

# **Rising Leaders**

## **Academy**



## **Student Handbook**

## **ABOUT RISING LEADERS ACADEMY**

Rising Leaders Academy (RLA) is a K-12 school that is dedicated to preparing students for outstanding academic achievement, interpersonal skills, elevated ethical character, a firm command of foreign languages, and knowledge of meaningful careers. Funding for RLA will assist in the planning, program design, and initial implementation of this high-quality charter school in Florida. Rising Leaders Academy will strive to meet the needs of every student in an inclusive classroom setting, which encourages lifelong learning through a focus on strong leadership skills. Students will achieve academic excellence through a developmentally rigorous, innovative, challenging, college preparatory curriculum in a warm, nurturing environment.

RLA has defined a number of broad goals for the school that include both targets for student achievement and goals for the broader community:

- Goal 1: Demonstrate a high level of academic performance.
- Goal 2: Develop clear and effective oral and written communication skills in each student.
- Goal 3: Develop strong foreign language skills in each student.
- Goal 4: Enhance students' ethical character development.
- Goal 5: Develop an environmental consciousness in students.
- Goal 6: Empower students to pursue excellence.
- Goal 7: Encourage civic responsibility.
- Goal 8: Create an environment where parents and family members are actively engaged in students' education.
- Goal 9: Develop and maintain outstanding teachers.
- Goal 10: Establish sound and accurate financial management practices in all areas of the school's business operations.

Rising Leaders Academy will prepare students for high academic achievement by emphasizing individual learning styles and critical-thinking skills through in-depth, experience-based, thematic instruction and relevant co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Our academic programs are founded on the Expeditionary Learning (EL)

model, one of the Nation's most innovative and successful school design instructional models. Through EL's design principles and practices, EL school designers will enable our teachers to implement real life, project-based learning expeditions that promote literacy and integrate curricular content.

Through the full range of training and professional development provided by EL school trainers, RLA teachers will learn how to manage classes containing students with differing skill levels and abilities. Rising Leaders will focus on constructivism, differentiated instruction, and creating a reading culture throughout the school to increase learning opportunities for the students. Students will also receive hands-on experience in flourishing careers, such as medicine, technology, and education and learn by serving the community. This will help promote civic and environmental responsibility through real-world applications, community service, and by fostering a global mindset with an appreciation for the natural world and the rich diversity of humanity. The hands-on experience will help students improve the community and expand their knowledge and skills. They will be motivated to rise to leaders who will make a difference in this world.

### **MISSION, VISION, AND FEATURES of RISING LEADERS**

The mission of RLA is:

Rising Leaders Academy (RLA) in Bay County, Florida is dedicated to preparing students to be lifelong learners who demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and values to excel in the 21st century. RLA provides outstanding academic achievement, interpersonal skills, elevated ethical character, and a firm command of foreign languages. Students achieve academic excellence through a developmentally rigorous, innovative, challenging curriculum in a warm, nurturing, and safe environment with outstanding teachers who provide individualized and differentiated instruction to meet the needs of every student. RLA provides students with a comprehensive academic experience to include fine arts through art, music, and theater, as well as student wellness through vigorous physical activity. RLA prepares students to have a sincere responsibility to give back to the community through service-learning projects, with a focus on strong leadership skills. This mission will be achieved through sound financial management practices.

Our VISION is to be recognized as one of the best schools in the state of Florida that empowers students to become successful Leaders.

