# New Connections Academy

# STUDENT & PARENT HANDBOOK
# 2026-2027

**Updated: June 1st, 2026**

**I. INTRODUCTION** **5**
A. Mission Statement 6
B. Promise Statement 6
C. Core Beliefs 8
D. A Fresh Start 11
E. Citizenship/Immigration Status 12
**II. GENERAL INFORMATION** **12**
A. Admission 12
B. Registration 13
C. Attendance 13
D. Emergency Contact Information 14
E. Emergency School Closure Information 15
F. Emergency Procedures 16
G. Transportation 16
H. Use of Physical Restraint, Time Out and Isolated Time Out 16
I. Communication & Consultation 17
J. In Case of Emergency 17
K. Visitors 17
**III. PROGRAMMING** **19**
A. Curriculum 19
B. Therapeutic Support Services 19
C. Restorative Intervention Program 20
D. Extended School Year (ESY) / Summer Term 22
E. Student Transition 22
F. Graduation Requirements 23
**IV. Policies And Procedures** **24**
A. Student Check-In 24
B. Student Appearance and Personal Belongings 24
C. Homework 26
D. Food 26
E. Student Health Policies 26
F. Student Records & Confidentiality 33
G. Abuse Prevention 34
H. Bullying Prevention and Racism-Free Policy 35

I. Policy On Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming Students 41
**V. STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE 46**
A. Prohibited Student Conduct 46
B. Interventions 48
C. Suspension 48
D. Manifestation Determination Review 49
E. Discharge 50
F. Search and Seizure 50
G. Battery, Firearm, & Drug Possession Incidents 51
**VI. ACCEPTABLE USE OF ELECTRONIC NETWORKS 52**
A. General Regulations 52
B. Acceptable Use 53
C. Unacceptable Use 54
D. Student/Staff Communication 54
E. Use of Artificial Intelligence 55
F. Use of Personal Electronic Devices 55
**Student Authorization For Acceptable Use Of Electronic Networks Form 57**
**Handbook Acknowledgement 58**

New Connections Academy welcomes students and families. New Connections Academy is excited about each student's choice to begin a new chapter and look forward to a successful start to what will be a great year for each student.

Enclosed is the updated Student & Parent Handbook ("Handbook") which includes important information concerning school policies and procedures. Please visit New Connections Academy's website at any time for all school information such as forms, lunch menus, and other information: newconnectionsacademy.net

The purpose of this Student & Parent Handbook is to notify students and their parents/guardians of New Connections Academy 's policies and procedures and not to create a contractual relationship. Counseling Connections and New Connections Academy reserve the right to amend, modify, or delete, without prior notice, this Handbook and the school rules, policies, and procedures contained herein as may be needed for the routine operation of the school and to ensure continued compliance with federal, State, or local laws. New Connections Academy will make every effort to notify students and parents/guardians in a timely manner of any changes. Not all behaviors can be specifically identified in a handbook; however, New Connections Academy expects students to follow reasonable rules and not violate the rights of others.

**Parent/Guardian Statement of Cooperation**: All parents/guardians shall acknowledge at the time of registration and annually that they have read, understand, and pledge to abide by the policies and procedures set forth in this Handbook, and that they have reviewed this Handbook with their student(s). It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians of each student enrolled at New Connections Academy to adhere to this Handbook.

# I. INTRODUCTION

New Connections Academy is a private therapeutic day school, founded in 2006. New Connections Academy serves children and adolescents, ages 6 – 22 who, because of significant special education needs, require an alternative school program that is both educational and therapeutic. By utilizing therapeutic, educational, family, and community connections, New Connections Academy promotes academic achievement, social/emotional well-being, and personal growth.

Staff members employ a variety of methods to help students make academic progress, and develop and/or improve their coping, problem-solving and social skills. By utilizing a combination of respect, humor, empathy, and kindness balanced with firmness (i.e., maintaining high expectations and ensuring that students adhere to rules, boundaries, and limitations), staff members are able to establish and maintain supportive, nurturing relationships with students. In turn, these relationships help the students be more open to learning the life skills required for long-term success.

Students engage in an academically challenging curriculum, which emphasizes group instruction and hands-on activities. The clinical/therapeutic staff utilize a skill-building/problem-solving approach as well as psychodynamic, family-systems, and narrative principles. In addition, the Lakota-Sioux Circle of Courage – which teaches the value of belonging, independence, generosity, and mastery – is employed to help students develop these essential life skills. This multi-faceted approach works to assist the students in overcoming issues at hand; practicing more successful behavioral alternatives; and exploring ways to rewrite their negative life stories.

The goal is to work with students to build on their strengths and gifts and be allies with them in their "fight" against the challenges and obstacles that get in the way of their success. The environment is based on a positive, nurturing model, where natural, logical consequences for behaviors are frequently utilized. Our philosophy avoids using restrictive and/or punitive methods of behavioral management and does not have a time-out room. Therapeutic holding (restraint) is only employed as a last resort when a student is presenting as an imminent danger to self or others.

The founders of the New Connections Academy program chose to base the mission of the schools on philosophical principles similar to those held at Counseling Connections – their multidisciplinary group practice which specializes in the therapeutic needs of children, adolescents, and families. The professionals at Counseling Connections have worked closely with the schools, courts, and social service agencies of Lake and Northern Cook Counties since 1983.

New Connections Academy offers a comprehensive array of support services, including:

- Small Group and Individualized Academic Instruction
- Individual, Group & Family Therapy and Crisis Intervention
- Psychiatric Consultation and Evaluation
- Individual and Group Art and Music Therapy
- Substance Abuse Evaluation and Individual & Group Therapy
- Occupational Therapy and Speech & Language Evaluations and Services
- Social/Emotional and Coping Skill Building
- Comprehensive Restorative Practice Program
- Daily School Nurse Services
- Transition and Post-Graduation Preparation

## A. Mission Statement

The mission of New Connections Academy is to provide a comprehensive, therapeutic educational environment that integrates academics, clinical services, and restorative practices to support students with complex learning, emotional, and behavioral needs. Through strong partnerships with families, school districts, and community providers, New Connections Academy is committed to delivering individualized, trauma-informed instruction and therapeutic interventions that promote academic growth, emotional regulation, and personal accountability.

## B. Promise Statement

- We promise to provide the highest quality, individualized, academic, therapeutic, and behavioral services in a physically and emotionally safe school setting for all learners.

- We promise to provide highly committed, well-trained professionals who use data, collaboration, and technology to promote best practices that yield success in school and life.

- We promise to provide a broad range of in-house, supportive, and educational services within a multidisciplinary environment.

- We promise to collaborate consistently with families, outside providers, school districts and other community partners to ensure students' success.

- We promise to respect the dignity of students and families by maintaining privacy and confidentiality, following laws and regulations, and abiding by ethical guidelines.

- We promise to promote acceptance and fairness, honor diversity and recognize the uniqueness and dignity of each student and family.

## C. Core Beliefs

There are two basic areas of understanding that inform us and guide us in our interactions with our students and with each other as a staff. The first is the *Circle of Courage* and the second is *Narrative Practices*. Both of these principles are described below.

1. Circle of Courage. The Circle of Courage represents four key values that enable children to be nurtured in a climate of respect and dignity. It also embodies traditional Native American practices of shared responsibility for the raising of its young people. The circle is a symbol for creating a balanced environment that maintains the essential needs of the students in our care by valuing individual freedoms, building respect through inner discipline, and modeling respectful guidance as children continue to grow and learn. We understand these needs to be Belonging, Mastery, Generosity, and Independence.

    a. Belonging
        - The need for human connection is cultivated through the development of trusting relationships.
        - When students feel they belong to the community of the school, they are motivated to become respectful and positive members of their social groups.
        - A felt sense of belonging to a positive, supportive community promotes cooperation, trust, healthy attachments, and positive peer relationships.

    b. Mastery
        - The innate drive for mastery is fostered by teaching students' effective strategies for coping with life's challenges.
        - When students have a felt sense of mastery, they feel capable of achieving their goals.
        - A felt sense of mastery promotes opportunities for achievement, success, creativity, resilience, motivation, and the ability to be an effective problem solver.

    c. Independence
        - The students' free will is fostered by increased opportunities for responsibility and empowering them to make their own decisions within their communities.
        - Helping students explore the effects of their decisions on themselves, on others, and on their environment promotes autonomy and self-reliance within their community.
        - A felt sense of independence fosters self-control, assertiveness, responsibility, and leadership, all of which increases the connection between students and their community.

d. Generosity
   - The students' character is nurtured by providing them with opportunities to show care and concern for the wellbeing of others.
   - By promoting and giving opportunities for generosity, students are provided with an invigorating sense of purpose in their life.
   - A felt sense of generosity promotes opportunities for altruism, caring, compassion, empathy, and selflessness.

2. Narrative Practices. Developed by New Zealand-based therapists Michael White and David Epston, Narrative Therapy seeks to have an empowering effect and offer counseling that is non-blaming and non-pathologizing in nature. It is a style of therapy that helps people become - and embrace being - an expert in their own lives. In Narrative Therapy, there is an emphasis on the stories that we develop and carry with us throughout our lives. We can carry multiple stories at once, such as those related to our self-esteem, abilities, family, friends, school, etc. As we experience events and interactions, we give meaning to those experiences and they, in turn, influence how we see ourselves and our world, and how to define the challenges or problems that are getting in the way of us becoming the person we want to be or living the life we want to live.

   So why else does Narrative Therapy guide our work at New Connections Academy ?

   a. It is non-pathologizing. That is, it does not label students, instead it labels each student's areas of struggle or problems. This separates the student from their problems, which gives them the opportunity to look at them critically and decide what to do about them.

b. It flattens the traditional therapeutic hierarchy. It honors our student's expert knowledge about their life and problem(s) that are getting in the way of them becoming the person they want to be or living the life they want to live.

c. It is collaborative. It decenters the therapist and consistently invites the student to be a part of the process. It encourages a team approach from defining the problem(s), to developing interventions and strategies for problem-solving and management.

d. It is respectful. Both the student and therapist are positioned to operate from a place of mutual respect and cooperation. Respect is also more inherent in a process when people are not defined by their problems or diagnosis(es).

e. It is non-adversarial. The student and therapist are positioned to work together toward common goals; therefore, resistance and conflicts of agenda are minimized.

f. The approach is natural and familiar. It's consistent with the human desire to make meaning in our lives – the language of stories and metaphors tend to be easily understood and are then used to build therapeutic interventions.

g. It is inclusive. The respectful, collaborative nature of the Narrative approach makes it very inclusive and sensitive to all forms of cultural, social and gender diversity in the student's world.

h. It is practical. By keeping the focus on identifying the most effective means to reach preferred outcomes, therapeutic interventions are only maintained when they produce results.

i. It is adaptive. The Narrative approach is also very adaptive and complementary to a wide variety of non-punitive point systems and restorative behavior management systems (such as ours).

j. It is easy to use. Simply put, the student and therapist work together to:

- identify challenges and name the problem(s) that are getting the way of the student becoming the person they want to be or living the life they want to live;
- explore the problem(s) history of negative impact on the student's life;
- examine the student's strengths;
- explore the student's history of successes/triumphs over the problem;
- enhance, reinforce, and document all narratives around these successes and triumphs; and
- strategize ways to create new opportunities for success and triumph over the problem.

All of which work to support the student in developing an alternative self-perception. This, then, helps them to build increasing resistance to the problem, which only further validates the student's alternate self-perception!

k. Most importantly, it's ego-syntonic (meaning, it works in harmony with our student's goals and the way they want to view themselves). For example, if a student feels they're in a losing battle with themselves and the world around them, they'd likely benefit most from those who are attempting to help them:

- identify the problem that's holding them back, rather than labeling or diagnosing them;
- understand the nature of their relationship to that problem and how it affects them and their relationships with others;
- identify their strengths and document their history of successes and triumphs over the problem; and
- develop strategies for conquering the problem or, at least, managing it better.

