arrangements to protect student privacy in the administration of protected information surveys and the collection, disclosure, or use of personal information for marketing, sales, or other distribution purposes. River Valley will directly notify parents of these policies at least annually at the start of each school year and after any substantive changes. River Valley will also directly notify, such as through U.S. Mail or email, parents of students who are scheduled to participate in the specific activities or surveys noted below and will provide an opportunity for the parent to opt their child out of participation in the specific activity or survey. River Valley will make this notification to parents at the beginning of the school year if the District has identified the specific or approximate dates of the activities or surveys at that time. For surveys and activities scheduled after the school year starts, parents will be provided reasonable notification of the planned activities and surveys listed below and be provided an opportunity to opt their child out of such activities and surveys. Parents will also be provided an opportunity to review any pertinent surveys. Following is a list of the specific activities and surveys covered under this requirement:

- Collection, disclosure, or use of personal information for marketing, sales or other distribution.
- Administration of any protected information survey not funded in whole or in part by ED.
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- Any non-emergency, invasive physical examination or screening as described above.

Parents who believe their rights have been violated may file a complaint with:
Family Policy Compliance Office
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202-5901
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT REPORTING PROTOCOL

The reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect is governed by Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 119, Section 51A. Section 51A requires a mandated reporter who, in their professional capacity has reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 is suffering from abuse or neglect, to immediately communicate with the Department of Children and Families (“DCF”) orally, and, within 48 hours, file a written report detailing the suspected abuse or neglect. School teachers, educational administrators, guidance counselors and family counselors are all mandated reporters.

If a Staff Member has reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering from abuse or neglect, such Staff Member shall notify the Assistant Director immediately; however, it is the responsibility of the Staff Member to report the abuse or neglect directly to Department of Children and Families.

If a Staff Member suspects that a child may be suffering from abuse or neglect, and if such suspicions are corroborated by another Staff Member, Administrator or person outside the school such that both the Staff Member and the second person determine that they have reasonable cause to believe that the child is suffering from abuse or neglect, the Staff Member who first suspected the abuse or neglect shall notify the Assistant Director immediately and report the abuse or neglect to DCF. Nothing in this paragraph shall be construed to prevent a Staff Member who, without the concurrence of a second person, has reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering from abuse or neglect from reporting the abuse or neglect to the Director and to DCF.

RVCS shall notify the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the child about whom a report is filed with DCF on the day the written report is submitted to DCF. RVCS shall not discharge, discriminate or retaliate against a mandated reporter who in good faith files a report with DCF.

If a Staff Member is the alleged perpetrator of the abuse or neglect reported to DCF, such Staff Member shall be placed on leave until DCF renders a determination. The Director and Board of Trustees shall consider DCF’s determination as well as other relevant information to determine whether the Staff Member shall be reinstated or require further disciplinary action, including termination.

The definitions and signs of abuse and neglect are contained in the Faculty Handbook which is distributed to all Staff Members.
PHYSICAL RESTRAINT POLICY

Purpose of Policy
River Valley Charter School (RVCS) seeks to promote an orderly, positive, productive learning environment in which all students are provided an opportunity to grow academically, emotionally, and socially. In accordance with the Code of Massachusetts Regulations 603 CMR 46.00, which governs the prevention of physical restraint on students and requirements if restraint is used in public and charter schools, every student at River Valley is free from the use of physical restraint that is inconsistent with 603 CMR 46.00. Physical restraints will be used with extreme caution and only in emergency situations of last resort after other lawful and less intrusive alternatives have failed or been deemed inappropriate. This physical restraint policy does not preclude any teacher, employee, or agent of RVCS from using reasonable force to protect students, other persons, or themselves from assault or imminent physical harm.

This policy shall be provided to staff and made available to parents and guardians of RVCS students annually. Through it and other communication with parents, RVCS will engage parents in discussion about restraint prevention and the use of restraint solely as an emergency procedure.

Definitions
Consent shall mean agreement by a parent who has been fully informed of all information relevant to the activity for which agreement is sought, in their native language or other mode of communication, that the parent understands and agrees in writing to carrying out of the activity, and understand that the agreement is voluntary and may be revoked at any time, and describes the activity and lists the records (if any) which will be released and to whom. In seeking parental consent, RVCS will not condition admission or continued enrollment upon agreement to the proposed use of any restraint.

