

**SOJOURNER**  
**TRUTH**  
montessori  
public charter school

Student and Family  
Policies Submission for  
the DC PCSB  
SY2022-2023

## Discipline Policy

Truth's mission is to empower students to transform the world. The primary objectives of the disciplinary response system at Truth are to support a quality learning environment through self-discipline and self-direction and instill our core values of honoring self-development, designing for positive impact, challenging mind, body and spirit and pursuing justice everywhere. Truth PCS's Code of Conduct gives students guidelines and clear expectations that will reinforce critical-thinking skills, positive decision-making skills, and the use of sound judgment, basic reasoning, and analysis in their day to day activities. Students are expected to enter the school each day ready to learn, respect, and cooperate with other members of the Truth community.

It is everyone's collective responsibility at Truth to build and support a community where students serve as active agents in the construction of peace and model the Montessori philosophy of grace and courtesy. Truth maintains high standards of conduct both in and outside of school. We recognize that the adolescent years are a time of transition when children learn the complicated connections between the choices they make and the resulting consequences.

The Code of Conduct guides students in making informed and responsible choices and provides a foundation on which students can build respect for themselves and others. It also helps us create a culture in which students have the opportunity to focus on achieving academic and social success and to understand the norms that will be expected of them as they mature and become responsible citizens.

All adult members of the Truth family are also expected to adhere to the components of the Code of Conduct and to work together to support and enforce its goals.

A full description of the Truth's Code of Conduct is provided to all families in order to give students, families, staff and other Truth stakeholders a clear understanding of the expectations of students and the responses for not meeting these expectations. Students are expected to comply with the Code of Conduct at all times while under the jurisdiction of Truth PCS, including all

activities during the school day, all supplemental programs, all extracurricular activities, and all school functions both on- and off-campus.

At the end of the school day, students are expected to leave the building in a responsible and respectful fashion. Students should be aware that all Code of Conduct rules apply when they are leaving the building and on the school grounds, and they continue to apply until they have arrived at their home or other destination. Students who violate the Code of Conduct on their way home or outside of school may earn disciplinary consequences in accordance with school policies and relevant laws or regulations.

While the provisions of this policy purport to control, regulate, or establish standards for the actions, behavior, or activities of students of Sojourner Truth PCS--those provisions shall be enforceable by school authorities, both during regularly scheduled school hours as well as at such other times and places including, but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- When the student is on school grounds;
- When the student is on or off school grounds participating in or attending any function or activity (including field trips, class trips, or athletic contests) that are sponsored by Sojourner Truth PCS;
- When the student is traveling on public transportation and the activity involves any conduct prohibited by DC Law, including from the time students leave home to come to school until the time they return home; and
- When the student commits a prohibited offense that occurs outside of school hours (with emphasis on infractions Tier 3 or greater, to include during the summer, whether or not a student is enrolled in Sojourner Truth PCS' Summer School Program).

### **Suspensions and Expulsions**

It is Truth's belief as a school that - unless there is a credible threat of injury or harm to others - that students should continue to be welcomed at school. While there will be clear and specific consequences for negative behavior, suspensions and expulsions are typically reserved for situations where it is deemed unsafe for a student to physically remain on campus (either for their own safety or for the safety of others).

### **Protocol Following Behavior Incidents**

When an incident occurs, it is Truth's first priority to make sure students are safe, and then to seek an understanding of events. It is common practice for students and staff involved in the incident, as well as those who may have been witness to it, to be asked to write a written statement for the purpose of capturing perceptions of the event while they are still fresh in memories. Witnesses will always be given the option to decline the opportunity to write and share this statement. These statements will only be used for internal purposes, and will never be shared outside of the Truth team or the parents of the writer. Parents and guardians will always be alerted when students are asked to write statements.

### **Due Process Procedures for Students with Special Needs**

Students with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as other students and may be disciplined for the same behavioral offenses listed above. A multidisciplinary team will hold a manifestation meeting to determine if the incident was a manifestation of their disability.

This meeting will not determine the consequences issued by the school for the recent infraction, though it may inform that decision. Discipline is handled by the school administration, who will hold a separate meeting. This meeting is to determine whether recent behavior was a manifestation of the disability and to review the appropriateness of the school plan.