All of which has the ability to help our students feel more confident, competent, and hopeful.

A therapist, or any other staff member, utilizing a Narrative approach is not meant to be an advice-giving authority but rather a collaborative partner in helping students grow and heal. Narrative therapy does not aim to change a person but to allow them to become an expert in their own life. And through Narrative work, students can identify alternative stories, widen their view of themself, challenge old and unhealthy beliefs, and open their mind to new ways of living that reflect a more accurate and healthier story.

## D. A Fresh Start

New Connections Academy believes that all students deserve a fresh start and an opportunity to learn and to be successful. Through the development of safe, supportive, and nurturing relationships, our staff enable students to make academic, emotional, and behavioral progress and learn the critical life and social skills necessary to find success in their lives.

While a primary goal is to help students develop a clear sense of belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence (the Circle of Courage); another goal is to boost each student's insight into, and understanding of, their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors:

- how they affect their interpersonal relationships
- how they support, or sabotage, their daily functioning and ability to meet their goals
- how they can better manage their thoughts, feelings, and behavior to get their needs met in healthy ways and live the life they want

All struggles or setbacks that may arise during this process are seen as powerful opportunities for growth and learning.

Ultimately, students will get out of their school experience, what they put into their school experience. Therefore, those who choose to engage in the program, are respectful of others, exhibit a positive attitude, and are willing to partner with staff in their process of learning and growing, tend to experience the most success.

## E. Citizenship/Immigration Status

Our school will not ask students or their parent(s)/guardian(s) regarding their citizenship or immigration status. We also will not designate immigration status, citizenship, place of birth, nationality, or national origin in any directory. We will not threaten to disclose or disclose any information regarding a student's actual or perceived citizenship or immigration status of a child or person associated with the child to anyone, including an immigration or law enforcement agency if we do not have direct knowledge of the status. Even with direct knowledge of such status, we will not provide such information to any other person or nongovernmental entity. We will comply with Sections 1373 and 1644 of Title 8 of the United States Code.

If a law enforcement agent attempts to enter our school without our request, an administrator in the school shall be immediately contacted. The administrator shall contact an owner of the school who may then contact our legal counsel regarding the request to enter our school. All requests from law enforcement agencies to enter our school shall be documented by the administrator and owner who has contact with the law enforcement officer/agency. If the law enforcement officer is allowed to enter the school, they shall be accompanied by an administrator at all times. If a law enforcement agency request access to a student for immigration enforcement purposes, our school will notify a parent/guardian if the student is under 18 and the student if the student is 18 or older or emancipated for consent to allow access to the student.

# II. GENERAL INFORMATION

## A. Admission

Admission to New Connections Academy begins with an initial referral from the student's home school district or the special education cooperative that represents the district. These

referrals go directly to the school of choice at which point the school Principal will review the student's records (including current IEP, most recent Multidisciplinary Conference Reports, Case Study Evaluation, psychiatric and psychological reports) and an "intake interview" will take place. New Connections Academy will determine the appropriateness of a student's enrollment based on individual needs. Participation in the intake interview process is not a guarantee of admission or acceptance. Communication regarding admission will be made directly to the referring entity.

## B. REGISTRATION

All students must register or re-register at the beginning of each school year. Parent/guardian(s) must complete emergency forms and all additional consents/releases that are shared home. Enrollment paperwork should be completed prior to the start of the school year. Enrollment packets are mailed home and also available on the school's website.

The parent(s)/guardian(s) is required to provide the student's home district with a certified copy of the student's birth certificate, within 30 (thirty) days of initial enrollment. The student's home school district may require additional registration at the beginning of each new school year.

## C. ATTENDANCE

Attendance is one of the best indicators of school success. Regular school attendance is required by state law. Students who attend school regularly are naturally exposed to more than those who are routinely absent. New Connections Academy strives to have every student present every day for every class.

1. School Hours. School doors open to students at 8:30 a.m. Classes are in session from 8:45 a.m. -2:45 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; and from 8:45 a.m. - 1:45 p.m. on Thursdays to accommodate staff in-service training.

2. Absences. Students shall be excused due to a student's illness; death in their immediate family; family emergency; medical/therapy appointments; no transportation provided by student's home school district; observation of religious holidays; situations beyond the student's control as approved by a New Connections Academy administrator; or such other circumstances that cause reasonable concern to the parent/guardian for the student's safety or health. Up to five cumulative days of absence due to mental or behavioral health, without a medical note, will also be considered excused, although students may be referred to appropriate school support personnel after the second such absence. Any other reason will be marked as an unexcused absence.

   In order for an absence to be considered excused, a parent/guardian must call the Front Desk **prior to the beginning of the school day** on the day of any absence. The Principal

may require documentation from the student's treating healthcare professional, including the dates of excused absence and the reason(s) for the excusal, at the Principal's discretion.

In accordance with the Illinois Administrative Code §401.230, New Connections Academy must notify a student's public school district following 5 (five) consecutive days of absences, unless the district requires a more frequent reporting schedule, regardless of whether the absences were excused or unexcused. Following 5 (five) consecutive days of absence, both the parent/guardian and home district will receive notice regarding the number of absences, the reasons for the absences, and documentation of attempted interventions to support student attendance. New Connections Academy will follow this same procedure when a student reaches 10 (ten) consecutive days of absence but will also require a meeting with the parent/guardian and home district to discuss additional supports as needed.

3. Home/Hospital Instruction. Home/hospital instruction is provided to a student when a physician licensed to practice medicine in all of its branches, a licensed physician assistant (PA), or a licensed Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) determines that the student will, or is anticipated to be, absent from school for a minimum of 10 (ten) days during the school year due to a medical condition. The goal of home/hospital instruction is to provide the student experiences equivalent to other students in the same grade level. Special education and related services required by a student's IEP must be implemented as part of the student's home or hospital instruction, unless the IEP team determines that modifications are necessary during the home or hospital instruction due to the student's condition. Written certification of the student's need for home/hospital instruction should be submitted to the student's home district. An IEP meeting including the home district and New Connections Academy will be scheduled to determine the amount of instructional or related service time to be provided through home/hospital instruction.

4. Late Arrival/Early Pick-Up. Parent/guardians should notify the school and transportation when a student has a medical, dental, therapy or any other valid appointment that will necessitate the student arriving late or being picked up early from school. Late arrivals must be reported to the school office and transportation. In the case of emergency medical appointments, please notify the school nurse. Parents/guardians are required to sign students in or out at the entrance at late arrival or early pick-up.

5. Summer Term. Summer Term consists of 20 (twenty) school days, and students are expected to be in attendance every day in accordance with their IEP.

## D. Emergency Contact Information

Parents/guardians are required to submit the names and contact information for emergency contacts on a yearly basis, containing the following information:

1. Two emergency contacts, including the names, telephone numbers and addresses of adults authorized to pick up the student in the event of illness or emergency.

2. The name, telephone number and address of an adult authorized to meet the student's transportation in the event parents/guardians are unable to do so.

The emergency contacts must be individuals other than the student's parent(s)/guardian(s).

## E. Emergency School Closure Information

1. Emergency School Closure and Communication. The Principal or designee is authorized to close the school in the event of hazardous weather or other emergencies that threaten the safety of students, staff members, or school property. In the event that New Connections Academy must close due to severe weather conditions or emergency conditions, families will be notified via robo-call as soon as the decision to close has been made. Decisions regarding school closures will be made by 6:00 a.m. when possible. Information will also be posted on the school website, as well as https://www.emergencyclosingcenter.com/. In the event of an Emergency School Closure, parents/guardians will be informed whether New Connections Academy plans to implement an E-Learning Day or an Emergency School Closing Day.

   If New Connections Academy experiences a problem with its facility that requires an emergency evacuation during the school day, students' parents/guardians will be contacted immediately via robo-call with information and details about dismissal. Information also will be posted on the school's website. If the situation necessitates students being moved from the school facility to another location, students' parents will be contacted immediately via robo-call and informed of the location from which they may pick up students.

2. E-Learning Day. In the event of an Emergency School Closure day (e.g., weather-related school closing), the Principal of New Connections Academy may choose to implement an E-Learning Day. In the event of an E-Learning Day, students will receive a minimum of five (5) clock hours of instruction, through a combination of face-to-face instruction and independent schoolwork. Related services will also be provided remotely.

   Decisions regarding an E-Learning Day will be communicated to families, staff, and transportation providers either the evening before the effected day or by 6:00 a.m. of the effected day via robo-call and the school's website.

   The use of an E-Learning Day will not impact the New Connections Academy calendar and will not require the use of a planned Emergency Day.

3. Emergency School Closing Day. An Emergency School Closing Day will not be considered a day of attendance for staff and students. The use of an Emergency School Closing Day will require the use of a planned Emergency Day. The instructional year will be extended by as many Emergency Days used. Any changes in the school calendar will be communicated as soon as possible.

## F. Emergency Procedures

New Connections Academy has developed and practices a comprehensive safety and emergency management plan. Procedures and policies for any crisis or emergency are provided in every classroom and every area of the school building. School evacuation, severe weather, lockdown, and other emergency response drills will be conducted several times each school year to comply with state and local laws, and to ensure rapid and orderly implementation for student safety.

## G. Transportation

Transportation to and from school is arranged by the student's home district or provided by the parent/guardian. School rules and expectations are in effect from the time a student enters the school-provided transportation in the morning, through the time the student is dropped off at home by school-provided transportation. School staff work closely with the transportation companies and have daily communication with the drivers to ensure that students are behaving appropriately and are adhering to all mandatory safety guidelines. Students must wear their seat belts at all times while on the bus or in the cab.

## H. Use of Physical Restraint, Time Out and Isolated Time Out

New Connections Academy adheres to the applicable state laws and regulations, specifically Section 10-20.33 of the Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/2-3.130 and PA 102-0339) and 23 Illinois Administrative Code 1.285, pertaining to the use of isolated time out, time out, and physical restraint. New Connections Academy does not authorize the use of time out or isolated time out. Physical restraint will be used only when the student's behavior presents an imminent danger of serious physical harm to the student or others and other less restrictive and intrusive measures have been tried and proven ineffective in stopping the imminent danger of serious physical harm. Physical restraint shall not be used as discipline or punishment, convenience for staff, retaliation, a substitute for appropriate educational or behavioral support, a routine safety matter, or to prevent property damage in the absence of imminent danger of serious physical harm to the student or others.

New Connections Academy follows CPI (Non-Violent Crisis Intervention) guidelines of the Crisis Prevention Institute. Only employees who have successfully completed CPI training, as required by CPI and the State Board of Education, may utilize authorized physical restraint interventions.

For additional information, please see New Connections Academy's *Special Treatment Techniques* policy, available from the Principal.

## I. Communication & Consultation

New Connections Academy believes that communication between all those involved with a student is crucial in ensuring success. Every student has an assigned teacher and a primary therapist. Teachers serve as case managers for the students in their homerooms and send home daily behavior report logs (or "home notes") that indicate the student's successes and areas of continued focus. These logs should be signed by the student's parent/guardian and returned the next school day. Phone calls and messages are always welcome, as are any questions specific to a student's academic functioning or educational programming.