**RLA is dedicated to providing the best educational practices in Bay County to help students and teachers excel.** Our mission includes full inclusion of all students across the range of academic and language achievement from educationally disadvantaged to gifted. RLA will have unique features that make it top notch, such as:

- **Only school in Bay County to offer a Harvard research-based educational program:** Hundreds of advanced schools in the U.S. are applying the Harvard research-based educational program, known as Expeditionary Learning. Schools that implemented this advanced program have outperformed district averages in language arts and math. RLA will be the first and only K-12 school in the state to implement this exceptional program, in which teachers implement real life, project-based learning expeditions that promote literacy and integrate curricular content.
  - **Only school in Bay County to offer leadership training with focus on interpersonal skills through the Harvard-based educational program:** RLA will emphasize leadership skills in curriculum, instruction, and school culture through Expeditionary Learning. Every student will be given the opportunity to lead. This will increase the students' confidence and self-esteem.
  - **Offer 2 foreign languages to all students from kindergarten:** In addition to all subjects being taught in English, RLA will also introduce students to one or more of the six UN languages in every grade. Research shows that students who learn a second language will achieve greater divergent thinking, creativity, and cognitive development compared to monolingual students.
  - **Only school in Bay County to incorporate community service into academic programs through Expeditionary Learning model:** RLA will prepare students to have a sincere responsibility to give back to the community through clinics and other locations where volunteering is permissible.
  - **STEM and hands-on experience are a major aspect of our curriculum.**
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### **Guiding Understandings for Our Daily Work**

Eight Guiding Principles for Our Work

1. **We take responsibility for results:** We take responsibility for the results of our students. We do not make excuses for poor student achievement but rather are constantly asking ourselves what we can do to improve the achievement and engagement levels of RLA students.

2. **We act professionally:** We are positive, optimistic, proactive, and professional with our students, their families, and with each other.
3. **We are dedicated:** We believe that we must work harder than what is sometimes expected of educators elsewhere in order to achieve the results we want. We are dedicated to making the school's goals a reality.
4. **We sweat the small stuff:** We sweat the small stuff, particularly regarding student behavior, engagement, organization and academic achievement. We believe that if we make a big deal of the little problems, then big problems will never materialize.
5. **We are caring and strict:** We are both caring and strict. We are comfortable with our authority as adults; however, we also know that we must strive to build deep caring, trusting relationships with each student.
6. **We have high expectations:** We have very high expectations for student behavior and academics. We are constantly measuring the realities of every day against these high expectations and readjusting our practices, actions and mentalities to reach them.
7. **We act with a sense of urgency:** Every minute of every class must be used as efficiently and productively as possible in order for RLA students to be able to succeed.
8. **Our children, our community:** We are all in this together and we are all connected. The success of our students directly affects our lives and the lives of those around us. We have a responsibility to serve our community.

### **Important Core Beliefs that Drive Our Work**

1. We believe that the school's mission can be accomplished, not through individual heroics, but through collectively engaging in focused, high quality instructional and school leadership best-practices.
2. We believe that children can be best educated in an orderly environment and in community with each other and the adults around them. We also believe that creativity and curiosity can be best expressed in such a structured setting. This structured environment allows students to focus on thinking critically and creatively rather than focusing on their own behavior or the behavior of others.
3. We believe that good schools focus on student learning-good teaching is measured by positive student outcomes.
4. We believe that our students should participate in at least one quality learning expedition per year.
5. We believe that parents are essential partners in the education of our students. We recognize that parents have entrusted us with the most valuable people in their lives and we act accordingly--as we would want others to act with our loved ones. We know that by working together with parents we can achieve more than we can by working alone. We will work with parents and try to understand their concerns, while always adhering to our school's mission and beliefs. We are responsible for calling families to provide them with updates on how their child is progressing academically and