### **Due Process Procedures for All Students**

A student who has been suspended for fewer than eleven (11) days may appeal the Suspension as follows:

1. Suspensions and expulsions may be appealed to the Principal.
2. All appeals must be made by the student's parent or guardian or the adult student, in writing to the Principal or person designated by the Principal as appropriate, no later than two (2) school days after receiving the notice of Suspension or Expulsion, and may be made prior to receiving formal written notice of the Suspension.
3. All appeals will be heard by the Principal or a person designated by the principal no later than one school day after the appeal is requested. Upon request of the adult student or minor student's parent or guardian, the time for the appeal may be extended up to three school days. The appeal may be held by telephone upon request of the parent or guardian if necessary due to health, work, or childcare.

4. The student and his or her parent or guardian may present evidence and ask witnesses to speak.
5. At the conclusion of the conference, the Principal or a person designated by the Principal, as appropriate, shall render a final decision.
6. No more than one school day after the conference, the principal or a person designated by the Principal, as appropriate, shall give the student and his or her parent or guardian a written summary of the conference proceedings, including the final decision.
7. Once a hearing is scheduled by the hearing office, the student shall be placed on Suspension, or in another appropriate placement until the conclusion of the hearing and appeals processes. This placement may be their regular assigned classroom or education setting.

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative Practices and the Restorative Justice methods outlined below are meant to repair and restore the community, and the individual's role in the community.

**Restorative Practices (RP)** take form in multiple ways: circles, conferencing, mediation, restorative conversations, restorative communication, and quasi-restorative processes. They can include the following:

- *Proactive strategies* for building community
- *Preventative strategies* for addressing conflicts or tensions, or
- *Responsive strategies* for repairing harm. See Restorative Practices/Positive Discipline document.

**Restorative Justice (RJ)** is a philosophy based on principles that guide the response to conflict and harm. The principles are based on practices that have been used for centuries in indigenous cultures. The three main goals of RJ are:

- *Accountability*, providing a chance for wrongdoers to be accountable to those harmed, and enable them to repair the harm to the extent possible.
- *Community safety*, through relationship-building strategies and empowering the community to be responsible for its members' well-being.
- *Competency development*, to increase the pro-social skills of those who

have harmed others, address factors that lead to delinquent behavior, and build on individuals' strengths.

### **RJ and its Influence on School Policies/Practices at Truth**

Truth will include Restorative Practices as a method when assigning responses to students for behavior. A restorative pathway repairs the harm that has been done to the community through one's negative behavior or interactions. The responsible administrator/dean will determine if the restorative response will be in addition to an already assigned consequence or in lieu of a more severe consequence. Restorative Practices include, but are not limited to, Restorative Conferences, Restorative Circles, Peer Conferences, Affective Statements, Collaborative Class Agreements, Problem-Solving Anchor Charts, and other activities focused on mindfulness. These practices can provide opportunities to meet all of the goals of our Code of Conduct: for students to repair harm caused by their actions, learn new skills that will prepare them for success at Truth and beyond, and take ownership over their behaviors. Thus, these practices provide Truth PCS with meaningful alternatives to suspension that align with our core values.

## **Attendance Policy**

Truth believes that regular school attendance is directly beneficial to both social-emotional and academic development. Regular attendance allows ongoing opportunities for social interaction, optimal communication between teachers and students, and the development of habits of dependability. The purpose of this policy is to encourage regular school attendance.

This Policy also recognizes that class attendance is a joint responsibility to be shared by the student, parent or guardian, teachers, and administrators.

### **Parent or Guardian's Responsibility**

It is the responsibility of the student's parent or guardian to help ensure the student is attending school, to inform the school in the event of an expected student absence, and to work cooperatively with the school to solve any attendance problems that may arise.

Absences are recorded and reported to the Office of the State Superintendent of

Education and the DC Public Charter School Board because attendance is considered a vital factor in a student's performance. *Vacations are not considered an excused absence.* Parents and guardians are responsible for sending their students to school and those that fail to do so may be subject to court action under the Compulsory Attendance Law of the District of Columbia 8-247.

### **What are Excused Absences?**

- Illness or medical reason (A doctor's note is required for an absence greater than 5 days)
- Doctor's appointments or other medical reason
- Death in the student's immediate family
- Observance of a religious holiday

The school will excuse a temporary absence if proper documentation is provided. Proper documentation includes: a note from a health care provider and/or a signed letter from a parent/guardian for family emergencies and/or observance of religious holidays. If your student has two or more unexcused absences, a parent conference will be held to discuss concerns and possible consequences.

