



ST. MARY'S

ACADEMY

Student Safety Task Force
Report to President Christina Friedhoff
January 30, 2019

President Christina Friedhoff convened the Student Safety Task Force in July 2018 to help ensure that SMA adopts and implements best practices to ensure safety for all students.

The SSTF was comprised of SMA parents, alumnae, staff, faculty and a member of the Board of Directors. The SSTF was charged with making recommendations to the SMA leadership, including the Board of Directors and the President, regarding student safety policies; training for students, staff and parents, reporting and investigation procedures; hiring and supervision practices; and other best practices in an educational setting related to student safety including the prevention of sexual assault and abuse.

SMA hired Tanya Young Stump, an independent consultant, to facilitate the Task Force.

In order to consider a holistic view of safety within the school community we used the following framework for clarifying and defining safety. This framework was introduced and used during SSTF meetings, listening sessions and presentations by experts and we recommend using it in ongoing efforts to discuss and promote a culture of safety.

Five Crucial Elements of Safety

Social	Spiritual	Intellectual	Physical	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Feels at ease with others in school and non-school settings, both with individuals and groups without fear of undue criticism or lack of acceptance or respect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Feels that one’s spiritual beliefs and practices can be expressed without fear of recrimination, criticism or judgment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Feels able to express thoughts and ideas that may be different from others without fear of ridicule or rejection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Feels safe physically from harm and inappropriate invasion of personal and private space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Feels support for expression of emotions and trusts that others will not ridicule or demean them personally.

***Note from SSTF regarding the above St Mary’s Academy Safety Plan.**

When we initially convened the Student Safety Task Force, there were several areas of need that became clear including the creation of important safe-guarding policies, teacher, student and parent training specific to safety, campus wide communication systems, additional work on diversity and inclusion and student leadership initiatives, for example. The decision was made, by Nicole Foran and her team, to proceed immediately with the creation and implementation of several safety protocols and enhancements rather than wait for the SSTF to conclude our research. This work has substantially reduced the number of recommendations necessary by this Task Force. We view this as a very positive outcome of the campus-wide focus on the 5 crucial elements of safety over the past 6 months and commend the administration’s commitment and follow through in being a leader in implementing best practices regarding campus safety.

Professional Conduct and Appropriate Boundaries Handbook, January 2, 2019

Nicole Foran, SMA Principal

In the first few meetings of the SSTF we reviewed the current state of policies and expectations regarding adult/student relationships and response to allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct. We felt a need for clarity in expectations, policy, procedure and response to concerns or allegations. Specifically:

- Heightened awareness and clear expectations regarding appropriate adult/student relational behaviors giving consideration and priority to:
 1. Student safety as the top priority
 2. Preserving the long-established culture of relational care and connection between adults and students at SMA.
- Clarity of policy, procedure and response to allegations of sexual abuse and potential misconduct
- Very clear guidelines for appropriate personal boundaries between adults and students.

This need was a clear priority so Principal Foran and her team moved forward immediately to create the Professional Conduct and Appropriate Boundaries Handbook as a supplement to existing annual Mandatory Reporter training.

Portions of the Handbook were sourced from a similar document written by a team at Emma Willard in Troy, NY and have been in use for several years.

The SMA Handbook was modified and expanded for culture, concerns and circumstances specific to St. Mary’s Academy by Nicole Foran, Patty Gorman and legal counsel.

The first section of the Professional Conduct and Appropriate Boundaries Handbook states:

“The safety of St. Mary's Academy students is our highest priority. We are a community that fosters strong, independent young women and our students must be able to learn and thrive in an environment in which they are safe and supported. Our students have a right to a life and educational environment free of abuse, misconduct, and harassment and in which appropriate adult-student boundaries are respected and maintained.

This policy sets forth the rights and expectations for all St. Mary's students, staff, families, and volunteers regarding the important issues of child abuse, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and appropriate boundaries. Specifically, this policy sets out the expectations regarding each of these issues, establishes how members of the St. Mary's Academy community should report concerns, describes how St. Mary's Academy will follow-up on any concerns, and provides information about where members of the community can go with questions or for additional support.

St. Mary's Academy prohibits and will not tolerate child abuse, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment, and requires that all adults affiliated in any way with St. Mary's Academy maintain appropriate adult-student boundaries with St. Mary's Academy students.”

The remainder of the document outlines standards of behavior and clear steps to providing timely response to rumors and allegations. Each student, faculty, staff, coach, volunteer and any other adults regularly on campus will be required to read and sign an acknowledgement that they have read the Handbook.

The SSTF reviewed this document on January 2, 2019 and agreed that it is an appropriate foundational, procedural document to introduce to the SMA community regarding prevention of sexual abuse, misconduct and appropriate boundaries. The Handbook is designed to be a living document that is regularly evaluated for comprehensive effectiveness and clarity of application. The intention is to infuse the language and conversation of personal boundaries and safe behaviors into the SMA culture.

