



## ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL

# Summary of Current Practices

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### **Philosophy:**

St. George's is committed to the safety, security, and well being of our students. Our efforts range from the thorough vetting and training of our employees, to education and training for students at every level. Educational efforts are supplemented by school policies, resources, and personnel devoted to supporting the health and safety of our students.

The ever-evolving terrain of education, culture, and technology is complex, and every school and community member must navigate this landscape on a daily basis. Our policies and procedures, as well as our support structures, are reviewed on an annual basis, and amended at any point deemed necessary, to ensure that we are doing our best to meet the needs of our students.

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### **Part 1: Faculty and Staff**

#### *Hiring:*

- All faculty candidates go through a lengthy, multiday interview process that includes a series of individual meetings with key leaders from respective academic and student life departments, as well as engagement in the life of the school which often includes teaching a class/classes, observing evening duty, and meeting with students.
- Thorough and strategic reference checks are made on all prospective employees as part of the hiring process. The school is attentive to employment history when considering candidates, and as a highly selective institution, has the luxury of highly competitive pools for all openings.
- In compliance with Rhode Island law, all employees undergo a national criminal background check administered by local law enforcement.
- While the school has always been in compliance with Rhode Island law with respect to background checks, we have reviewed our practice and made deliberate changes to our policy. We have extended the scope of the checks to include all school employees who might have been previously "grandfathered" under the state statute. In addition, beginning this summer, the school will require all non-employee spouses and adult children who reside in school housing to complete background checks. The scope of the policy also includes contracted individuals working on behalf of the school who may

have direct access to children. Finally, while not required by law, the school will renew all criminal background checks every four years.

*Faculty Structure:*

- As an element of the hiring process, the school encourages, through active outreach and institutional supports, gender balance across the faculty and among administrative leadership. At this time, out of a faculty of 94, including administrators and dorm parents, 50 are women, 44 are men. In addition, women currently hold 50 percent of leadership roles, including some of the most senior administrative positions such as the Head of School, Dean of Faculty, Director of College Counseling, Director of Diversity, Director of Finance, School Chaplain, Director of Athletics, Director of Communications, and Director of Technology.

*Abuse Reporting: Education and Practice:*

- Each year, the faculty review our collective and individual responsibilities to report suspected child abuse under Rhode Island state law. We review both the language of the statute and the implications and requirements for all employees.
- Any employee may go directly to the public authorities to report, or if they are more comfortable, to the school's Director of Counseling and Community Response Team who will assist them in filing a report.
- The school's reporting policies, in accordance with state law, make clear that any report made in good faith protects an employee from institutional or legal repercussions.
- Faculty appointment letters, signed individually every year, make explicitly clear that faculty are expected to adhere to the "highest standards of professionalism on behalf of our students."
- As part of our multi-day orientation for new faculty, which includes meetings with the Head of School, Dean of Faculty, Dean of Students, Director of Counseling, and the Human Resources office, we review the state reporting laws and emphasize the importance of personal and professional boundaries, as well as reviewing the multiple support structures in place to ensure the health and safety of our students.
- The Human Resources office supports best practices to allow for independent reporting of employment issues or concern. Trained HR professionals are available to assist with addressing any issues of professional misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or other forms of personal misconduct.

*Faculty Training and Professional Development:*

- While regular faculty meetings have been a long-standing practice at the school, within the last decade St. George's has deliberately added three professional development days throughout the year as an acknowledgement of the complexity of our work and the

need for professional growth amidst a complex, changing world. These days are primarily focused on student review and professional development and training. The faculty is devoted to knowing our students and these reviews allow us the opportunity to discuss the developmental successes and progress of all our students. This time often helps us to recognize patterns of behavior that may need to be addressed and helps ensure that students do not “fall through the cracks.” Along with regular student review, the training sessions cover a wide range of institutional and pedagogical topics, but in the last five years alone, the following sessions have addressed student safety and well being in various forms:

- We are committed to holding annual seminars on boundary training for all faculty and staff employees. These sessions focused on raising awareness of the sorts of circumstances in which misconduct can flourish, identifying behaviors that could indicate abuse or misconduct, and how to respond if misconduct is suspected.
- In April/May 2018, the Leadership Team and Health Group participated in MassKids’ on-line training “Preventing Child Sexual Abuse in Schools”
- In October 2017, the Dean of Faculty attended the National Conference on Innovative Strategies to Prevent Educator Sexual Misconduct.
- In August 2017, Stephanie Trilling from the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center presented a program titled, “Bystander Training” to faculty and staff.
- In March of 2017, the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center presented a workshop on campus titled “Defining, Recognizing and Preventing Sexual Violence.”
- In January 2016, we hosted author [Ali Michael](#), who came to SG to work with faculty on cultural competency, so that the faculty can more effectively assist students who come to the School from a wide range of personal and family backgrounds.
- In the past three years the faculty and staff have gone through two different training sessions for active shooter threat response. Led by law enforcement, these training sessions included drills for responding to active shooter situations.
- We hosted the organization [Safe Surroundings](#) in September 2015, to help train the faculty regarding the evolving landscape of substance abuse with adolescents, especially as it relates to boarding schools and identifying signs of substance abuse in dorm rooms.
- For the duration of the 2014-15 academic year, the faculty engaged in a comprehensive program review guided by the standards of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ accreditation process. In September of 2015, SG hosted a three-day visit by a team of nine educators from around New England who assessed the school on its self-study. The full report from the visiting committee can be found [here](#).

## Part 2: SAFETY AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

There are a wide range of safety and support structures in place for students and employees alike, and these structures evolve consistently, as best practices do. Safety and support structures include but are not limited to:

- [\*The Shield\*](#), the community handbook for students and their families, outlines school policies and expectations on a range of topics. With regard to student safety, the school has strong policies against harassment and bullying, as well as defined policies regarding sexual behavior and consent. Students and parents sign a document to acknowledge their adherence to *The Shield*, as part of their overall enrollment contract.
- The Employee Handbook, which details the policies and expectations for all school employees, is managed and overseen by the HR office. The handbook details a wide range of expectations, responses, and practices of the school. In accordance with our philosophy, *The Shield* and the Employee Handbook undergo periodic review and revision by outside experts and legal counsel. A comprehensive review and update of both documents continues annually.
- The Health Group is a standing faculty committee that meets weekly to address student health concerns – both physical and emotional. The group includes the Director of Counseling and Health Services (a licensed clinical psychologist), representatives from the Health Center, including the Director, the Head of School, Associate Head, Academic Dean, Dean of Students and any additional members by invitation. As explained in *The Shield*, the Health Group is a crucial part of the health safety net for students and faculty alike.
- With respect to emotional support for students, the school employs two trained and licensed counselors, and maintains a network of outside professionals to whom we make referrals including psychiatrists, nutritionists, and family therapists. We also offer anonymous “peer concern,” in which a peer may share concerns privately about another student.
- In addition to professional counseling, students can rely on a host of other resources, particularly advisors, who remain central to the experiences of many students. Teachers, coaches, dorm parents and the nurses in the Health Center also serve as conduits for students who seek counsel and support; they are trained to refer students to healthcare professionals when appropriate.
- In addition to the adults who serve on the Health Group, we sponsor a student organization called Health Council, whose members are elected and serve as a voice for the student body. Health Council meets weekly with the Director of Counseling and addresses concerns of health and safety, as well as serving as a sounding board and conduit for the counseling staff to address broader topics of healthy behaviors in the community.
- For students who have specific worries about a classmate or friend, a system called Peer Concern allows students to raise concerns directly with the counseling staff. It is not

anonymous (reporting students must sign their name) but it is confidential (the identity and source of the concern is not revealed to the student of concern). This has proven an effective way for students to broach conversations with trained professionals about difficult subjects or circumstances faced by their friends, including eating disorders, family strife, and substance abuse.

- St. George's provides students with 24/7 staffing by campus safety officers and by health center staff. The campus is covered by trained, but unarmed, campus safety officers, the health center has nurses on duty at all times, and a physician on campus most days and on call otherwise.
- In terms of physical safety, buildings on campus and many interior spaces are now controlled by digital card locks. Students' ID cards include a chip that works like a key, allowing access to their dorms or other facilities. The cards can be deactivated if lost, and the locks can be configured to allow variable access (boys' cards will not open a girls' dorm and vice versa, and student cards cannot open academic buildings after hours, for example). In an emergency situation, the system will allow the school to lockdown buildings or to review the history of ID use for entering buildings on campus.
- As part of our emergency response plan, the school has an emergency notification system that allows us to contact members of the community via phone, text, email, and alert beacons that are located across campus. We test these systems periodically, to ensure their readiness should there be an emergency.
- The school has installed three "Blue Light" emergency stations found commonly on college campuses. These phones are a direct 911 line that also notifies campus safety of any emergency. Our Blue Lights are located just outside the Academic Center, the entrance to the Dorrance Field House and at the Cabot/Harman Ice Center.