- behaviorally, and we immediately call families of students who are struggling in our classes or who make poor behavioral decisions, without forgetting to call the families of students doing exceptionally well.
6. We believe that we are responsible for our students' results. This means we take responsibility for the successes as well as the failures. We do not make excuses for failure, but rather ask ourselves what else we can do to get the results we want. We then act to get these results.
  7. We believe that we must always hold our students to the highest expectations for academics and behavior. This is the foundation of everything.
  8. We believe that a sense of urgency should permeate all areas of the school.
  9. We believe that our work must reflect the rigor we know our students need in order to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college.
  10. We believe that every minute of class is precious and should be used in the most efficient and productive way possible, as determined by what the learning targets and power targets are.
  11. We believe that we need to use a variety of assessments in order to gauge how our students are progressing. Furthermore, we will not ignore the importance of our students doing well on standardized exams.
  12. We believe that we must weave preparation for these exams responsibly into our curriculums, and we also know that we must analyze, reflect upon and make sound educational decisions based on all of the various assessments we give and the data taken from them.
  13. We believe that every adult in the school should strive to develop trusting, caring relationships with our students and that this can translate into higher levels of student engagement.
  14. We believe that it is reasonable to expect that every student will be engaged and participating in every class.
  15. We believe that we must be tenacious with our students in order to get results. We have set a high bar for ourselves and we cannot lower this bar. We believe that we all must push, coax, demand, and drag our students to get over this bar, be they in the kindergarten grade or tenth grade, or anywhere in between. We will not give choices to students who are not ready to make the correct choice. Rather, we will make the correct choices for them if need be.

## **Understandings About School Culture and Community**

### **Benefits of Structure and Order**

We believe that academic achievement can only occur at its highest levels within a structured and caring setting. Efficient learning and excellent teaching cannot take place at the levels we need it to if a great deal of time is taken up dealing with misbehavior and its negative effects on the community. Furthermore, it is difficult for positive, caring, and trusting relationships--between teachers/adults and students and

between students and other students—to grow and flourish in an environment that is chaotic, unstructured, and undisciplined. Therefore, Rising Leaders Academy requires its teachers/adults and students to adhere to a number of organizational beliefs and routines to promote order, respect, good behavior, responsibility, a sense of community, and student achievement.

Orderly and structured classrooms are necessary in order to create learning environments in which time is used in the most efficient and productive ways possible. Therefore, every minute of the day must be used efficiently and productively. Moreover, school should be a safe place where students know that everything works and where they feel like there are predictable boundaries of what is right and wrong attached to predictable and consistent consequences if rules are broken. Structured classrooms allow for students to feel safe at school and to focus on learning, not behavior.

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### **Daily Policies and Routines**

1. There are school wide norms that will be standardized across the classrooms, posted in the classrooms and hallways.  
They will be posted in the following format:  
Trustworthiness  
Respect  
Responsibility  
Fairness  
Caring  
Citizenship
2. Teachers will also have individual rules specific to their classrooms.

### **Classroom Entry and Exit**

1. Students will line up in a quiet or silent line in the cafeteria and follow the teacher to class.
2. Teachers will have assigned seats for students.  
Students will immediately sit in their assigned seats upon entering class.
3. The first few minutes are considered Crew Time or Character Education, in which the teacher may engage students in initiatives or protocols to start the day, go over Learning Targets, or answer Homework questions.
4. Teacher has an Agenda, with the date and the Learning Targets (at least one academic and one character) phrased as “I can...”, posted each day in the front of the classroom.
5. Classroom exiting procedures: teacher dismisses students, not the bell; students clean up and push-in their chairs upon teacher’s request. Teacher makes sure students leave no trace or mess around their learning area.
6. Students will line up outside of the next class between periods. This will be either silent or quiet depending on hallway expectations.

## **Hallways and Other Transitions**

1. Students walk in silent or quiet lines from one class to another. Students are not allowed to walk on their own, and a teacher leads the lines to each class. Teachers also lead and pick-up their students to and from the cafeteria and other common areas.
2. All teachers and other adults will be visible in hallways and present at or near their doorways to assist in supervision during transition periods.
3. Students must have a pass in order to go anywhere without an adult. No more than one student at a time from a given class should go to the bathroom.
4. Social worker(s), counselors and other adults will pick up students from class. Students should not go to appointments on their own. Do not send students to another adult without checking with that adult first.
5. If a student needs to go home, he / she should be sent to the Main Office indicating that the student needs to go home with a note of the reason.
6. Bathrooms will not be used between periods, only during periods.