Mechanical restraint shall mean the use of a device or equipment to restrict a student’s freedom of movement. The term does not include devices implemented by trained school personnel or utilized by a student that have been prescribed by an appropriate medical or related services professional, and are used for the specific and approved positioning or protective purposes for which such devices were designed. Examples of such devices include: adaptive devices or mechanical supports used to achieve proper body position, balance, or alignment to allow greater freedom of mobility than would be possible without the use of such devices or mechanical supports; vehicle safety restraints when used as intended during the transport of a student in a moving vehicle; restraints for medical immobilization; or orthopedically prescribed devices that permit a student to participate in activities without risk of harm.

Medication restraint shall mean the administration of medication for the purpose of temporarily controlling behavior. Medication prescribed by a licensed physical and authorized by the parent for administration in the school setting is not medication restraint.

Physical escort shall mean a temporary touching or holding of a student without the use of force, of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, or back for the purpose of inducing a student who is agitated to walk to a safe location.

Physical restraint shall mean direct physical contact that prevents or significantly restricts a student’s freedom of movement. Physical restraint does not include: brief physical contact to promote student safety, providing physical guidance or prompting when teaching a skill, redirecting attention, providing comfort, or physical escort.

Prone restraint shall mean a physical restraint in which a student is placed face down on the floor or another surface, and physical pressure is applied to the student’s body to keep the student in the face-down position.

School working day shall mean a day or partial day that students are in attendance at the public education program for instructional purposes.
Seclusion shall mean the involuntary confinement of a student alone in a room or area from which the student is physically prevented from leaving. The use of “time out” procedures during which a staff member remains accessible to the student shall not be considered a seclusion restraint.

Time-out shall mean a behavioral support strategy in which a student temporarily separates from the learning activity or the classroom, either by choice or by direction from staff, for the purpose of calming. During time-out, a student must be continuously observed by a staff member. Staff shall be with the student or immediately available to the student at all times. The space used for the time-out must be clean, safe, sanitary, and appropriate for the purpose of calming. Time-out shall cease as soon as the student has calmed.

Interventions & Alternative Methods to Preclude the Need for Physical Restraint
When seeking to prevent student violence, self-injurious behavior and suicide, including time-out and de-escalation of dangerous behavior occurring among groups of students or with an individual student, there are many appropriate interventions and alternative responses that should be used prior to administering a physical restraint. Physical restraints should only be used in emergency situations of last resort and after these other, less intrusive, alternatives have failed or been deemed inappropriate.

Examples of interventions and other less intrusive methods include, but are not limited to the following:
- Utilizing an empathic, nonjudgmental approach upon noticing an increase or change in student behavior
  - Specific examples: validating, acknowledging, offering comfort, giving space, listening and asking questions
- Being directive (characterized by setting limits) upon noticing a further increase in student behavior
  - Specific examples: identifying the behavior, explaining why it is inappropriate, offering choices and options with consequences, allowing processing time, enforcing consequences
- Removing the student or removing other students to a more private and safe area in order for the student to de-escalate.

Physical Restraint Procedures

Determining When to Use a Physical Restraint
Physical restraints may only be used when the student’s behavior poses a threat of assault, imminent, serious, physical harm to themself and/or others and when non-physical interventions have not been effective. The use of physical restraints is restricted to emergency situations, after other less intrusive alternatives have failed or been deemed inappropriate to prevent student violence, self-injurious behavior, and/or de-escalation of a potentially dangerous behavior.

All physical restraint will be terminated as soon as the student is no longer in immediate danger to themself or others, or the student indicates they cannot breathe, or if the student is observed to be in severe distress such as having difficulty breathing or sustained prolonged crying or coughing.

Prohibitions on the Use of a Physical Restraint
Physical restraint, including prone restraint, where permitted, shall be considered an emergency procedure of last resort and shall be prohibited except when a student’s behavior poses a threat of assault, or imminent, serious, physical harm to self or others and the 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.

Physical restraints are prohibited as a means of discipline, punishment or 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 these actions do not constitute a threat of assault, imminent, serious, physical harm. Physical restraint shall not be used when the 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. Physical restraint is not a standard response for any individual student. No individual behavior plan or individualized education program (IEP) may include the use of physical restraint as a standard response to any behavior. Physical restraint is an emergency procedure of last resort.