The therapists at New Connections Academy also serve as case managers for their assigned students and families. Any student-specific questions or concerns can be directed to the student's primary therapist (though all academic questions should be directed to the teacher). Therapists consistently work with parents/guardians to develop opportunities for students to be successful in school, at home, and within their communities. The clinical staff also provides monthly Parent Activities and Groups. In addition, parents/guardians, and students where applicable, will be asked to authorize contact with all outside service providers within the community (e.g., private therapist, treating psychiatrist, caseworker, etc.).

Our school works closely with your family and your student's home school district. As a result, any information you share with our school staff, may be shared with the child's other parent (unless there is a court order prohibiting it) and the home school district. This best ensures we all work together for the benefit of your child.

## J. In Case of Emergency

The staff at New Connections Academy often only access their email and voicemail communications during normal school hours (*School Year – Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Summer Term – Monday-Thursday, 8:00 a.m. -4:00 p.m.*). Outside of these hours, email and voicemail communications with school staff are **not to be used for emergency purposes**. In the event of an emergency, please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room for assistance.

## K. Visitors

Any visitor entering New Connections Academy must sign in at the front desk and will be provided a visitor badge. Visitors must be accompanied by an employee throughout the building.

Personnel from contracting public schools with students attending New Connections Academy and representatives from the Illinois State Board of Education are entitled to visit New Connections Academy any time with or without notice. These visitors also are required to sign in at the front desk to receive a visitor badge and will be accompanied by a New Connections Academy employee throughout the building.

## L. School Contact Information

For additional information, questions, or concerns, please contact the Principal at 847-359-8690.

# III. PROGRAMMING

## A. CURRICULUM

New Connections Academy serves students between the ages of 6 and 22. Appropriate class groupings, with no more than a four-year age span in any given room, are maintained at all times.

The Elementary and Junior High School curriculum emphasizes the acquisition of basic academic skills (reading, spelling, language arts, math, science, and social studies), and wellness (physical education and health); as well as collaborating with the therapists to give the students opportunities for social and emotional growth through therapeutically relevant group activities, and individual meetings with their therapist.

The High School curriculum is designed to meet the graduation requirements of student's various home high schools. The curriculum includes courses in English, History, Science, Consumer Economics, Mathematics, Work Study, Health and Physical Education. While classes are generally self-contained, New Connections Academy also uses the concepts of team teaching, departmentalization, and cooperative learning when appropriate. High school students are also given the opportunity for social and emotional growth through therapeutically relevant group activities, and individual meetings with their therapist.

The school will draft an individualized transition plan to support those students in the process of preparing for independent or semi-independent living and employment. Students work on developing necessary functional skills through class work, practice, and community experiences. These skills may include understanding social cues and body language; developing and maintaining relationships; money management; utilizing resources effectively; transportation within the community; time management; safety within the home and community; maintaining proper hygiene; cleaning and maintaining a household; preparing meals; seeking and gaining employment; and finding future educational opportunities.

In addition to academic instruction, students receive all special education and related services pursuant to their Individual Education Plans (IEP).

## B. THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Therapeutic services are an integral part of the services we provide to students and their families. Our therapists provide individual, group & family therapy, risk assessment and crisis intervention supports for each student as needed per their Individual Education Plan.

Each student is assigned an individual therapist who meets with them in a manner to best meet the student's individualized needs while also meeting the requirements outlined in the student's IEP. Therapy sessions focus on a wide variety of issues, including: reason for referral; primary presenting concerns; level of self-awareness and insight; emotional and behavioral regulation skills; coping skills, problem-solving and self-soothing skills; communication and interpersonal relationship skills, etc. Therapists also serve as the primary contact person for parents/guardians; and assist with case management and coordination with private service providers, such as: private therapists, psychiatrists, DCFS caseworkers, probation officers, SASS workers, etc.

Therapists are available throughout the academic day for individual therapy sessions, family therapy sessions, risk assessment and crisis management. If any staff member feels a student requires therapeutic support, or if a student requests to meet with their therapist, the therapist will be contacted, and they will connect with that student and/or family as a source of therapeutic support as soon as possible. Therapists collaborate with the educational staff to identify appropriate times to conduct therapeutic services with students and help coordinate and balance these supports while meeting requirements of their academic schedules.

Therapists facilitate group therapy within the classrooms throughout the week. These groups are focused on the development of social/emotional skills, emotional and behavioral regulation skills, coping skills, problem-solving skills, self-soothing and stress-management skills. Students also have the opportunity for various specialty expressive arts groups and therapy such as art therapy and music therapy. Additionally, students and families may access substance abuse education and supports. There are also specialized groups for our students with specifically identified therapeutic needs. This could include specialized topics such as, but not limited to; intersections of identity, healthy relationships, trauma intervention groups, etc.

In order to support our students in their efforts to make and sustain progress in their lives, therapists offer, and strongly encourage, family therapy for our students, their parents/guardians, and if possible, siblings and extended family members. In addition, there are monthly parent groups and activities in the evenings (schedule available on the school website), where collaboration and communication with staff and families is reinforced; and where guest speakers and educational programs are utilized to explore a variety of topics relevant to families. These topics include: restorative intervention practices, preparation for life transitions, understanding the experience of your special education student, encouraging social/emotional development, supporting substance abuse issues, family art and music therapy activities, and much more.

## C. RESTORATIVE INTERVENTION PROGRAM

Our school community is based upon mutual respect, cooperation, and generosity. Our program is focused on motivating students to demonstrate these values through positive

interactions with others, thoughtful listening, group participation, supporting peers, managing their reactions to negative influences, and remaining on task in the classroom. One of our primary goals is to identify student strengths and use these to overcome emotional, psychological, and learning challenges. Our staff are dedicated to helping students understand what affects their behavior and choices, and how this impacts both their interpersonal relationships and opportunities for success. Students are encouraged, supported, and rewarded for learning new and more appropriate strategies to meet their needs.

With guidance from staff members, students evaluate their decisions and the correlation to their individual goals, and desired outcomes in the areas of belonging, mastery, generosity, independence. To track their progress in these areas, students utilize a daily point sheet and refer to our level system. Earning points allows students to be eligible for additional privileges and to "spend" their points on various desired items and experiences. Students are therefore taught the relationship between their choices and additional privileges and freedoms.

The restorative interventions put in place are highly individualized and use both anticipated and actual circumstances as positive teaching opportunities. Maladaptive behaviors and poor decision-making are addressed as immediately as possible using interventions that are individually tailored for each student, and reflective of the student's specific needs. What may look like two very similar incidents on the surface may have very different origins and emotional context; therefore, each situation calls for a distinct set of interventions, supports, and other actions. This variety of approaches is used to help the student learn the skills and behavior necessary to succeed.

When a student appears to require more support during the school day, staff members work with the student to identify ways in which the team and the student can be more proactive in the future. At times when students struggle to manage their emotional experiences, staff make every effort to remove the immediate stressor from the situation. Staff are trained to use a progressive series of pre-teaching, verbal prompts, and redirection, as well as breaks to provide students with opportunities to make more productive choices in times of stress. Occasionally, students may be removed from the peer group to visit the Restorative Intervention and Supports (RIS) office, where the students can receive a higher level of assistance including but not limited to counseling services, OT and sensory equipment, peer support, etc. Once in RIS, students are supported in the process of utilizing their coping strategies to regain emotional and behavioral control, and then process through the situation with an Intervention Specialist and other staff as needed. The ultimate goal is to restore students to a regulated state in order to promote learning and success.

It is important to note that we do not endorse the use of time out rooms, mechanical restraint, or harsh/punitive interventions. Staff do not engage in physical interventions with a student as a consequence or disciplinary technique. Highly trained staff members use these

techniques when a student presents an imminent danger to themselves or others. We believe that students can learn to act in a safe and appropriate manner with the positive guidance of nurturing adults, who promote clear rules, boundaries, and expectations within the school.

## D. Extended School Year (ESY) / Summer Term

Extended school year services or "ESY" services are special education and related services provided to a student with a disability beyond the normal school year. Both federal and State law require that every local school district ensures ESY services are available to eligible students. New Connections Academy provides ESY services to its students, as documented in each student's IEP. Also referred to as Summer Term at New Connections Academy , participation in ESY/Summer Term is mandatory, according to the student's IEP. If a student does not attend Summer Term, New Connections Academy cannot guarantee that the student's placement will be available in the fall.

Summer Term is an opportunity for students to earn one high school credit, or extra credit towards their next year in grade school or junior high school.

The Summer Term begins after a short break and consists of 20 (twenty) school days spread out over five consecutive weeks. Students are required to be in attendance for all of ESY in accordance with their IEP. Summer Term is followed by approximately 26 (twenty-six) days of summer vacation. The specific dates of Summer Term are made available to parents/guardians via the school calendar.

## E. Student Transition

Successful transition to a less restrictive educational environment is the ultimate goal for all New Connections Academy students. Individualized criteria to meet this goal will be defined for each student and agreed to by parent/guardian and district. Students who have moved up through our motivational system are able to begin discussions with their team, (school staff, district, and parents) regarding beginning a partial transition back to the home school. The motivational system allows students to:

- Set goals
- Feel the satisfaction of achieving goals
- Increase self-esteem by self-advocacy
- Learn to deal with disappointment when a goal is not achieved
- Identify behaviors that need improvement and demonstrate independence in managing their emotional regulation
- Learn to use social skills
- Learn ways to be a positive role model
- Learn to use the Circle of Courage

The process of moving up through the level system is as follows:

1. "Am I Ready for 80/90% Club?" Form. The "Am I Ready" form is meant as a self-evaluation for students to ask themselves before attempting to start the process.
2. Data collection Period. When the student completes the "Am I Ready" form the process can begin. Staff & students will keep track of the student's academic, therapeutic, and behavioral progress, and attendance for three weeks.
    a. If the student is still maintaining criteria after 3 weeks, then they will be given the 80% Criteria or 90% Criteria signature sheet. Students will walk around requesting staff signatures from staff on the 4th week. This part of the program promotes the student's self-advocacy skills.
    b. If the student has not displayed the criteria needed to process and move up to 80/90% Club, staff will discuss any goals with the student and fill out the "Extension Form." The student will have an additional 1 to 2 weeks to work on the goals stated on the "Extension Form." Once the student has met the criteria the student can take the test written or verbally, to move up to 80% Criteria or 90% Criteria Sheet.
3. 80/90% Club Sheet Test. Once the student has met the criteria the student can take the test written or verbally, to move up to 80% or 90% Criteria.
4. Attendance. The Student maintains a 90% attendance rate or better, and all absences are excused.
5. Grades. The Student earns, and maintains, passing grades (B or better).
6. Therapy. The Student is an active and appropriate participant in all forms of therapy and making progress on IEP goals – Individual, Group, Art, and Family therapy. Has not required risk/safety assessment for 8 weeks for any reason.
7. Behavior. The Student consistently demonstrates appropriate, safe, positive school behaviors; sets a good example for peers and spends little, to no, time in the Restorative Intervention Services (RIS) Office. Earns an average of 90% or more of daily points on the point sheet.

## F. Graduation Requirements

Graduation requirements for junior high school are established by the home school district. Graduation requirements for high school are established by State law, and the student's home school district. A student's graduation requirements may be determined by the student's IEP. Upon meeting these requirements, and if approved by the home school district, the student is eligible to participate in graduation ceremonies, both at New Connections Academy and the student's home school. The student will receive a certificate of completion from New Connections Academy and a formal diploma from the student's home school district. Students who will continue to receive special education services through age 21 are eligible to receive a certificate of completion and participate in the graduation ceremony at their home high school upon completion of four years of high school.