## **Students' Uniform**

1. As a general rule, if an article of clothing or accessory is offensive or does not meet RLA Student Dress Code Policy, any adult at the school may deem the student out of compliance with RLA Dress Code. It is required that all faculty and staff support each other and are consistent with the dress code. Students found to be out of dress code will receive a parent alert, and depending on the severity of the violation, may be sent to the front office to contact their parents to remedy the violation.
2. Students are expected to arrive at school in the school uniform; RLA will not provide for, or allow time for, students to change into uniform after entering the school in the morning.

## **RLA Student Dress Code Policy**

Appropriate dress is the primary responsibility of the student and his/her parents or guardians. RLA dress code must be followed from student arrival, and until the end of the day. Students are expected to follow the uniform policy, and adhere to the following guidelines:

**Shirts:** Students are required to wear a school uniform top every day, unless it is a special dress or spirit day. Approved uniform tops are RLA collared shirts, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or performance dry-wear tops. A long sleeve or short sleeve t-shirt may be worn under uniform tops, but it must be solid color similar to the RLA uniform shirt



colors. Nothing can cover the school shirt, unless it's approved outerwear (see Outerwear section below). No pins can be attached to RLA shirts.

**Bottoms** must be **pants or shorts only** for all students. Bottoms must be uniform material fabric or solid opaque legging pants/bottoms in uniform color. Leggings, spandex, or tights pants are permitted only when worn under a short or shirt that is at least mid-thigh. May not be sheer or see-through material. (Legging, spandex, tight, and biker shorts are NOT permitted.)

#### **BOTTOMS CANNOT BE:**

large pocket style pants or cargo shorts, bell-bottoms, baggy pants, hip-huggers or overalls of any kind. Bottoms fabric material **CANNOT** be made of leather, hosiery, see-through or sheer fabrics, spandex/leotard, sweatpants, or contain rips or holes. Shorts must be no more than 5 inches above the kneecaps as measured standing up.

Skirts, dresses, jumpers, and skorts **are NOT** allowed bottoms, as students participate in physical activities, PE, Ninja Warrior, Recess, etc. in school uniforms.

Jeans or jean shorts are **ONLY** allowed on special dress days for elementary and middle school students. Denim jeans should fit appropriately, not sag, or have rips/holes. Uniform bottoms can be purchased at any store.

**Bottoms:** The approved colors for uniform bottoms are solid khaki and solid black. No other colors, stripes, or designs may be on the solid-colored bottoms. Bottoms should be straight-leg style, or uniform style bottoms. No cargo or sweat-pants permitted as uniform bottoms.

#### **Shoes:**

Students must wear closed toed and closed backed shoes for safety. No Crocs, flip-flops, or slippers are allowed. Shoes cannot have lights or wheels.

#### **Outerwear:**

Approved outerwear will be the school-approved RLA logo fleece, jackets, sweaters, or sweatshirt. Other outerwear should be removed once inside the classroom and should always be worn over a school uniform shirt. Inside the classroom, the students must be in their RLA school shirt, which can be a short or long sleeve shirt, sweater, sweatshirt, or RLA jacket.

#### **Hair:**

Students cannot come to school with any chemicals or unnatural coloring in the hair. Hair below the shoulder is recommended to be pulled-back, braided, and not a distraction in the learning environment. No headwear except for simple headbands and bows, or headwear for religious purposes. No shaved heads with designs.

#### **Jewelry:**

Students cannot wear any flashy or heavy jewelry that might create a hazard to a

student's safety. Light, small necklaces and bracelets are permissible. Students may not have any body piercing other than small stud earrings in the earlobes, which can be gold or silver. No colorful beaded earrings that hang below the ear lobe.