The use of mechanical restraint, medication restraint, and seclusion is prohibited. Prone restraint shall be prohibited except on an individual student basis, and only under the following circumstances:

a. The student has a documented history of repeatedly causing serious self-injuries and/or injuries to other students or staff;

b. All other forms of physical restraints have failed to ensure the safety of the student and/or safety of others;

c. There are no medical contraindications as documented by a licensed physical;

d. There is a psychological or behavioral justification for the use of the prone restraint and there are not psychological or behavioral contraindications, as documented by a licensed mental health professional.

e. Consent to use prone restraint in an emergency has been obtained as set out in 603 CMR 46.03(1)(b), and such use has been approved in writing by the principal; and,

f. The program has documented 603 CMR 46.03(1)(b) 1-5 in advance of the use of prone restraint and maintains the documentation.

**Proper Administration of a Physical Restraint**

All physical restraints, including prone restraint where permitted, shall be administered in compliance with 603 CMR 46.05 and shall be limited to use of such reasonable force as is necessary to protect a student or another member of the school community.

Only trained RVCS staff or agents shall administer physical restraints on students. Trained school personnel are those individuals who have received the required training detailed below. Training requirements do not preclude an RVCS staff member or agent from using reasonable force to protect students or themselves from assault or imminent, serious, physical harm.

Whenever possible, the administration of a physical restraint shall be witnessed by at least one other adult who does not participate in the physical restraint. When administering a physical restraint, school personnel shall use only the amount of force necessary to protect the student or others from physical injury. Additionally, school personnel administering a physical restraint shall use the safest method available and appropriate to the situation pursuant to the safety requirements detailed below and shall discontinue the restraint as soon as possible. Floor or prone restraints shall be prohibited unless the staff member administering the restraint has received in-depth training according to regulation 603 CMR 46.03(3) and the judgment of the trained staff member is that such method is required to provide safety for the student or others present.

**Safety Requirements for the Use of Physical Restraints**

No restraint shall be administered in such a way that the student is prevented from breathing or speaking. Additionally, restraint shall be administered in such a way so as to prevent or minimize physical harm. During the administration of a restraint, a staff member shall continuously monitor the physical status of the student, including skin temperature and color, and respiration. A restraint shall be released immediately upon a determination by the staff member that the student is no longer an immediate danger to him or herself or others, or the student indicates that he or she cannot breathe, or if the student is observed to be in severe distress such as having difficulty breathing or sustained or prolonged crying or coughing. If, at any time during a physical restraint, the student demonstrates or expresses significant physical distress including, but not limited to difficulty breathing, the student shall be released from the restraint immediately, and school staff shall seek medical assistance. School personnel shall review and consider any known medical or psychological limitations and/or behavioral intervention plans regarding the use of physical restraint on an individual student.
For any restraint lasting for a period of longer than twenty (20) minutes, the program staff shall obtain the approval of the Assistant Director and approval shall be based upon the student’s continued agitation during the restraint.

**Follow-Up Procedures and Reporting Requirements**

Following the release of a student from a restraint, RVCS shall implement follow-up procedures. These procedures shall include reviewing the incident with the student to address the behavior that precipitated the restraint; reviewing the incident with the staff person(s) who administered the restraint to discuss whether proper restraint procedures were followed; and consideration of whether any follow-up is appropriate for students who witnessed the incident.

All restraints will be logged and shared with both the Assistant Director and the Director of the school as soon as possible and no later than the next working school day.

Reasonable efforts will be made to notify parents to verbally inform them within 24 hours of the event. Written notification to the parents/guardians of the physical restraint will be provided within three school working days (either by the email provided by the parent for communication about the student or postmarked by regular mail within three days). Any parent who receives information from the school in another language shall be provided with this information in that language. The student and parent will be given an opportunity to comment orally and in writing on the use of the restraint and on information written in the report. The contents of the report will include:

- The names and job title of the RVCS staff or agent who administered the restraint and observers; the date of the restraint; the time the restraint began and ended; and the administrators who were informed following the restraint, and for restraints lasting longer than 20 minutes, the person who approved the extended restraint.
- A description of the activity in which the restrained student and other students and staff in the same room or vicinity were engaged immediately preceding the use of physical restraint; the behavior that prompted the restraint; the efforts made to de-escalate the situation including specific de-escalation strategies; alternatives to restraint that were attempted; and the justification for initiating the physical restraint.
- A description of the administration of the restraint including the holds used and reasons such holds were necessary; the student’s behavior and reactions during the restraint; how the restraint ended; and documentation of injury to the student and/or staff, if any, during the restraint and medical care provided.
- Information regarding any further actions that the school has taken or may take, including any disciplinary sanctions that may be imposed on the student.
- Information regarding opportunities for the student’s parents/guardians to discuss with school officials the administration of the restraint, any disciplinary sanctions that may be imposed on the student, and/or any other related matter.

If a student is restrained for a period longer than 20 minutes, program staff shall obtain the approval of the Assistant Director or designee. The approval shall be based upon the student’s continued agitation during the restraint justifying the need for continued restraint.

A formal written report to the Department is required for all physical restraints which result in an injury to a student or RVCS staff member. This report shall be postmarked no later than three school working days of the administration of the restraint. In addition, the Department will be provided with a copy of the record of physical restraints maintained by the Assistant Director for the thirty-day period prior to the date of the reported restraint.

**Staff Training Requirements**

Within the first month of each school year, the Director shall provide for all RVCS staff members to be trained on this policy. Additionally, for all new RVCS employees that are hired after the start of the school year, the Director shall, within the first month of their employment, provide for training. The training shall consist of the following:
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- The role of the student, family and staff in preventing physical restraint
- The RVCS physical restraint prevention and behavior support policy
- Requirements whenever restraint is used
- Interventions that may preclude the need for restraint, including de-escalation of problematic behaviors
- Types of restraints and related safety considerations, including information regarding the increased risk of injury to a student when an extended restraint is used
- Administering physical restraint in accordance with known medical or psychological limitations and/or behavioral intervention plans applicable to an individual student; and
- Identification of RVCS staff who have received in-depth training pursuant to 603 CMR 46.03(3) in the use of physical restraint.

Annually and at the beginning of each school year, the Director, in conjunction with the School Counselor, shall establish a Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) Team comprised of at least three individuals and including, at a minimum, the School Counselor and the Assistant Director. The CPI Team will be trained annually and be authorized to serve as a school-wide resource to assist in ensuring the prevention of physical restraint and its appropriate use when necessary. The CPI Team Leader shall participate in “train-the-trainer” training in the prevention and use of physical restraint. The remainder of the Team will be trained by the CPI Team Leader.

RVCS utilizes the Crisis Prevention Institute’s Nonviolent Crisis Intervention framework and curriculum. The content of this in-depth training includes, but is not be limited to:
- Appropriate procedures for preventing the need for physical restraint, including the de-escalation of problematic behavior, relationship building and the use of alternatives to restraint;
- A description and identification of dangerous behaviors on the part of students that may indicate the need for physical restraint and methods for evaluating the risk of harm in individual situations in order to determine whether the use of restraint is warranted;
- The simulated experience of administering and receiving physical restraint, instruction regarding the effect(s) on the person restrained, including instruction on monitoring physical signs of distress and obtaining medical assistance;
- Instruction regarding documentation and reporting requirements and investigation of injuries and complaints; and
- Demonstration by participants of proficiency in administering physical restraint.
- Instructions regarding the impact of restraint on the student and family; recognizing that restraint has impact including but not limited to psychological, physiological, and social-emotional effects.

Ongoing Review of Restraint Data
The Assistant Director shall review restraint data weekly to identify students who have been restrained multiple times in a week. The information will be shared with the Director. Whenever there are multiple restraints in a week, a Review Team will be convened to assess the student’s progress and needs. The team review will include:
- Review and discussion of the written reports and any comments provided by the student and parent about such reports and the use of restraints,
- An analysis of the circumstances leading up to each restrain including factors such as time of day, day of week, antecedent events and individuals involved,
- Consideration of the factors that may have contributed to escalation behaviors, consideration of alternatives to restraint, including the de-escalation techniques and interventions, with the goal of reducing or eliminating the use of restraint in the future,
- Agreement on a written plan of action by the program.
If the Assistant Director has participated directly in the restraint events, the Director shall lead the review team’s discussion. The Assistant Director will ensure that a record of each individual student review is maintained and made available for review by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or the parent, upon request.