# IV. Policies And Procedures

## A. Student Check-In

To ensure the safety of students and staff, all students are searched prior to admittance into the school building. In some schools these searches are gender-specific (e.g., female staff search female students and vice versa) unless otherwise stipulated by a student's individual plan. Searches generally include the use of a metal detecting wand, emptying of pockets, removal of outerwear and shoes, and examination of all belongings. Random searches also may be conducted at other times during the school day if deemed necessary by school staff or administration. If a student is detected to have metal from the metal detecting wand, staff will use the back of their hand to go over that part of the student's body with another staff present, but will not put their hands on the student's groin, buttocks, or chest. Parents may also be called to come to school to assist if a student is noncompliant with assisting in removing potential metal objects.

Students may not possess any of the following items in school: weapons; over-the-counter medication; illegal drugs; alcohol; tobacco or vaping products, including e-cigarettes; live animals; or lighters.

## B. Student Appearance and Personal Belongings

1. Student Appearance. Students are expected to dress in such a way to bring pride to themselves and the school community, while also maintaining the safety of all members of the school community.

    - Metaglasses may not be worn in school.
    - Any recording devices brought to school must be turned off and stored in the student's cubby.
    - Skirts, dresses, and shorts must be at the length of the longest fingertip
    - All bottom garments must be opaque (not see-through)
    - Tank tops must have straps at least 1-2" thick
    - All undergarments (bras, underwear, boxers, etc.) must be completely covered at all times
    - Pants, shorts, and skirts are expected to be worn at, or just below, the waist
    - Tops must cover the entire torso area at all times
    - Clothing must be free from messaging that is disruptive or offensive to the school community, which includes but is not limited to alcohol/drug-related advertising or implications; obscene or suggestive language or content, and gang-related messaging
    - New Connections Academy supports our students individuality and ownership of one's own body. Students are allowed to have facial piercings as long as they do

not protrude beyond the pierced area, are not offensive to race, religion, gender, etc., and do not have sharp ends to them. While supporting students individuality and ownership of their body, we are also concerned with safety and students may be asked to remove their piercing if administration deems it inappropriate or a safety concern. Please note administration reserves the right to ask a student to remove their piercing(s)

- Ear gauges must be plugged with full closure plugs (no spiked or open gauges, rings, etc.)
- Clothing and accessories must not endanger student or staff safety. Hooded sweatshirts, coats, hats, scarves, or bandanas must be removed upon entering the building. Oversized belt buckles, hanging straps, or chains are not permitted
- Slippers or pajamas are reserved for pajama day only.
- Hickeys are to be covered at all times.
- Tattoos that are offensive, gang-related, overly sexual, violent, discriminatory, drug-related, etc. must be covered. Judgment of appropriateness is at the discretion of the Principal or designee.
- Students must have gym shoes for PE, which can be left at school.
- Head coverings related to a student's religion are allowed.

Judgment of appropriateness of student appearance is at the discretion of the Principal or designee. If a student is in violation of this dress code, the student will be asked to turn clothing inside-out, change, or remove certain items.

2. Hairstyles. New Connections Academy supports hairstyles historically associated with race, ethnicity, or hair texture, including but not limited to, protective hairstyles such as braids, locks, or twists. New Connections Academy does not prohibit these hairstyles.

3. Modesty. New Connections Academy allows students to modify their athletic or team uniforms for the purpose of modesty in clothing or attire that is in accordance with the requirements of the student's religion, cultural values, or modesty preferences.

4. Money and Personal Belongings**.** Students do not need to bring money to school. If there is a field trip, parents will receive advance written notification. If deemed appropriate by the teacher, parents may send spending money in a sealed envelope with the student's name and the amount indicated on the front. If a student chooses to bring money to school, they may not be in possession of more than $10.00.

   Students' personal belongings will be stored in a locked room, in the student's individual cubby during the school day. Non-school items, including items brought for use during transportation to/from school, as well as personal cell phones and other personal electronic devices, must be turned off and stored in the student's cubby during the school day. Watches and other wearable devices capable of texting, calling, accessing the

internet, and/or with other communication capabilities should be left at home or turned off and submitted with other belongings to the school staff during check-in procedures.

New Connections Academy retains the right to confiscate excess money, unapproved devices, items that are deemed inappropriate for the school setting, or items used inappropriately. These items will only be returned to the parent/guardian.

New Connections Academy does not allow students to trade, exchange or purchase belongings with/from other students.

5. Live Animals. Students are not permitted to bring live animals to school without prior approval of the classroom teacher. Any animals brought to school without approval will be confiscated as soon as they are discovered and parents/guardians will be called to immediately pick up the animal.

   For questions related to service animals on campus, please contact the Principal.

## C. HOMEWORK

Students are expected to complete homework according to their teachers' specifications. Staff members are here to help problem-solve issues with homework completion in order to promote student success. If a student does not complete homework or class assignments by the due date, the student's point sheet will be addressed for not being prepared and teachers will make parents aware of all late and missing assignments on the student's home note. Late work will be accepted for full credit until the end of an instructional unit. Late work turned in after the conclusion of an instructional until will be accepted per Principal discretion.

## D. FOOD

Students are not allowed to bring any food or drink items into the school building. This includes hard candy, gum, breath mints, etc. Students are provided with a nutritionally balanced, catered lunch and have access to fruit and snacks, free of charge. Accommodations can be made based on dietary necessity, (e.g., diabetes, food allergies, etc.). Students have access to water throughout the day.

## E. STUDENT HEALTH POLICIES

1. Student Health Examinations. Health examination, immunization, dental examination, and eye examination forms are required by the State of Illinois for all school students enrolled in certain grades and for a first-time enrollee in an Illinois school. Parent/guardians must submit all required forms to the student's home district.

a. Health Examination and Immunizations: All students entering kindergarten or 1st grade, 6th grade, 9th grade, and any first-time enrollees are required to submit proof of a health examination and proof of immunizations against, and screenings for, preventable communicable diseases no later than the first day of school. Students entering 6th and 12th grade must also submit proof of immunization against meningococcal disease.

b. Eye Examination: All students entering kindergarten or entering school in Illinois for the first time are required to have an eye examination and submit proof of the examination by October 15.

c. Dental Examination: All students in kindergarten, 2nd grade, 6th grade, and 9th grade are required to have a dental examination and submit proof of the examination by May 15.

2. Student Illness. New Connections Academy abides by all applicable laws and regulations regarding communicable and chronic infectious diseases and works in cooperation with State and federal government health agencies to enforce the applicable laws and regulations.

   To prevent the spread of illness, students exhibiting the following symptoms must be kept at home until well:

   a. Fever of 100.4°F or higher within the past 24 hours. Student must be fever-free for at least 24 hours prior to returning to school, without the use of fever-reducing medication;
   b. Severe coughing, sore throat, or difficulty swallowing;
   c. Diarrhea or vomiting within the past 24 hours;
   d. Undiagnosed rash (student may return to school with a doctor's note that the rash is not contagious);
   e. Discharge from eye (e.g., pinkeye) or ears, or profuse colored nasal discharge (student may return to school when discharge is clear or has been on antibiotics for 24-48 hours, according to doctor's instructions);
   f. Unusual lethargy, irritability, persistent crying, or difficulty breathing (student may return to school when symptoms subside); or
   g. Evidence of a contagious or communicable disease.

   If a student becomes ill during the school day, the student will be sent to the school nurse after obtaining permission from the student's classroom teacher. The school nurse, in consultation with the school staff, will determine whether the student should be sent home.

3. Contagious and Chronic Infections Disease. New Connections Academy abides by all applicable laws and regulations regarding communicable and chronic infectious diseases and works in cooperation with State and federal government health agencies to enforce the applicable laws and regulations.

   Parents/guardians must notify the school office if their student is diagnosed with a contagious or communicable disease or other contagious condition. Examples include, but are not limited to, strep throat, strep-related diseases, chicken pox, measles, mumps, pink eye (conjunctivitis), and COVID-19. In the event that a student contracts an illness that is considered contagious or communicable to others, it is imperative that the student remain home until cleared by a doctor to return to school. New Connections Academy reserves the right to disclose necessary information regarding student health concerns to notify students and staff. Student health information will remain strictly confidential.

4. Injury. If life or limb is threatened, staff will call 911 after the emergency has been addressed.

   New Connections Academy does not offer student accident insurance. Parent should submit accident/injury claims to their insurance carrier.

5. Medication at School. Whenever possible, the parent/guardian should make arrangements for medication to be administered at home, before and/or after school hours. Administration of medication to students during regular school hours and during school-related activities is discouraged unless absolutely necessary for the critical health and well-being of the student. If a student's physical health and/or emotional wellbeing requires the administration of medication during school hours, a School Nurse/Registered Nurse, Licensed Practical Nurse, school administrator, or trained staff member will administer medication to students in compliance with applicable state laws and regulations, specifically Section 10-22.21b of the Illinois *School Code* (105 ILCS 5/10-22.21), 105 ILCS 5/22-30, and 23 Illinois Administrative Code § 1.540, pertaining to the administration of medication to students during regular school hours and during school-related activities. New Connections Academy will keep on file any record of medication administration training provided to a staff member who is delegated medication administration authority by the licensed School Nurse/Registered Nurse. Only prescriptions authorized by a physician will be administered in accordance with State regulations. The physician's order is valid for one year from the date it is written. Over the counter medications will only be administered by the nurse if ordered by a physician. **Absolutely no verbal orders from a physician will be accepted.**

   a. Medication(s) are defined as all prescription and non-prescription (over the counter) pharmaceuticals and preparations. This includes but is not limited to pain relievers, fever reducers, cough drops, eye drops, contact lens solutions, inhalers, allergy medications, skin ointments/lotions.

b. Any student requiring the administration of prescription or over-the-counter medication during school hours or at a school related activity must have a completed medication administration authorization form on file with New Connections Academy that is signed by the parents/guardians, and a licensed physician, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse, which must include the name of the medication, the prescribed dosage, and the time or times at which or the circumstances under which the medication is to be administered.

   The parent/guardian must assume responsibility for informing the school of any change in the student's health, or medications. Written physician orders and parent permission must accompany changes in medication given at school.

c. Prescription medication must be provided in the original pharmacy or physician labeled container that includes the student's full name, doctor or prescriber's name and telephone number, name of the medication, refill/expiration date, the prescription dosage, and specific directions regarding administration of the medication. Over-the-counter medications must be in the original manufacturer's packaging and clearly marked with the student's name.

d. All medication must be provided by the parent/guardian. New Connections Academy does not purchase or provide medication, prescription or otherwise, to students.

e. All student medications (prescription and over the counter) must be **delivered to school by the parent/guardian, or other responsible adult approved by the school administration. Students may not bring in medication, and medication is not to be brought in by the driver of transportation.** Medications may be delivered to the school Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Mon. – Thur. during summer session) or once per month at Parent Night.

f. All prescription medications will be kept in a secure location in the nurse's office. Only students with specific plans authorizing self-administration of medication may be allowed to carry and self-administer emergency medication, with parent/guardian and physician approval, in compliance with State law. No other students may carry or self-administer prescription or non-prescription medication. See Section 6, below.

g. The nurse will maintain a daily written log of medication administration.

h. A student's parent/guardian must indemnify and hold harmless New Connections Academy and its employees and agents against any claims, except a claim based on willful and wanton conduct, arising out of the provision of medical treatment, administration of medication, a student's self-administration of medication, or the

storage of any medication or equipment by school personnel.

6. Self-Administration of Medication. Students with an Asthma Action Plan, an Individual Health Care Action Plan, an Illinois Food Allergy Emergency Action Plan and Treatment Authorization Form, a plan pursuant to Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, or a plan pursuant to the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* may self-administer any medication required under those plans. The student's parent/guardian is responsible for providing New Connections Academy with all required forms and releases prior to allowing a student to self-administer medication, including a medication administration authorization form. The parent/guardian must provide the prescription label for the medication, which must contain the name of the medication, the prescribed dosage, and the time or times at which or the circumstances under which the medication is to be administered. New Connections Academy will also adopt an emergency action plan for any student authorized to self-administer medication.