### **In-Seat Attendance**

Truth is held accountable by the DC Public Charter School Board by, in part, our performance on a Performance Management Framework. Part of this is the rate at which students are present at school. This includes both excused and unexcused absences. In other words, *absences for sickness, vacations, and other reasons are still counted against us.*

### **Tardiness**

Students are considered late if they are not in their first period class by 8:45am. Students that arrive late must get a tardy pass from the main office before heading to class.

Tardiness is recorded and reported to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board as it can adversely impact student performance.

In accordance with DC law, if a student accumulates ten (10) unexcused absences from school, Truth PCS will refer them to Washington, D.C.'s student

and Family Services Agency (CFSA) as a chronically absent student. At the same time, Truth will report the student as truant to the Office of the State Superintendent for Education for follow up. The school will notify the family of these truancy reporting measures in collaboration with the Municipal Police Department.

## Grievance Procedures

### Parental Grievance Policy

Truth is committed to creating the strong family-school relationships essential to the success of each Truth student and to our school as a whole. On the occasion that parents wish to make a complaint, we have established the following grievance protocol to solve disputes or complaints in a fair and prompt manner. Notably, the formal procedures described below may be implemented only *after* the parties have engaged in an earnest attempt to resolve matter(s) informally.

### Parent Complaints

Parent complaints are taken seriously by Truth and should proceed as follows:

1. Parents should first schedule a conference with the immediately-involved teacher or administrator to discuss the issue. The school reserves the right to redirect parent(s) to the appropriate personnel if this step has not been followed.
2. If parent(s) conclude that the initial response/course of action was insufficient, a meeting may then be scheduled with the Principal or Executive Director. Prior to the scheduling of any such meeting, the parent(s) should first provide the Principal or Executive Director with a message that identifies: (a) the issue/ concern/ complaint; (b) what steps have been taken to resolve the situation; and (c) proposed solutions. The Principal or Executive Director will make an effort to respond to all grievances within 2 business days.
3. If parent(s) conclude that the initial response/course of action was insufficient, an in-person meeting should then be scheduled with the Executive Director, following the same steps outlined in Step 3.



4. If a resolution cannot be reached through a discussion with the Executive Director, parent(s) should submit a formal Parental Grievance Letter to the Truth Board of Trustees (boardchair@truthpcs.org). This message must include the information and materials discussed below.

Information on the DC Public Charter School Board's procedures for receiving complaints and/or concerns can be found at <https://dcpcsb.org/community-complaints>.

### **Process of Board Review for Parental Grievances**

The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School's Board of Trustees shall annually appoint a Grievance Committee comprised of two (2) Trustees and the Executive Director. The Executive Director shall not participate in any grievance proceeding in which they are the subject of an original grievance. A Parental Grievance Message should be submitted in writing to the Board of Trustees within 30 days of the conduct that triggered the grievance and must specify:

- The nature and date of the grievance and any related or supporting documents;
- The results of previous discussions to resolve the conflict, including any correspondence;
- The reason for the parent's dissatisfaction with the decisions previously rendered; and
- A description of the relief sought.

Within 30 days of the submission of a complete Parental Grievance Message, the Grievance Committee shall:

- Research the nature of the complaint;
- Interview the concerned parties; and
- Recommend a course of action to the full Truth Board of Trustees through communications by the Board Member serving as Parental Grievance Committee Chair to the Board Chair.

The Board shall render a final ruling on the grievance at its next regularly scheduled meeting following its receipt of the recommendation of the Grievance Committee.

## Non-Discrimination Policy

In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the D.C. Human Rights Act of 1977, as amended, District of Columbia Official Code Section 2-1401.01 et seq. (Act), Truth Public Charter School does not discriminate (including employment therein and admission thereto) on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family status, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, genetic information, disability, source of income, status as a victim of an interfamily offense, or place of residence or business. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, which is prohibited by the Act. In addition, harassment based on any of the above-protected categories is prohibited. Discrimination in violation of the aforementioned laws will not be tolerated. Violators will be subject to disciplinary action.

## Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) Notice

### **FERPA**

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 the School received a request for access. Parents of eligible students should submit to the School principal (or appropriate school official) a written request that identifies the record (s) they wish to inspect. The School 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 of eligible students believes are inaccurate. Parents or eligible students may ask the School to amend a record that they believe is inaccurate. They should write to the School principal (or appropriate school official), clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it is inaccurate. If the School decides not to amend the record as

requested by the parent or eligible student, the School 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 parents of eligible students when notified of the right to a hearing. 3. The right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained 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 school officials with legitimate educational interests. A school official is a person employed by the School as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel); a person serving on the School Board; a person or company with whom the School has contracted to perform a special task (such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist); or a parent or student serving on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee, or assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by the School District 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 4000  
Maryland Avenue, SW Washington, DC 20202-5901

### **Notification of Rights Under PPRA**

The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (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.