### **RLA Celebrations/Parties Policy**

The mission of RLA is to provide academic excellence in a nurturing environment. The reason for any celebration or party at RLA must be aligned with the mission and related to learning. RLA values students' and staff's time, and therefore the celebrations/parties are meant for meaning fun that is directly related to the learning and will further enhance the learning and environment, such as the Community Circles, which are celebrations of learning. All other celebrations/parties must have administrative approval.

### **RLA Drop-off/Pick-up Policy**

RLA hours are:

**K - 1: 7:40 - 3:00 Mondays - Thursdays, 7:40 - 12:30 Fridays**

**2 - 5: 7:40 - 3:15 Mondays - Thursdays, 7:40 - 12:30 Fridays**

**MIDDLE/HIGH: 8:00 - 3:30 Mondays - Thursdays, 8:00 - 12:45 Fridays**

Parents may drop the students off no earlier than 7:15 a.m. A staff member will be outside to bring the students to the cafeteria. Parents/guardians are not permitted inside the facility during drop-off/pick-up. Students must be picked up on time. Students who are not picked up on time will be charged a late-fee. Parents must leave immediately after pick-up and cannot remain parked in the school parking. Other than aftercare student pickup buses, no cars are to park directly in front of the school on the school property. There are parking spots on the sides of the facility, as well as across the street.

### **RLA-Parents Partnership Policy**

Rising Leaders Academy and Parents are partners in educating our children. Therefore, RLA has the following expectations for Parents that align with our student character education program:

1. To talk with your child about school and his/her academic and behavioral goals.  
(Character Traits: Integrity; Passion; Collaboration)

2. To model our character traits for RLA students. (Character Traits: Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, Trustworthiness, Citizenship)
3. To ensure that your child is at school on time and ready to learn. (Character Traits: Self-Discipline; Integrity)
4. To ensure that your child gets 8-10 hours of sleep, minimum. (Character Traits: Self-Discipline; Integrity)
5. To ensure that your child eats a healthy breakfast. (Character Traits: Self-Discipline; Integrity)
6. To get to know your child's teacher and communicate respectfully on a regular basis. (Character Traits: Collaboration; Passion)
7. To engage in the life of the school. (Character Traits: Collaboration; Passion)
8. To attend school events: Parent meeting, Community Circles, Expeditionary Learning Gallery Night, Presentation of Learning, etc. (Character Traits: Integrity; Passion; Collaboration)
9. To be good stewards of our school and community. (Character Traits: Integrity; Passion; Collaboration; Integrity; Self-Discipline)
10. Learn with us. Grow with us. Celebrate with us. (Character Traits: Collaboration; Passion)
11. To believe that your child can do more than you ever imagined possible. (Character Trait: Passion)

In addition, families are required to volunteer 20 hours per year.

### **RLA Dismissal Policy**

RLA follows all the Bay District Code of Conduct policies and will take action in accordance with district and school policies. In addition, all parents must sign the Parent Contract form, which states the expectations and policies for being an RLA member. RLA will strive to keep the school environment safe and nurturing for all staff and students. If a child or parent/guardian interferes with the educational environment in a disruptive or disrespectful manner towards any student or staff, the parents will be notified of such behavior. If such behavior continues after such notification, the child may be dismissed from the school. RLA has the right to dismiss a student if the student or parent/guardian has continuous disruptive or disrespectful behavior towards any student or staff. The parent will receive a dismissal letter and the student will be

dropped from all RLA programs and not permitted to return back to school. The student's spot will be filled with another student on the waiting list. This action is to preserve the positive energy at RLA.

### **RLA Donation Policy**

All donations to RLA or individual classes must be given to the RLA office. The donor will be given a donation letter. If the donation is for a specific class or expedition, the office will then forward the donation to the specific class. All donations must be recorded and then forwarded to the accountant.

### **RLA Student Lunch Policy**

Rising Leaders Academy strives to provide a healthy lunch for students with a variety of choices. School meals offer fresh fruits and vegetables, salads, allergen-free selections, daily hot meals, and vegetarian and vegan options. Students are not allowed to bring soft drinks, such as Coke. For safety purposes, students are not permitted to use the microwave, nor should a staff member microwave the meals for the students. We encourage our families to participate in our healthy cafeteria program, or to provide nutritious meals for their students from home.