   New Connections Academy shall work with the student's parent/guardian to develop and adopt a Seizure Action Plan, Asthma Action Plan, an Individual Health Care Action Plan, and/or an Illinois Food Allergy Emergency Action Plan for any student that appropriately notifies New Connections Academy of his or her status and potential need for self-administered medication in accordance with 105 ILCS 5/34-18.61.

   New Connections Academy and its employees and agents are exempt from liability or professional discipline, except for willful and wanton conduct, as a result of any injury arising from a student's self-administration of medication. Parents/guardians must sign and return an acknowledgment to New Connections Academy that they indemnify and hold harmless New Connections Academy and its employees and agents against any claims, except for a claim based on willful and wanton conduct arising out of a student's self-administration of medication.

7. Allergy Management. School attendance may increase a student's risk of exposure to allergens that could trigger an allergic reaction, including a food-allergic reaction. It is the responsibility of parents/guardians and students to notify New Connections Academy of any and all known allergies. New Connections Academy is committed to reasonably accommodating students' allergies and strives to reduce the risk of exposure to allergens and provide timely treatment of allergic reactions. Please direct all questions or concerns regarding allergies to the school nurse. The school nurse will work with parents and students to develop an Allergy Action Plan.

   New Connections Academy is an allergy-aware campus. Information regarding student allergies is shared with staff and supervisors. Food and other allergens may be restricted by classroom or school building based on the needs of the school population.

8. Diabetes Care. For a student with diabetes, the student's parent/guardian must submit a diabetes care plan, signed by the student's parent/guardian, to the school nurse. The student's parent/guardian must submit a diabetes care plan for the student at the beginning of the school year, upon enrollment, as soon as possible following diagnosis, or when the student's care needs change during the school year. Parents/guardians are responsible for informing the school in a timely manner of any changes to the diabetes care plan and their emergency contact numbers.

   It is the responsibility of the student's parent/guardian to ensure that the student's health care provider's instructions concerning the student's diabetes management during the school day are clearly set forth in the diabetes care plan. The diabetes care plan must include the treating health care provider's instructions concerning the student's diabetes management during the school day, including a copy of the signed prescription, the methods of insulin administration, and a uniform record of glucometer readings and insulin administered (Illinois State Board of Education form).

9. Epilepsy Care. For a student with epilepsy, the student's parent/guardian must submit a seizure action plan, signed by the student's parent/guardian, to the school nurse. The student's parent/guardian must submit a seizure action plan for the student at the beginning of the school year, upon enrollment, as soon as possible following diagnosis, or when the student's care needs change during the school year. The seizure care plan must include the health care provider's instructions for the student's epilepsy management, as well as prescriptions for medication and instructions for administration of medication.

   The seizure action plan must be submitted at the beginning of each school year and whenever the student's care requires change during the school year. The parent/guardian is responsible for informing New Connections Academy as soon as possible, of any changes in the student's medical care or emergency contact information.

   All school employees shall receive training in the basics of seizure recognition and first aid and appropriate emergency protocols. If at least one student at New Connections Academy is enrolled with epilepsy, a delegated care aide will be trained to perform tasks necessary to assist the student in accordance with the seizure action plan. Any school employee who transports a student with a seizure action plan will be provided a copy of the student's seizure action plan.

10. Medical Cannabis Products. Connections schools recognize that students with certain qualifying medical conditions are now legally able to obtain a medical marijuana card for medical marijuana. As in any other prescribed medication, medical marijuana may be administered at school under certain conditions outlined below.

    Required documentation:

1. A copy of the medical marijuana card authorizing the student as a registered qualifying patient to obtain marijuana.
2. Registry identification cards from the Department of Public Health designating the parent or guardian or any other individual as the designated caregiver. Connections schools reserve the right to verify the authenticity of these documents.
3. A signed letter by the physician who authorized the medical marijuana card indicating how many times a day a parent/guardian authorized to administer marijuana can come to school to administer the medication.
4. Copies of these documents must be on file and kept in the students Medical Administration Record in the nurses' office.

Procedure:

1. A parent or guardian or other individual registered with the Department of Public Health will transport the prescribed medical marijuana to the school.
2. This designated caregiver will be the only person authorized to administer the prescribed medical marijuana to the student.
3. Administration of the medication must take place in a private office with the door closed without other students present, such as the nurse's office or Principal's office.
4. The marijuana cannot be administered if it requires smoking or vaping on school grounds.
5. Documentation of time and date and person administering the medical marijuana must be maintained in the students Medical Administration Record. The school nurse shall be responsible for maintaining this record.
6. At no time shall any school personnel including the school nurse be in possession of or administer this medication to the student.
7. Following the administration of the medical marijuana, the designated caregiver will as soon as possible remove the medication from the school property
8. At no time shall the medical marijuana be stored on school grounds.
9. Our school prohibits the use of gummies, lotion, and other topical THC-containing products.

11. Concussion and Head Injury Procedures. Parents/guardians are required to sign an acknowledgement that they fully understand the information in the Student Handbook. Students may not participate in any covered activity, field trip athletic event, or other competition, until the parent/guardian has signed the acknowledgement form and returned it to the school.

    The school nurse is trained annually on the nature and risk of concussions and head injuries, including the risk of continuing to participate in certain activities after a concussion or head injury. The decision to allow a student to return to play is a medical decision and must be authorized by a healthcare professional.

12. Privacy and Dignity Policy. New Connections Academy students are generally self-sufficient in using the bathroom. The bathrooms are individual bathrooms. Employees must check the bathroom before and after student use to ensure that the rooms are kept clean and orderly.

    If a student needs assistance, two employees will accompany the student into the bathroom and give only as much assistance as is warranted. Student privacy and dignity is to be maintained at all times.

## F. Student Records & Confidentiality

1. Student Records. New Connections Academy and all its employees are required to comply with all student record maintenance and retention rules as established in the Illinois *School Student Records Act* (105 ILCS 10/). Employees are responsible for ensuring that all relevant information, including but not limited to: IEP documents, progress reports, RIS reports, health documents, related service provider logs, private evaluation reports, physical restraint reports, etc. are maintained in the appropriate student's file.

    Employees are prohibited from releasing student record information to individuals other than the student's parent/guardian (unless prohibited by court order or law) or resident district, without a signed release of record, completed by the parent or guardian, and/or student, as required by State and federal law. All requests for student record or otherwise confidential student information should be directed to the Principal or designee prior to release.

    Release of mental health records will occur pursuant to the Illinois *Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Confidentiality Act* (740 ILCS 110/), and only after approval of the Principal or designee.

    All student records provided by the home district or created by our school will be returned to the student's resident district upon request. New Connections Academy is required to return all school student records to the home school district of a student who is no longer attending New Connections Academy . All records will be returned within 20 business days.

2. Clear and Present Danger Reporting. New Connections Academy follows the Illinois State Police Clear and Present Danger Reporting Instructions for School Administrators. This requires school administrators, licensed clinical social workers, and licensed clinical psychologists to report persons who pose a clear and present danger to themselves or the community. The school administrative team regularly reviews student risk levels to determine if this report needs to be completed. For more information about FOID Mental Health Reporting please visit:IDHS FOID Mental Health Reporting System

## G. Abuse Prevention

1. Student Educational Awareness Program. New Connections Academy is committed to providing students with an educational program to address issues of sexual harassment and sexual abuse and discrimination. The purpose of the program is to:

    - Provide students with an understanding of what sexual harassment and sexual assault are defined as.
    - Provide students with the necessary skills to deal with inappropriate comments, etc. to keep New Connections Academy free from all forms of discrimination, sexual harassment, or assaults.
    - Provide students with response options when inappropriate circumstances present themselves.
    - Provide students a confidential resource for support and counseling.

2. Policy for High-Risk Students.
    - Students with a history significant for sexual abuse, sexualized behavior, or sexual abuse allegations may require additional supports.
    - Students identified as high risk will be provided a safety plan, developed by the student's school team, which may include limiting all 1:1 contact between employees and the student to an open area or in a room with the door ajar; and/or conducting all therapeutic sessions and other 1:1 sessions in an open area, or with the door ajar.
    - This safety plan will be periodically reviewed and revised as determined by the team.
    - As a matter of policy, all doors closed during therapeutic sessions must be kept unlocked when sessions are in progress.

3. Child Protection/Mandated Reporting. All New Connections Academy employees (including administrators and certified and non-certified school employees) are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. Any employee who suspects or receives knowledge that a student may be an abused or neglected child, an abused or, for a student aged 18 through 22, an abused or neglected individual with a disability, shall: (1) immediately report or cause a report to be made to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and (2) follow directions given by DCFS concerning filing a written report within 48 hours with the nearest DCFS field office.

4. Sexual Abuse Response and Prevention Resource Guide. The Illinois State Board of Education has developed the *Sexual Abuse Response and Prevention Resource Guide.* It can be found at https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Faiths-Law- Resource-Guide.pdf. If you would like a copy of it, we can provide one to you.

## H. Bullying Prevention and Racism-Free Policy

This Bullying Prevention and Racism-Free Policy is created pursuant to and is in compliance with Sections 22-95 (b) of the Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/22-95(b)). New Connections Academy serves a unique population of students with disabilities and, therefore, the policy set forth herein is tailored to address the needs of New Connections Academy's student population. Bullying causes physical, psychological, and emotional harm to students which interferes with a safe, civil, and healthy learning environment. Additionally, bullying has been linked to other forms of antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, shoplifting, skipping or dropping out of school, fighting, use of drugs/alcohol, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.

Bullying on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, physical appearance, socioeconomic status, academic status, pregnancy, parenting status, homelessness, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender-related identity or expression, unfavorable discharge from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic is prohibited at New Connections Academy. No student shall be subjected to bullying:

1) During any school-sponsored education program or activity;

2) While in school, on school property, on school buses or other school vehicles, or at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities;

3) Through the transmission of information from a school computer, a school computer network, or other similar electronic school equipment; or

4) Through the transmission of information from a computer that is accessed at a non-school-related location, activity, function, or program or from the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by the school if the bullying causes a substantial disruption to the education process or orderly operation of the school. This item (4) applies only in cases in which the school administrator or teacher receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred and does **not** require the school to staff or monitor any non-school-related activity, function or program.

Nothing in this policy is intended to infringe upon any right to exercise free expression or the free exercise of religion or religiously based views protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution under Section 3 of Article 1 of the Illinois Constitution.

**DEFINITIONS**

**"Bullying"** includes "cyber-bullying" and means any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

A) Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;

B) Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;

C) Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; or

D) Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by the school.

Bullying may take various forms, including without limitation one or more of the following: harassment, threats, intimidation, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, theft, public humiliation, destruction of property, or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

**"Cyber-bullying"** under this policy is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation 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 system, photoelectronic system, or photo-optical system, including without limitation electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. "Cyber-bullying" includes the creation of a webpage or weblog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages if the creation or impersonation creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this policy. "Cyber-bullying" also includes 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 or posting creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying per this policy. Cyber-bullying also includes the posting or distribution of an unauthorized digital replica

by electronic means if the posting or distribution creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of "bullying" in this Section.