The Professional Conduct and Appropriate Boundaries Handbook will be implemented at SMA based on the following schedule:

- February 8th - Training for Faculty and Staff
- February 19th - Training for students during TA
Parent informational email sent
Link to Handbook placed on SMA website
Dates offered for informational meetings with Principal Foran

Mission: St. Mary's Academy, sponsored by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary since 1859, is a Catholic high school for young women, providing a challenging college-preparatory education in a vibrant learning environment. Guided by the values and charism of the Sisters, St. Mary's fosters a diverse community, educates the whole person by nurturing spiritually, encouraging creativity, promoting justice and inspiring a sense of global interdependence to prepare students for service and leadership.

Charism/Value Statements: The charism we have inherited from the Sisters of the Holy Names, who founded St. Mary's Academy, includes the following principles to which we are committed:

- A special concern for the economically and/or emotionally poor and disadvantaged
- A dedication to value-centered education with a clear emphasis on spirituality, issues of justice, including the pursuit of civil liberty
- A clear call to service
- A commitment to meet the diverse needs of the day with love and compassion
- A strong commitment to justice for women and women's issues
- A devotion to the full development of the human person
- Encouragement of racial, economic, and ethnic diversity
- A dedication to a warm and hospitable environment

Our Findings:

In our research, hearing presentations from topical experts in trauma, mental health, youth development, physical school safety, laws and best practices in addressing misconduct and abuse regarding minors, talking to stakeholder groups and learning from the academic policies vetted and implemented in other academic institutions across the country it is clear that the topic of safety is broad and complex and impacts nearly every aspect of life at St. Mary's Academy. It is also clear that the students at St. Mary's Academy receive great benefit from pivotal and high-quality relationships between teachers and students and this unique benefit should be retained and promoted to the extent possible.

Major Conclusions:

Considering the five crucial elements of safety that we used as our framework - Social, Spiritual, Intellectual, Physical and Emotional - several areas of focus and priority emerged from our work:

- Create a culture of emotional safety and trust
- Communicate effectively and courageously
- Increase focus and understanding of inclusion and equity
- Create a system to effectively implement and regularly review policies and procedures
- Continually evaluate physical safety

We believe that a focus on these 5 topics will help SMA align with their stated relational values and operate within a pervasive culture of safety within the campus community.

- **Create a Culture of Emotional Safety and Trust**
 - This overarching priority will require an increase in intentional trust building. A focus on creating an open system where transparency, honesty, vulnerability and deep listening skills are demonstrated and highly valued at the administrative level, the educator level and the student level will lead to an increase in trust. SMA's charism values of love, compassion, warmth and hospitality are a priority here and should be the focus.
 - Create ongoing opportunities for regular, open forum type, face-time with administrators and other leadership. Courageous listening and feedback sessions, open access question and answer sessions, with both defined and open-ended topics all structured with transparent and trust building communication as a priority.
 - The creation of alumnae affinity group advisory teams to act as an insightful resource for administration. Creating opportunities to better understand and value the needs and interests of students. These could provide equity insights, sensitivity awareness, cultural advisory, insights into unique experiences and needs, etc.
 - Regular training on appropriate response to trauma and becoming a trauma informed school. High numbers of students are experiencing trauma both inside and outside of school and it is crucial that staff, faculty and administration shift their perception and understanding of trauma and its impacts on adolescent development and gain skills to respond in healthy and appropriate ways.
 - Openly engaging both students and employees in decisions that pertain to them to the greatest extent possible will build additional trust. Many student and staff advisory groups are underway, and we recommend they be activated as broadly as possible.
 - Incorporate additional curriculum on the topic of boundaries and safety that promotes an interactive conversation between students and parents/guardians during every year of school. Each year the discussion progressively builds, introducing timely and important topics and conversations as the students develop, mature, and prepare for college. Design thoughtful questions for student contemplation and then prompt discussion between student and parent/guardian as part of homework requirements.

- **Communicate Effectively and Courageously**
 - Establish a defined communication plan that prioritizes transparency, effectiveness and timeliness with teachers, students and parents. Information moves quickly in the digital age and SMA should seek to inform the community, to the best of its ability, of important events before they hear it elsewhere. This promotes trust and respect. Pre-written blast emails and texts with general information or pre-recorded phone messages on the main office line might be of benefit.
 - In instances of difficult conversations or tragic circumstances allow more time and slow down the discussion, be as transparent as possible, even saying "I don't know" when necessary. Listening and validating voices and allowing ample