In addition to the review of repeated individual restraint data, the Assistant Director shall conduct a monthly review of school-wide restraint data to consider patterns of use if restraint, similarities in these patterns, the number and duration of restraints used, the type and results of the use of restraint, etc. Determination will be made as to whether it is necessary or appropriate to modify this policy, conduct additional staff training on restraint prevention, or take other action to reduce or eliminate the use of restraints.

Complaints Regarding Restraint Practices
A student or their parent/guardian who has concerns regarding a specific use of a physical restraint should discuss and seek to resolve their concerns with the RVCS Assistant Director or designee within ten (10) days of the parent/guardian’s receipt of the written report from the school detailing the administered physical restraint. The Assistant Director or designee, within their authority, shall attempt to work with the individual(s) to resolve the complaint fairly and expeditiously. If the student and/or their parent/guardian are not satisfied with the resolution, then the student and/or their parent/guardian may proceed with the formal complaint process detailed below.

A student or their parent/guardian who has a complaint regarding a specific use of a physical restraint may submit a written complaint to the RVCS Director. This letter should be submitted to the Director within twenty (20) days of the parent/guardian’s receipt of the written report from the school and include the following:

- The name of the student
- The name of the individuals involved in the physical restraint, if known
- The basis of the complaint or concern
- The corrective action being sought.

The Director or his/her designees shall conduct an investigation into the complaint in a timely manner upon receipt. In the course of the investigation the Director or his/her designee shall contact those individuals that have been referred to as having pertinent information related to the complaint. After completing the formal investigation, the Director or their designee shall write a report regarding the merits of the complaint and a proposed resolution and will send the report to the individual submitting the complaint. A parent or guardian may appeal the decision of the Director to the Board of Trustees.

Referral to Law Enforcement or Other State Agencies
Nothing contained in this policy or the Massachusetts regulations regarding physical restraints prohibits:

- The right of any individual to report to appropriate authorities a crime committed by a student or other individual;
- Law enforcement, judicial authorities, or school security personnel from exercising their responsibilities, including the physical detention of a student or other individual alleged to have committed a crime or posing a security risk; or
- The exercise of an individual’s responsibilities as a mandated reporter pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws c. 119 § 51A.

Policy and Data Review
The Director shall annually review this policy and its procedures.
## Physical Restraint Reporting Form

All physical restraints will be formally recorded no later than the next working school day and distributed to the Director and Assistant Director. Parent/guardian will be notified verbally within 24 hours, and in writing within three working school days.

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<th>IDENTIFYING INFO</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Person Filling out Form (and position):</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Observers or other personnel involved in the incident (and position):</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Today's Date:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date of Event (if different):</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Location of Incident:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Student Name:</strong></td>
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<th>RESTRAINT INFO</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of activity immediately preceding the event:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior that prompted the event:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Efforts made to de-escalate/attempted alternatives including specific de-escalation strategies used and alternatives attempted:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason for Restraint:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ Non-physical interventions were unsuccessful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ Protect student from imminent, serious physical harm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ Protect other from imminent, serious, physical harm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of Hold:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning Restraint Time:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ending Time:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How did the restraint end?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ Staff determination that student no longer at risk to himself or others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ Intervention by others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ Law enforcement arrival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ Medical assistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student's behavior and reaction during the event and how it ended:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were there any injuries?</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What medical care was provided?</th>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person approving any restrain over 20 minutes:</th>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will there be further action including consequences imposed on the student?</th>
</tr>
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</table>

### NOTIFICATIONS

- **€ Director** (asap, by end of next school day)  
- **€ Assistant Director** (asap, by end of next school day)  
- **€ Parent #1** (verbally w/in 24 hrs)  
- **€ Parent #2** (verbally w/in 24 hrs)  
- **€ School Counselor/504 Coordinator**  
- **€ In addition to verbal notification to parents, written notification was sent to parents within three school working days.**

Date Sent: _____________________  
Initials of Sender: _____________________

- **€ Notification needed in language other than English**  
- **€ Parents were given opportunity to discuss the administration of the restraint, disciplinary sanctions or any other related matter.**

### DEBRIEFING FINDINGS


Signature: _____________________  
Date: _____________________