**“Restorative Measures”** means a continuum of school-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, that: (i) are adapted to the particular needs of the school and community, (ii) contribute to maintaining school safety, (iii) protect the integrity of a positive and productive learning climate, (iv) teach students the personal and interpersonal skills they will need to be successful in school and society, (v) serve to build and restore relationships among students, families, schools, and communities, (vi) reduce the likelihood of future disruption by balancing accountability with an understanding of students' behavioral health needs in order to keep students in school, and (vii) increase student accountability if the incident of bullying is based on religion, race, ethnicity, or any other category that is identified in the Illinois Human Rights Act.

**“School personnel”** means persons employed by, on contract with, or who volunteer in the school, including without limitation school administrators, teachers, school service providers (e.g., school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses), cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, school resource officers, and/or security guards.

## BULLYING REPORT PROCESS

Bullying is contrary to Illinois law and the policies of New Connections Academy and is consistent with (a-5) of 105 ILCS 5/22-110.

Anyone, including staff members and parents/guardians, having knowledge of any incident(s) considered to be acts of bullying as defined in this policy are asked to promptly report the bullying to the Principal or Assistant Principal. A report may be made by phone, in person, by e-mail or in writing to the individual(s) named below who is/are responsible for receiving such reports. Anonymous reports may also be made in writing and provided to the address below, however, this shall not be construed to permit formal disciplinary action solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Ms. Cook, Principal
New Connections Academy
865 E. Wilmette Rd., Suite A
Palatine, IL 60074
acook@newconnectionsacademy.net
847-359-8690

## RESPONSE TO BULLYING REPORTS

Upon receipt of a report or bullying, New Connections Academy will investigate whether such reported act of bullying is within the permissible scope of its jurisdiction pursuant to this policy.

Consistent with federal and state laws and rules governing student privacy rights, as applicable to New Connections Academy, and the policies of New Connections Academy , the parents/guardians of all students involved in an alleged incident of bullying will be notified of such, along with threats, suggestions, or instances of self-harm determined to be the result of bullying, within 24 hours after the school's administration is made aware of the student's involvement in the incident. As appropriate, the above-named Administrator/Staff shall also discuss the need for interventions and availability of services, which may include social work services, counseling, school psychological services, other interventions, including community-based services, and restorative measures. New Connections Academy shall make diligent efforts to notify a parent/guardian, utilizing all contact information the school has available or that can be reasonably obtained by the school within the 24-hour period.

New Connections Academy serves a unique population of students with autism spectrum disorders or similar needs in the areas of emotion regulation, social communication and sensory integration, for all students ages 6 to 22. Due to the nature of the population served by New Connections Academy and the possibility that certain acts may be manifestations of a student's disability rather than an intentional act of bullying, as part of determining whether a reported act of bullying is within the permissible scope of the school's jurisdiction, each reported instance of bullying will be reviewed and assessed for the need to investigate on a case-by-case basis and as determined to be appropriate by New Connections Academy's Principal, Ms. Cook

If determined to be appropriate for investigation and within the school's jurisdiction, New Connections Academy will comply with the following procedure for promptly investigating and addressing the report(s) of bullying:

- New Connections Academy will make all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within 10 school days after the date the report of the incident of bullying was received and taking into consideration additional relevant information received during the course of the investigation about the reported incident of bullying.

- Any reports of bullying will be kept confidential to the extent possible given the need to investigate the reported claim.

• School support personnel and other staff members with relevant knowledge, experience and training on bullying prevention, as deemed appropriate, may be involved in the investigation process.

• As soon as possible after a report is received, the Principal or Assistant Principal, or his/her designee, will be notified of the report of the incident(s) of bullying.

• Consistent with the federal and state laws, as applicable to New Connections Academy, and the policies governing student privacy rights and confidentiality, parents/guardians of the students who are parties to the investigation may be provided relevant information regarding the investigation, as deemed appropriate by the Principal or Assistant Principal, or his/her designee, and an opportunity to meet with the Principal or Assistant Principal, or his/her designee, to discuss the investigation, the findings of the investigation, and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying, as deemed appropriate.

New Connections Academy may implement interventions to address reports of bullying. Interventions that may be taken to address findings of incidents of bullying in the school, include, but are not limited to: school social work services, restorative measures, social-emotional skill building, counseling, school psychological services, and community-based services. Any student who is determined, after an investigation, to have engaged in an intentional act of bullying will be subject to disciplinary consequences as deemed appropriate and consistent with the school's disciplinary policies, and/or the disciplinary policies of the student's referring school district, as applicable and deemed appropriate. New Connections Academy is a nonpublic, therapeutic school and an agent of Illinois placing school districts, as such, New Connections Academy may share information regarding incidents of bullying with the referring school district(s) of those students involved in a bullying incident, and an individualized education program ("IEP") meeting may be convened to discuss the impact, if any, on the student's current educational program, placement, supports and services. Additional services that are available within the referring school district and community, such as counseling, support services, and other programs, should be discussed directly with the student's referring school district by the parent/guardian.

Reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying per this policy is a violation of this policy and strictly prohibited. Such reprisal or retaliation will be treated as bullying for the purpose of determining appropriate consequences and anyone engaging in retaliation or reprisal against any person who reports an act of bullying may face consequences and appropriate remedial action as deemed necessary by New Connections Academy and consistent with the school's disciplinary policies. No person will be subject to consequences for

making a good-faith report of bullying. Appropriate consequences and remedial action, which are consistent with the school's disciplinary policies, may also be taken against a person found to have falsely accused another of bullying as a means of retaliation or as a means of bullying.

## POLICY EVALUATION

Please also note the following related to the development, notification and publication, and evaluation of this policy:

• This policy is based on engagement with a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents/guardians.

• This policy is consistent with the other policies of New Connections Academy.

• This policy can be found on the school's existing, publicly accessible website, is included in thestudent handbook, and, where the school's other policies, rules, and standards of conduct are currently posted. A copy of this policy may also be requested from Ms. Cook, NCA Principal.

• This policy will also be provided periodically throughout the school year to students and faculty and distributed annually to parents/guardians, students, and school personnel, including new employees when hired.

• New Connections Academy will engage in the process of reviewing and re-evaluating this policy every two years to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of this policy and shall make any necessary and appropriate revisions. This review process includes, but may not be limited to, collecting and assessing the following information:

1) the frequency of victimization;
2) student, staff, and family observations of safety at a school;
3) identification of areas of the school where bullying occurs;
4) the types of bullying utilized; and
5) bystander intervention or participation.

New Connections Academy may use relevant data and information it already collects for other purposes in the policy evaluation. The information developed or collected as a result of the policy evaluation will be made available on the school's website or otherwise will be provided to

New Connections Academy's board, if applicable, administrators, school personnel, parents/guardians, and students. No later than September 30th of the subject year, the policy will be filed with the State Board of Education after being updated. This policy is consistent with New Connections Academy's policies.

## I. Policy On Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming Students

1. Purpose. To foster an educational environment within New Connections Academy that is safe, welcoming, and free from stigma and discrimination for all students, regardless of gender identity or expression.
   To facilitate compliance with local, State, and federal laws concerning bullying, harassment, privacy, and discrimination.

   To ensure that all students have the opportunity to express themselves and live authentically.

   A Note on Terminology: Transgender and gender nonconforming youth may use different words to describe their lives and experiences of gender. Terminology and language can differ based on region, language, race or ethnicity, age, culture, and many other factors. Examples of terms used by some youth include: trans, trans girl, trans boy, non-binary, genderqueer, gender fluid, and two-spirit. These terms often mean different things or refer to different experiences of gender. All staff will use the terms that students use to describe themselves and avoid terms that make these students uncomfortable.

2. Definitions. These definitions are provided not for the purpose of labeling students, but rather to assist in understanding this policy and the legal obligations of New Connections Academy staff. Students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves or their experiences.

   - Bullying: Any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has, or can be reasonably predicted to have, the effect of one or more of the following:

     - Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;
     - Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;
     - Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; and/or
     - Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by their school.

Bullying can take various forms, including one or more of the following: harassment, threats, intimidation, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, exclusion, sexual violence, theft, public humiliation, destruction of property, or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

This also includes bullying that is based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, size, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, privileges provided by their school, socioeconomic status, or another distinguishing characteristic. This also includes conduct that targets a student because of a characteristic of a friend, family member, or other person or group with whom a student associates.

- Cisgender/Cis: Term used to describe people whose gender identity corresponds solely with their sex assigned at birth - male or female.
- Gender Expression: The manner in which a person represents or expresses gender to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, activities, voice, or mannerisms.
- Gender Identity: A person's deeply held knowledge of their own gender, which can include being female, male, another gender, or no gender. The responsibility for determining an individual's gender identity rests exclusively with the individual. Gender identity is not determined by body parts or sex assigned at birth.
- Gender Nonconforming: Gender expressions that fall outside of societal expectations for one's sex assigned at birth.
- Intersex: A general term used for the many ways in which a person can be born with chromosomes, reproductive anatomy, and/or genitalia that do not fit the typical definitions of female or male.
- Nonbinary/Genderqueer: These are terms often used to describe people whose gender is not exclusively male or female, including those who identify with a gender other than male or female, as more than one gender, or as no gender.
- Pronouns: A word used to refer to someone without using their name. Common pronouns include but are not limited to she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs, ze/zir/zirs.
- Sex Assigned at Birth: Typically, the assignment of "male" or "female" at birth by a medical professional based on visible body parts. This binary assignment does not reflect the natural diversity of bodies or experiences.
- Sexual Orientation: The gender or genders to which one is romantically, emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted. Sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity.
- Transgender/Trans: Individuals with an affirmed gender identity different than their sex-assigned at birth. Transgender can be used as an umbrella term that

encompasses diversity of gender identities and expressions. This term applies to identity, not body parts.

- Transition: The process in which a person begins to live according to their gender identity, rather than the gender they were thought to be at birth. Transition is a process that is different for everyone, and it may or may not involve social, legal, or physical changes. There is no one step or set of steps that an individual must undergo in order to have their gender identity affirmed and respected.
- Questioning: Being unsure of your gender identity, being unsure of your sexual orientation, or both. Many people go through a stage of questioning during their lives, sometimes several times. This can be because they learn new words that fit them better, or it can be that their actual feelings of gender or attraction change over time.

3. Scope. This policy covers conduct that takes place in the school, on school property, and on school buses or vehicles, during a student's commute to and from school. This policy also pertains to the use of electronic communication that occurs in the school, on school property, on school buses or vehicles, and on school computers, as well as any electronic communication that is directed at a student and substantially interferes with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by the school. This policy applies to the entire school community, including school staff, students, and parents.

4. Intake. While all New Connections Academy staff are responsible for knowing and upholding the contents of this policy, students are encouraged to work with their school administration to coordinate gender-related supports. When a student and/or a student's parent(s)/guardian(s) contacts staff requesting support at school, the staff shall notify the school administration. A meeting will be held with the student and family regarding the request for support. In the interim, between this request and the meeting, a lack of a meeting shall not prohibit staff from treating students in a manner consistent with their gender identity.

5. Anti-Bullying, Anti-Harassment, & Anti-Discrimination. Discrimination, bullying, and harassment on the basis of gender identity or expression is prohibited within New Connections Academy , and it is the responsibility of each school and their staff to ensure that all students, including transgender and gender nonconforming students, have a safe school environment. The scope of this responsibility includes ensuring that any incident of discrimination, harassment, or bullying is given immediate attention, including investigating the incident, taking age- and developmentally appropriate action, and providing students and staff with appropriate resources and supports. Complaints alleging discrimination or harassment based on a student's actual or perceived gender identity or expression are taken seriously and handled in the same manner as other discrimination, bullying, or harassment complaints. This process is outlined in New

Connections Academy  Bullying Prevention and Racism Free Policy, which focuses on education and prevention, rather than exclusionary discipline.