### **Part 3: STUDENTS**

The school has made substantial and deliberate efforts to cultivate and support a positive student culture including:

- The drafting and adoption of a school-wide Honor Code. Created by a joint committee of students and faculty in 2007, the Honor Code was adopted by vote of the student body and the faculty independently. Information about the honor code can be found [here](#). The Honor Code provides all members of the school community with the guiding principles of respect and trust that underpin the strength of our common goals as a school.
- The creation of the Honor Board, and its separation from the roles of the School Prefects. This was done in 2010 to allow for additional positions of leadership for sixth formers, while still preserving the important role for student voices in the discipline process. The Honor Board is the successor body to what some will remember as the Discipline Committee, and it is made up of elected students and faculty and charged

with upholding the Honor Code by making recommendations on disciplinary matters to school leadership.

- Along with other efforts to cultivate leadership opportunities and to train student leaders, the school has been active in encouraging and supporting gender balance among student leaders, especially among the sixth form. This has contributed to a gender distribution of senior leadership positions among boys and girls that has been nearly equally divided over the past 10 years, with 24 girls and 26 boys among the School Prefects, and 27 girls and 23 boys among the DC/Honor Board members.
- In keeping with our Mission and Honor Code, the school has taken strides to eliminate or amend traditions or practices that were incompatible with a positive student culture, including any event that could be seen to encourage hazing, bullying, or harassment in any form.
- In recent years, more than 40 new traditions have been created specifically targeted toward building school spirit and positive energy among the student body. These include additional Middlesex Rallies in the winter and spring, Friday Night Lights athletic contests which the whole school attends, the Honor Book signing chapel, and the revival of the long defunct School Club competition that pits Sachuest versus Sakonnet in a series of contests and achievements across the year.
- Specifically with regard to issues of social dynamics and sexual consent the school has made and continues to make a substantial and intentional effort to address the complex issues faced by this generation of students and society in general. Some of these efforts include:
  - Formalized training for dormitory prefects, which includes a two-day, on-campus orientation prior to the start of the academic year. This training focuses on fostering safe communities in the dorm, and coaches dormitory prefects about how to intervene if unsafe situations arise.
  - In the 2013-2014 Academic Year, the whole school community viewed a documentary film called "*Submit*," which focuses on adolescent development and the consequences of teasing, bullying, and harassment. This was part of a deliberate push to equip students to be more than a bystander if they were party to or aware of some form of harassment. Following the airing of the video, student and faculty gathered in breakout sessions to discuss how it connected to their own experiences in schools, and what SG as a community might learn from the film.
  - Every year the school holds an "Age 18 Meeting" in which we meet with the sixth form to discuss their responsibilities as legal adults. In addition to explaining their general legal status, this meeting includes a detailed review of Rhode Island laws regarding the age of sexual consent and sexual contact with underage students, along with Rhode Island reporting laws.
  - On multiple occasions we have hosted speakers informing students of the risks and complexity posed by various social media vehicles such as Snapchat and Instagram

as well as perilous practices like sexting and video chats. In 2015, Conrad Wang spoke with students about their “digital footprint” and the dangers present in certain online behaviors.

- Our annual Health and Wellness program includes conversations with third-form and fourth-form students about a variety of issues, including human development, sexual intimacy, abstinence, birth control, STD’s, sexual identity and orientation, stereotypes, etc. Along with the important factual information, the school emphasizes the many sources of support on campus from the counseling and health center staff to advisors and dorm parents.
  - We have made the issue of sexual consent and appropriate physical intimacy a priority of attention and discussion across the school, devoting multiple student life programming sessions to small group conversations about consent and relationships among students on campus. One of the school’s design teams in our SGx program investigated ways in which the school community might further cultivate and support healthy relationships among students. In February 2016, we hosted [The Date Safe Project](#), an organization focused on providing students with practical skills and insights for addressing issues like verbal consent to intimacy, respecting boundaries, sexual decision making, bystander intervention, and supporting survivors. The all-school session was followed by faculty training regarding these issues.
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