### **RLA Absences Policy**

Parents are expected to notify the school the day of the absence. Parents must provide school personnel with accurate telephone contact numbers (home, cell, and work for parents or legal guardians) and ensure the number(s) are correct if there is a change during the school year. As an Expeditionary Learning School, with foreign languages, RLA provides students with an advanced curriculum, which contains a larger amount of information than other schools. Students who are absent frequently miss this information and have difficulty making up all the subjects and activities. Therefore, students who accumulate 10 unexcused absences throughout the year may be dismissed from RLA.

#### **An excused absence includes:**

- **illness;**
- **medical or dental appointments (doctor's statement may be required);**

- automobile accident;
- deaths or funerals;
- emergency situations acceptable to the Principal or designee;
- required court appearance (subpoena required);
- established religion observance;
- severe weather

### **RLA Tardy/Early Pick-Up Policy**

A student is tardy when the student arrives after the beginning of the school day or when he/she is not in his/her assigned seat or station right after the Pledge of Allegiance. A student's tardiness shall be excused when the reason given is acceptable to the principal or teacher. In the event students do arrive late, the office will issue excused tardies for physician/dentist appointments with a doctor's note. All other tardies are unexcused. Your child should attend school every day on time. Teachers cannot provide an effective instructional program for children who are frequently absent or tardy. Students who arrive tardy for class disrupt the other students who are engaged in learning. **Three tardies constitute one absence. If a student has ten unexcused absences, they may be dismissed from the school or face retention.** Therefore, excessive tardies can cause expulsion from school. Early pick-up is when the student is picked up before the end of the school day. An unexcused early pick-up counts like a tardy.

### **RLA Field Trip Policy**

*"EL differentiates between traditional field trips, in which students are often spectators, and fieldwork, in which students are active investigators, applying the research tools, techniques of inquiry, and standards of presentation used by professionals in the field." (Core Practice 6)*

As an Expeditionary Learning School, students should attend field trips with the intent to participate with research and study, not as spectators. Teachers will provide students with a guide on research goals and methodologies. According to EL Core Practice 6, *"Fieldwork is structured so that it is safe and productive. Teachers preview sites to shape the field experience effectively."* For the safety of our elementary school students, the field trips must be within one hour drive one-way from Rising Leaders Academy. If there is a location longer than one hour that is necessary for an expedition and unique, with no similar venue within one hour of RLA, the teacher must provide convincing evidence, and it must be approved by the School Principal.

*"Students are prepared to be ambassadors for their school when on fieldwork."*

*They are courteous, articulate, organized, and helpful." (Core Practice 6)*

## **NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Rising Leaders Academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex (gender), marital status, disability (Section 504/ADA), sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or other legally protected characteristics in its educational programs and activities. No person shall, on the basis of any protected characteristic, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program, activity, or work environment. This practice applies equally to students, employees, applicants for employment, and all persons having business with Rising Leaders Academy.

## **Discrimination/Harassment/Retaliation**

Rising Leaders Academy desires to maintain an academic and work environment in which all employees, volunteers, and students are treated with respect and dignity. A vital element of this atmosphere is the Board's commitment to equal opportunities and the prohibition of discrimination or harassment practices. The Board's prohibition against these practices includes prohibitions based upon a person's membership in a protected class as defined by applicable state or federal law. Rising Leaders Academy, Inc. policies forbid sexual harassment, or any other form of illegal harassment, of any employee, student, volunteer, or visitor. The school will not tolerate harassment by any of its employees, students, volunteers or agents, vendors, and service providers who have access to school facilities.