6. Privacy/Confidentiality. New Connections Academy shall ensure that all personally identifiable and medical information relating to transgender and gender nonconforming students shall be kept confidential in accordance with applicable state, local, and federal privacy laws. School staff shall not disclose any information that may reveal a student's transgender identity to others, including parents or guardians and other school staff, unless legally required to do so, or unless the student has authorized such disclosure. In the rare instance that a school is legally required to disclose a student's transgender status, New Connections Academy will provide the student an opportunity to make that disclosure themselves, where practicable. This would include providing the student with any support services they need to make the disclosure in a safe and supportive environment.

   Transgender and gender nonconforming students have the right to discuss and express their gender identity and expression openly and to decide when, with whom, and how much to share private information. The fact that a student chooses to use a different name, to transition at school, or to disclose their transgender status to staff or other students does not authorize school staff to disclose a student's personally identifiable or medical information. When school staff interact with parents, guardians, district representatives, or other collateral contacts, school staff will ask the student whether to use the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity, or whether to use their legal name and corresponding pronouns with these individuals. (See "Student Transitions" below.)

7. Names, Pronouns, & School Records. Every student has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to the student's gender identity. Regardless of whether a transgender or gender nonconforming student has legally changed their name or gender, New Connections Academy will allow such students to use the chosen name and gender pronouns that reflect their identity.

   If the student has previously been known at school by a different name, school staff will use the student's chosen name and pronouns when asked to do so by the student. If the student would also prefer consistency within their school records, every effort will be made to immediately update student education documents and records (such as attendance reports, class and therapist rosters, report cards, electronic records, etc.) with the student's chosen name and appropriate gender markers, as allowable by State law. For example, the student can identify if they would prefer John Doe (birth name), Jane Doe (chosen name), or John "Jane" Doe (both names) on these records. With the student's permission, this information will also be communicated to the student's home district so that similar changes can be made to the student's records held in that location. Finally, in consultation with the home district and with the student's permission, the

student's gender identity and preferred name information will be reported to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

8. Access to Gender-Segregated Activities & Facilities
    a. Restrooms: All restrooms in New Connections Academy are gender neutral, meaning, they are accessible to all students, regardless of their identified gender. When students leave school grounds and only have access to gender segregated facilities, students will use whatever restroom they prefer. Access to restrooms and locker rooms for non-binary students and students questioning their gender will be determined on a case-by-case basis, in conversation with that student. In all cases, school staff will provide students with options for staff support and/or accompaniment to help them feel safe, comfortable, and included when off school grounds.
    b. Morning Check-In: Any student will be given the option to stand in the check-in line of their choice or receive a private check-in with two staff members. If the student chooses a private check-in, they can also identify their preference for male or female check-in staff members, or a combination of male and female staff members.
    c. Physical Education Classes and NWSRA Activities: All students shall be permitted to participate in physical education classes and NWSRA activities in a manner consistent with their gender identity.

9. Dress Code. Students have the right to dress in accordance with their gender identity and expression, including maintaining a gender-neutral appearance, within the constraints of New Connections Academy's dress code. The school may not adopt a dress code that restricts students' clothing or appearance on the basis of gender.

    A student whose gender expression is different from societal expectations based on the student's sex assigned at birth shall not be considered disruptive of the educational process or in interference with the maintenance of a positive teaching/learning climate. All students shall be permitted to wear gender-affirming clothing to school, including at school events such as dances and graduation.

10. Student Transitions. New Connections Academy recognizes that each student has a unique process for transitioning, and staff will accept the gender identity that each student asserts. A student is not required to obtain legal and/or medical or psychological documentation as a prerequisite to having their gender identity recognized. Students ready to transition at school will be fully supported in their process of changing their name, pronouns, attire, and access to gender-related programs, activities, and facilities consistent with their gender identity as it develops.

11. Training & Professional Development. New Connections Academy conducts training for all staff members on their responsibilities under applicable laws and this policy.

Following the adoption of this policy, staff shall be trained on its content and their professional responsibility to uphold the policy. This policy will also be incorporated into the training provided for all new employees.

# V. STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE

New Connections Academy views discipline issues that may arise during classroom activities as opportunities to identify the issues that challenge students, as well as opportunities for teaching and student growth. The staff uses a cognitively oriented, narrative, problem solving approach to help students stand up to and overcome the problem at hand. Students are engaged in practicing more successful behavioral alternatives. While students may experience the logical consequences to problem dominated behavior, the approach is always positive and non-punitive. New Connections Academy does not endorse the use of time out, time out rooms (isolated time out), or other aversive interventions. Rather than only using behavior modification techniques, such as points and level systems, the school also helps each student develop strategies to improve their educational achievement by being more successful at recognizing and conquering the problems that currently interfere with their performance.

## A. PROHIBITED STUDENT CONDUCT

Prohibited student conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. Using, possessing, distributing, purchasing, selling, or being under the influence of alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia, look-alike drugs, controlled substances, tobacco or tobacco products, any alternative nicotine product, or any cartridge or component of an alternative nicotine product on school grounds or at a school-related event.

2. Using, possessing, distributing, purchasing, or selling any firearm, knife, martial arts device, or any other object that may be construed to be a weapon, including look-alikes. This prohibition applies regardless of whether a student is licensed to carry a concealed firearm.

3. Fighting, including any assault of school personnel or other students, or any use of violence, force, coercion, threats, or other such conduct, or urging other students to engage in such conduct.

4. Engaging in hazing or any kind of bullying or aggressive behavior that does physical or psychological harm to staff or another student or urging other students to engage in such conduct. Prohibited conduct specifically includes, without limitation, any use of violence, intimidation, force, noise, coercion, threats, stalking, harassment, sexual harassment,

public humiliation, theft or destruction of property, retaliation, hazing, bullying, bullying using a school computer or a school computer network, or other comparable conduct.

5. Engaging in any sexual activity, including without limitation, offensive touching, sexual harassment, indecent exposure (including mooning), and sexual assault.

6. Causing or attempting to cause damage to, or stealing or attempting to steal, school property or another person's personal property.

7. Publishing, posting, or transmitting threatening, intimidating, insulting, harassing, illegal, immodest, or otherwise inappropriate comments or pictures on the Internet or social media websites.

8. Displaying or demonstrating any type of gang affiliation, including wearing, possessing, distributing, selling, drawing, or displaying anything that could reasonably be interpreted as a gang symbol; participating in gang, gang-like, or gang-related activities; communicating gang representation verbally, or non-verbally with gestures, handshakes, etc.; and/or soliciting others for gang membership through any means.

9. Unauthorized possession or use of an electronic device, including personal or school-issued devices.

10. Any other acts that directly or indirectly jeopardize the health, safety and welfare of school personnel or other students.

11. Violating any criminal law, including but not limited to, assault, battery, arson, theft, gambling, eavesdropping, vandalism, and hazing.

## B. INTERVENTIONS

Restorative interventions for a student with disabilities will incorporate procedures and methods consistent with generally accepted practices in the field of behavioral intervention. Nonrestrictive interventions are preferred because of the low risk of negative side effects and the high priority placed on behavioral modification.

Restorative interventions shall be used in consideration of the student's physical freedom and social interaction and inclusive of the student's strengths and needs. Behavioral interventions shall be implemented in a manner that respects the dignity and personal privacy, ensuring the right to placement in the least restrictive environment.

Proactive strategies are designed to promote and strengthen desirable, adaptive student behaviors while reducing identified target behaviors. Proactive strategies are used to the maximum extent possible and preferred to reactive strategies. While proactive strategies alone may not always succeed in managing disruptive behaviors, the use of reactive strategies is temporary.

Examples of non-restrictive interventions include:

- Sensory breaks
- Push-pull breaks
- Walk breaks
- Movement breaks
- Therapeutic services

## C. SUSPENSION

Positive, proactive alternatives to suspension are emphasized at New Connections Academy . Exclusionary discipline may be used if a student demonstrates gross disobedience or misconduct that places self or others in the school community in danger or disrupts the operation of the school. Examples of gross disobedience include, but are not limited to those listed in Section A, Prohibited Student Conduct, above.

Suspension is the temporary removal of a student from school for not more than ten (10) consecutive school days or a total of ten (10) school days or less, in a school year, for gross disobedience or misconduct.

1. A student may be suspended from school for not more than ten (10) consecutive days, upon the discretion of the Principal. A student may be subject to suspension more than once, but for no more than ten (10) cumulative days in a given school year. The parent/guardian will be required to pick up a student from school following a suspension. If the parent/guardian refuses to come to accept the student, the school has the right to call the local police department to request a youth officer. The youth officer must be notified, in writing, of the student's disability.

2. Reasons for suspension:

    a. If the student is a danger to self or others;
    b. If the student's behaviors result in a significant disruption to the learning of others; and/or
    c. If the student's continued presence at school disrupts the operation of the school.

3. The student and parent/guardian will be informed of the alleged misconduct and the student will be provided the opportunity to respond to the allegations, prior to discipline. Where the student's continued presence poses a continuing danger to persons or property

or an ongoing threat of disruption to the education process, this process will occur as soon as practicable.

4. The parent/guardian and home district will be informed of the suspension in writing. This will include an explanation of the reason for the suspension and will indicate appeal procedures, where appropriate or available.

5. All procedures for suspension will be in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Illinois State Board of Education.

6. Following a suspension, the student and parent/guardian will participate in a re-entry meeting with appropriate school staff to facilitate the student's transition back to school.

## D. MANIFESTATION DETERMINATION REVIEW

When a student faces a suspension that could result in removal from school for more than ten (10) consecutive days, or more than ten (10) cumulative days over the course of a school year, a Manifestation Determination Review ("MDR") must be convened, with members of the IEP team (including the student's home district LEA representative) and the parent/guardian. The purpose of the meeting is to determine whether the student's disability was the primary cause of the student's misconduct.

The following procedures must be followed when it is proposed that a student with a disability is to be excluded from school for more than ten (10) total school days in a school year:

1. A Manifestation Determination Review will be convened to determine whether the student's misconduct is related to the student's disability;
2. A suspension of more than ten (10) days may not be imposed if the student's disability is determined to be the main cause of the misconduct. The student's IEP may be revised, including changes to the student's behavior plan, development of a behavior intervention plan if the student does not have one, completion of an evaluation, changes to services, or a recommendation for a more restrictive placement.
3. A suspension of more than ten (10) days may be imposed if the misconduct is determined to not be related to the student's disability.

## E. DISCHARGE

In the event that New Connections Academy is no longer able to meet a student's needs and must terminate the placement, New Connections Academy will notify the student's contracting home district in writing, at least 20 (twenty) business days prior to the termination, unless the health and safety of any student is imminently endangered.

## F. SEARCH AND SEIZURE

1. Searches. In order to provide for the safety and supervision of students, to maintain discipline and order in the schools, and to otherwise provide for the health, safety, and welfare of all persons within the schools, the principal or designee is authorized to conduct reasonable searches of property and equipment owned or controlled by New Connections Academy, as well as of students and their personal effects while on New Connections Academy property or at New Connections Academy sponsored events.

   The Principal or designee may inspect and search property and equipment owned or controlled by New Connections Academy (e.g., cubbies, lockers, coat hook areas, desks, parking lots), as well as personal effects left there by a student, without notice to or the consent of the student. Students shall have no reasonable expectation of privacy in these places or areas or in their personal effects left therein.

   The Principal or designee may search a student and the student's personal effects in the student's possession (e.g., purses, wallets, backpacks, book/sports bags, lunch boxes) when there is a reasonable ground for suspecting that the search will produce evidence the particular student has violated or is violating either the law or New Connections Academy policies and rules.