Truth has developed and adopted policies 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. Truth will directly notify parents of these policies at least annually at the start of each school year and after any substantive changes. Truth 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 his or her student out of participation of the specific activity or survey. Truth 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 student 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.
- 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, SW Washington, D.C. 20202-5901

See the list below of the disclosures that elementary schools may make without consent.

FERPA permits the disclosure of information from students' education records, without consent of the parent or eligible student, if the disclosure meets certain conditions found in §99.31 of the FERPA regulations. Except for disclosures to school officials, disclosures related to some judicial orders or lawfully issued subpoenas, disclosures of directory information, and disclosures to the parent or eligible student, §99.32 of the FERPA regulations requires the school to record the disclosure. Parents and eligible students have a right to inspect and review the record of disclosures. A school may disclose information from the education records of a student without obtaining prior written consent of the parents or the eligible student –

- To other school officials, including teachers, within the educational agency

or institution whom the school has determined to have legitimate educational interests. This includes contractors, consultants, volunteers, or other parties to whom the school has outsourced institutional services or functions, provided that the conditions listed in §99.31(a)(1)(i)(B)(7) - (a)(1)(i)(B)(2) are met. (§99.31(a)(1))

- To officials of another school, school system, or institution of postsecondary education where the student seeks or intends to enroll, or where the student is already enrolled if the disclosure is for purposes related to the student's enrollment or transfer, subject to the requirements of §99.34. (§99.31(a)(2))

- To authorized representatives of the U. S. Comptroller General, the U. S. Attorney General, the U.S. Secretary of Education, or State and local educational authorities, such as the State educational agency in the parent or eligible student's State (SEA). Disclosures under this provision may be made, subject to the requirements of §99.35, in connection with an audit or evaluation of Federal- or State-supported education programs, or for the enforcement of or compliance with Federal legal requirements that relate to those programs. These entities may make further disclosures of PII to outside entities that are designated by them as their authorized representatives to conduct any audit, evaluation, or enforcement or compliance activity on their behalf. (§§99.31(a)(3) and 99.35)

- In connection with financial aid for which the student has applied or which the student has received, if the information is necessary to determine eligibility for the aid, determine the amount of the aid, determine the conditions of the aid, or enforce the terms and conditions of the aid. (§99.31(a)(4))

- To State and local officials or authorities to whom information is specifically allowed to be reported or disclosed by a State statute that concerns the juvenile justice system and the system's ability to effectively serve, prior to adjudication, the student whose records were released, subject to §99.38. (§99.31(a)(5))

- To organizations conducting studies for, or on behalf of, the school, in order to: (a) develop, validate, or administer predictive tests; (b) administer student aid programs; or (c) improve instruction. (§99.31(a)(6))

- To accrediting organizations to carry out their accrediting functions. (§99.31(a)(7))

- To parents of an eligible student if the student is a dependent for IRS tax purposes. (§99.31(a)(8))

- To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena. (§99.31(a)(9))

- To appropriate officials in connection with a health or safety emergency, subject to §99.36. (§99.31(a)(10))
- Information the school has designated as “directory information” under §99.37. (§99.31(a)(11))

If you do not want the school to disclose directory information from your student’s education records without your prior written consent, you must notify the school in writing by September 30, 2019. Truth designates the following information as directory information:

- Student’s name
- Participation in officially recognized activities and sports
- Address
- Telephone listing
- Weight and height of members of athletic teams
- Electronic mail address
- Photograph
- Degrees, honors, and awards received
- Date and place of birth
- Major field of study
- The most recent educational agency or institution attended
- Dates of attendance
- Grade level
- 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.)

## Admission Preference Policy

Truth participates in the common lottery through MySchoolDC. If a student applies to Truth after the lottery and there is still space available in the grade in which the student has applied, he or she will be offered a seat on a first-come, first-served basis. If there are no spaces available, then the student will be placed on the waiting list for that grade and will be contacted as soon as a space becomes available.

Truth currently has five preferences in the MySchoolDC system. The first is a

*Founders Preference* for the children of founding board members and staff members, and the second is a *Children of Staff* preference. The third is *Sibling Attending* and the fourth is *Sibling Offered*. The fifth and final preference is an *Equitable Access* preference.