- time and resources for processing of information is crucial for healthy and healing communication. Resist rushing to move on or resolve.
- Students at SMA are taught to be confident leaders who value civil liberty and justice. It is important that SMA teachers and administrators respond with integrity, encouragement and receptivity when students practice those skills and use their voices in dissent during their education at SMA.
 - Many topics regarding safety are already included in the SMA curriculum and scheduled throughout the 4 years. This task force believes there would be benefit to front loading those topics in the first two years so students may be earlier equipped with skills around boundaries, exploitation, abuse, healthy relationships and sexual health that will benefit them both now and into new adult experiences.
- **Increase Focus and Understanding of Inclusion and Equity**
 - Prioritize developing awareness and understanding of what inclusion and equity look like to minority populations. Give specific and careful consideration to all communications, curriculum structure, course offerings, employment selections and all other actions, doing everything possible to act with educated, cultural competence in protecting and treating all students equitably; explicitly reinforcing that every student deserves to have a safe and welcoming school, no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity, race or ethnicity, disability, religious beliefs or any other factor.
 - Intentionally offer inclusivity and diversity in hiring of minority populations so the diversity of adults in the building is a representation of the diversity of students in the building. This should also include actively representing all minority groups in curriculum.
 - Actively apply existing policies that invite the inclusion of LGBTQ students and employees, making safety and welcome a consistent priority for all individuals.
 - Give additional consideration to the experience and voice of the LGBTQ individuals. Their experience is unique given the combination of theological and political complexities in our society and in a private Catholic school that are not present with other minority groups. This creates vulnerabilities and nuances that require careful listening and thoughtful insight in order to offer a safe environment. Reference the recommendation in the above section for an LGBTQ Advisory Team.
 - Use the implementation of the new Professional Conduct and Appropriate Boundaries Handbook as an opportunity to raise school-wide awareness of the many forms of abuse. Sexual abuse in LGBTQ students is reported at 3 times higher than nationally reported rates of sexual abuse in heterosexual students

and it is crucial that SMA increase awareness, sensitivity and safeguards against abuse in any form.¹

- **Create a System to Effectively Implement and Regularly Review Policies and Procedures**
 - The creation and implementation of the Professional Conduct and Appropriate Boundaries Handbook is a very significant safeguard for SMA students. This task force recommends using the topics in this handbook as a cornerstone to deliberately and diligently promote a culture of awareness and open discussion with students around developing confident personal boundaries and trusting themselves to identify and report misconduct, boundary violations, and abuse in their own lives and in the lives of fellow students.
 - Create a due diligence check-list or flow chart as a reference for teachers, administrators and students which simply outlines the chronological steps to address allegations of misconduct or abuse, when and how to report, who gets notified, when to access a neutral outside investigator, what is the required reporting timeline etc. Clarity, simplicity and training will minimize subjective risk.
 - Create a similar flow chart for teachers, students and parents to clarify mandatory reporting rules, define reportable information and what is required of teachers when students self-disclose information.
 - Create a clear path of due diligence so students feel fully protected and employees are assured that a process is in place that will adequately protect them from unfounded allegations.
 - Consider special training for adults coaching SMA sports teams as their role is of a different relational nature and may benefit from additional clarity.
 - Annually review policies, procedures and training regarding misconduct, abuse and reporting to evaluate continued benefits, clarity, gaps in policy, and environmental changes. We recommend seeking student and teacher feedback during the review process. The rapid and ever-changing landscape of society may warrant a regularly scheduled, deeper review and update to policies and procedures. We recommend this in-depth review process include the use of a task force; similar to the current SSTF, under the supervision of the Principal and made up of parents, alumnae, faculty and staff.
 - Work with appropriate advisors to create a clear SMA policy regarding the documentation and reporting of misconduct and/or abuse that clearly outlines what to document in a report, who has access to reports, how and where they

¹ (<https://qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/>)

will be preserved and for what duration. Ensure appropriate personnel are trained on confidentiality, preservation and non-destruction procedures.

- **Physical Safety Considerations**

- Advise against arming teachers
- Define policy regarding what circumstances merit increased security measures and/or utilization of armed security guards
- File SMA Safety Plan with PPD (It is already on file with PFD)
- Consider installing locking mechanisms for doors that open outward
- Consider clarifying evacuation/active threat response during assembly and after-hours circumstances
- Consider increasing lighting in front of building
- Recommend practice evacuation and RUN FIGHT HIDE drills each semester
- Consider connecting to PSU Mass Messaging to be aware of their security concerns
- Consider forwarding PPS messaging to parents and students (lock downs, imminent threats happening near SMA)
- With consideration for building security, specific recommendations regarding campus safety measures have been forwarded directly to administration and will not be published in this document. Contact Nicole Foran if you would like more information.

Being entrusted with the minds and hearts of students in an educational setting is a significant honor and responsibility. The values and charism that St. Mary’s Academy has undertaken to share with the young people in the SMA community demonstrate a great desire to equip service-minded, balanced leaders who pursue a commitment to justice and equity as powerfully and with as much tenacity as they pursue as love and compassion. This commitment and devotion to the full development of the human person, in an all-girls, urban, Catholic school, in the digital age of 2019 is a profound and important challenge.

The commitment to a broad, lengthy and reflective investigation into what will promote a culture of safety in this challenging environment is a crucial and ongoing conversation. In order to meet their great potential, students at SMA must have an opportunity to practice using their voices to advocate for both themselves and others and be provided with intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual and physical safety while learning to do so. This begins with the understanding and self-awareness of what feels personally safe and what does not and the ability to use that knowledge with personal agency.

The Student Safety Task Force offers these recommendations to the St. Mary’s Academy Administration with a desire that they contribute to the creation of a dynamic culture where personal safety is a top priority, where students are encouraged to deeply understand how to honor themselves and each other, celebrate their diversity and use their voices and talents in service to the world.

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