   The Principal or designee may request the assistance of law enforcement officials to conduct inspections and searches of students and school property for controlled substances or illegal drugs, weapons, or other illegal or dangerous substances or materials, including searches conducted through the use of specially trained dogs. Searches conducted by authorized school personnel at the behest of the law enforcement agencies shall be conducted in accordance with the standards applicable to such law enforcement agencies.

2. Seizure of Property. If a search produces evidence that a student has violated or is violating the law or New Connections Academy's policies or rules, such evidence may be seized and impounded by the Principal or designee, and disciplinary action may be taken. When appropriate, such evidence may be transferred to law enforcement authorities.

3. Notification Regarding Student Accounts/Profiles on Social Networking Websites. The Principal or designee shall notify students and their parents of each of the following in accordance with the Right to Privacy in the School Setting Act (105 ILCS 75/1 et seq.):

   - School officials may not request or require a student or the student's parent to provide a password or other related account information to gain access to the student's account or profile on a social networking website.

- School officials may conduct an investigation or require a student to cooperate in an investigation if there is specific information about activity on the student's account on a social networking website that violates a school disciplinary rule or policy. In the course of an investigation, the student may be required to share the content that is reported in order to allow school officials to make a factual determination.

### G. Battery, Firearm, & Drug Possession Incidents

1. Battery. New Connections Academy is legally required to report a written complaint submitted by a staff member reporting an instance of battery against teachers, teacher personnel, administrative personnel or educational support personnel to local law enforcement immediately after the occurrence of the attack, and within three days to the Illinois State Police through the School Incident Reporting System (SIRS).

2. Firearms. All school personnel, including teachers, school counselors and support staff must immediately notify the Principal or designee in the event they observe any person in possession of a firearm on school grounds, except for persons known to be law enforcement officials engaged in conduct related to his/her official duties. The Principal or designee is required to immediately notify local law enforcement. If the person in possession of the firearm is a student, the student's parent will also be immediately notified. Any written, electronic or verbal report from school personnel of a verified incident involving a firearm on school property or school transportation will be immediately reported to local law enforcement and the State Police.

3. Drugs. Any written, electronic or verbal report from school personnel of a verified incident involving drugs, including cannabis and narcotics on school property or school transportation will be immediately reported to local law enforcement and the State Police.

## VI. ACCEPTABLE USE OF ELECTRONIC NETWORKS

This policy is intended to serve as a guide to the scope of New Connections Academy's authority and the safe and acceptable use of the school's computers, mobile devices, computer network (local and wide area networks), email, and Internet access, which are collectively referred to as the "electronic network."

All New Connections Academy technology and electronic networks are a part of New Connections Academy's instructional program and serve to promote educational excellence by facilitating resource sharing, innovation, and communication. New Connections Academy's electronic network is part of the curriculum and is not a public forum for general use. The use of New Connections Academy's electronic networks shall be consistent with curriculum and instructional needs, learning styles, abilities, and developmental levels of the students.

The computers and software that are utilized by staff and students are owned by New Connections Academy and are intended to be used for business purposes only. Utilizing these resources for informal or personal purposes is permissible only when it is congruent with New Connections Academy policy and does not adversely affect productivity. Students are expected to demonstrate a sense of responsibility and not abuse this privilege. Access to online content via the electronic network may be restricted in accordance with New Connections Academy policies and federal regulations.

The school takes precautions, through staff supervision and network settings, to prevent access to materials that may be defamatory, inaccurate, offensive, or otherwise inappropriate in the school setting. Because information on the Internet appears, disappears, and changes it is not always possible to predict or control what students may locate. While it is possible to select some resources that will be more easily available to students, school officials cannot completely control the Internet environment. Although computers with Internet access are in supervised areas, parents and staff members are responsible for setting and conveying the standards that students should follow.

## A. General Regulations

1. Access to the electronic network at school must be for educational purposes and correlate with the educational objectives of the classroom.

2. All students must have parent/guardian permission to access the electronic network while at school and when using school-issued devices.

3. The use of the electronic network is a privilege, not a right, and inappropriate use will result in denial of this privilege, as well as other possible discipline. Senior staff members will make decisions regarding whether or not a user has violated this policy and may deny, revoke, or suspend access at any time.

4. Email messages sent or received and Internet searches conducted via the electric network are the property of the school and subject to search at any time. Students have no expectation of privacy with respect to any information transmitted or received via the school's electronic network.

5. New Connections Academy is not responsible for any information that may be lost or damaged, or become unavailable when using the electronic network, or for any information that is retrieved or transmitted via the Internet. Furthermore, New Connections Academy will not be responsible for any unauthorized charges or fees resulting from access to the Internet.

6. Personal Safety:

- Students should not share personal information, including phone number, address, birthday, social security number, financial information using the electronic network.
- Students should never agree to meet someone they meet online in real life without parental permission.

## B. Acceptable Use

Students will:

- Use school technologies only for school related activities and research.
- Follow the same guidelines for respectful, responsible behavior online that students are expected to follow offline.
- Treat school resources carefully and alert staff if there are any problems with operation.
- Encourage positive, constructive discussion when allowed to use communicative or collaborative technologies.
- Alert a teacher or other staff member to threatening/ bullying, inappropriate or harmful content (images, messages, posts) online.
- Use school technologies at appropriate times, in appropriate places, for educational purposes only.
- May use AI tools for brainstorming, idea generation, grammar checking, or improving understanding of course material with teacher permission.
- May use AI tools for non-assessed assignments or personal study unless otherwise restricted.
- Cite sources when using online sites and resources for research including any use of AI-generated text, images, or code; ensure there is no copyright infringement.
- Recognize that use of school technologies is a privilege and treat it as such.
- Be cautious to protect the safety of myself and others.
- Help to protect the security of school resources.

## C. Unacceptable Use

Student users are responsible for their actions and activities involving the electronic network. The following are examples of unacceptable uses (however, this is not an exhaustive list):

- Illegal distribution of software (pirating – which is a federal offense);
- Using the electronic network for private, financial, or commercial gain, illegal activity, and/or advertising;
- Wastefully using resources, such as file space/memory;
- Gaining unauthorized access to resources or entities;
- Invading the privacy of individuals, including using another's account or password with or without permission;

- Posting material authored or created by another without consent or proper credit;
- Posting anonymous messages;
- Accessing, submitting, posting, publishing, or displaying content that contains hostile, degrading, sexually explicit, or otherwise offensive references to people based on their sex, race, nationality, religion, age, color, disability status, gender, sexual orientation, or other protected status;
- Accessing, submitting, posting, publishing, or displaying any defamatory, inaccurate, abusive, obscene, profane, sexually explicit, threatening, racially offensive, harassing, or illegal material;
- Using the electronic network while access privileges are suspended or revoked;
- Degrading or disrupting equipment or system performance;
- Vandalism (defined as any malicious attempt to harm or destroy equipment, data or another user, the internet itself, or any other network. This includes, but is not limited to, the uploading or creation of computer viruses);
- Use school technologies in a way that is harmful to self or others;
- Searching for inappropriate images or content;
- Engaging in cyber-bullying, harassment, or disrespectful conduct towards others-staff or students;
- Attempting to circumvent the school's safety measures or filtering tools;
- Submitting AI-generated content as original work in assignments, essays, or projects without proper citation or teacher approval is considered academic dishonesty;
- Using AI to bypass learning (e.g., generating entire assignments or exam answers)is strictly prohibited.

## D. Student/Staff Communication

1. New Connections Academy does not permit employees to accept or request "friend" or contact requests from any current or former students on any social network sites, blogs, etc. (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.).
2. Students may not communicate with staff through instant messaging, texting, social media, or other non-school-supported applications. Students may message staff during school hours using school-supported applications. Staff will not respond to messages received after school hours.
3. Student and staff communication via electronic mail is restricted to New Connections Academy issued email addresses only. Staff will not respond to student emails originating from non-school email accounts.
4. New Connections Academy reserves the right to include a parent or guardian on email communications with students.
5. Students and staff are prohibited from communicating via private text message, other messaging applications, or online gaming platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, SnapChat, X-Box, etc.).

## E. Use of Artificial Intelligence

*Permitted use:*

1. AI tools may be used for brainstorming, idea generation, grammar checking, or improving understanding of course material *with teacher permission*.

2. Students may use AI tools for non-assessed assignments or personal study unless otherwise restricted

*Prohibited Use:*

1. Submitting AI-generated content as original work in assignments, essays, or projects without proper citation or teacher approval is considered academic dishonesty.
2. Using AI to bypass learning (e.g., generating entire assignments or exam answers) is strictly prohibited.
3. Any use of AI-generated text, images, or code in assignments must be clearly cited following the school's academic policy.

## F. Use of Personal Electronic Devices

1. Students' electronic devices (including: metaglasses) are collected and held for the student when the student is checked into the building.
2. All devices must be turned off when in the building (not just turned to silent).
3. Devices may not be shared or loaned to other students.
4. No pictures or videos may be taken of students or staff with these devices.
5. Students assume all responsibility for their own devices. The school is not liable for any personal electronic devices brought from home.
6. These expectations are also applicable to use of devices on students' transportation to and from school.

Should a student commit a violation of the acceptable use parameters, access privileges will be suspended or revoked. School disciplinary and/or appropriate legal action may be taken depending on the violation or inappropriate use.

# Student Authorization For Acceptable Use Of Electronic Networks Form

I agree that I will follow New Connections Academy's *Acceptable Use of Electronic Networks* when I use New Connections Academy electronic network. I understand that if I violate these rules I can be disciplined, which may include loss of computer network use and privileges, detention, suspension, expulsion, or other consequences.

I understand that:

- Information or files which I create, place, transmit, or receive through New Connections Academy 's electronic network may be opened, reviewed, copied, and used by school officials and/or their designees at any time they deem appropriate in connection with the protection of the network, the application or enforcement of any school policy or suspected violations of the law. There are no expectations of privacy with respect to any such information or documents, except as may be provided by applicable law governing the privacy of student records and information.
- Information or documents placed on New Connections Academy 's system may be lost or damaged.
- If, in violation of New Connections Academy *Acceptable Use of Electronic Networks* policies, I misuse the computer network or cause harm to the network or anyone else or their information or documents, such that it disrupts the operation of New Connections Academy ; threatens the integrity and operation of the computer network; violates the rights of others; violates federal, State or local law; or is contrary to the behavior expectations of New Connections Academy ; I will be responsible for paying for such misuse or damage as will my parents or guardian to the extent provided by applicable law.
- Once this completed authorization form is submitted, I will be held responsible to the terms of this *Acceptable Use of Electronic Networks Agreement* throughout my enrollment at New Connections Academy or any other Connections Organization school. If my computer network privileges are suspended or revoked, a new authorization must be submitted.

**Students**: By signing below, I agree to abide by the *Acceptable Use of Electronic Networks Agreement* and the related policies in the Student-Parent Handbook.

**Parent/Guardian:** By signing below, I certify that I have reviewed with my child the rules regarding use of New Connections Academy 's electronic network.

| Student Name | Student Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Parent / Guardian Name | Parent / Guardian Signature | Date |

## New Connections Academy

# Handbook Acknowledgement

I, the undersigned, acknowledge that I have read and understood the New Connections Academy **2026-2027 Student & Parent Handbook.**

I understand that the school has the right to change, modify, alter, or cancel any provision of the handbook without notice; and that this Handbook supersedes all policies, written or oral, that may have been in effect.

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ | _____ |
| **Parent/Guardian Printed Name** | **Parent/Guardian Signature** |
| _____ | _____ |
| **Student Printed Name** | **Student Signature** |
| _____ | |
| **Date** | |

*This form must be signed and returned to the school office by 8/13/2026. It will be maintained in the student's file.