All employees shall be allowed to work, and students allowed to learn, in an environment free from all forms of illegal discrimination, including sexual harassment and unlawful retaliation. Any person who engages in illegal discrimination, sexual harassment, and/or unlawful retaliation during the performance of their duties, or any adult who knowingly permits these unlawful actions to occur without intervention or reporting, shall be in violation of Rising Leaders Academy, Inc.'s policy.

## **Title IX Notice of Nondiscrimination**

Rising Leaders Academy does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its education programs or activities and is required by **Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972** (34 C.F.R. Part 106) not to discriminate in such a manner. This requirement extends to **admissions and employment**.

**Title IX Coordinator (Designated Official): School Principal**

Email: [RisingLeadersAcademy@gmail.com](mailto:RisingLeadersAcademy@gmail.com) | Phone: (850) 215-0844

Reports may be made at any time, including outside business hours, by email or phone.

## How to Report

Students, parents/guardians, employees, applicants, and community members may report sex discrimination (including sexual harassment) to the Title IX Coordinator **in person, by mail, by email/phone**, or via the school's online reporting form found on [RisingLeadersAcademy.org](http://RisingLeadersAcademy.org). Any employee can assist you in contacting the Coordinator.

## Scope of Prohibited Conduct under Title IX

Prohibited sex-based discrimination includes sexual harassment (including quid pro quo harassment, hostile environment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking), sex-based bullying, pregnancy/parenting discrimination, and retaliation.

## Supportive Measures & Grievance Process

Rising Leaders Academy offers individualized, non-disciplinary **supportive measures** (e.g., schedule adjustments, counseling referrals, mutual no-contact directives) **with or without** a formal complaint. Formal complaints will be addressed through the school's **Title IX Grievance Procedures**, which provide a prompt, fair, and impartial process conducted by trained personnel. The procedures are available below:

## Title IX Grievance Procedures

**Purpose & Scope.** These procedures explain how Rising Leaders Academy (RLA) responds to reports or complaints of sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, consistent with Title IX (34 C.F.R. Part 106). They apply to conduct in RLA's **education programs or activities** and to **employees and students**. RLA will handle matters **promptly, fairly, and impartially** by trained personnel.

### 1) Reporting & Initial Response

- **Who can report:** Any student, parent/guardian, employee, or community member may report to the **Title IX Coordinator at any time** by email, phone, mail, or in person.
- **Immediate outreach:** Upon receiving a report, the Coordinator will promptly contact the person reported to be affected (the "complainant") to:
  - discuss the availability of **supportive measures** (available with or without a formal complaint),
  - explain the **grievance process**, and
  - describe how to file a **formal complaint**.

## 2) Supportive Measures (Available With or Without a Complaint)

RLA offers individualized, non-disciplinary, and non-punitive measures designed to restore or preserve equal access (e.g., schedule adjustments, counseling referrals, increased supervision, classroom changes, no-contact directives). The Coordinator will consider the complainant's wishes and maintain privacy to the extent allowed by law.

## 3) Filing a Formal Complaint

- A **formal complaint** is a signed request (by the complainant or the Coordinator) asking RLA to investigate alleged Title IX sexual harassment.
- The Coordinator will provide **written notice** of the allegations and the process to the parties (complainant and respondent), including the **presumption of non-responsibility** and the parties' rights.

## 4) Investigation

- An impartial **investigator** will gather relevant evidence and interview parties and witnesses.
- Both parties may **present evidence**, identify witnesses, and have an **advisor** of their choice (who may be an attorney).
- Prior to the determination, both parties will have a **reasonable opportunity to review and respond** to the evidence and/or the draft investigative summary.

## 5) Questions & Credibility

RLA provides a process for parties to submit **relevant questions** to each other and witnesses (including follow-ups) and receive written answers before a determination. (Live hearings are **not required** in K–12.)

## 6) Determination

- A **decision-maker (not the investigator or Coordinator)** will objectively evaluate all relevant evidence, apply the school's **standard of evidence** ([preponderance of the evidence]/[clear and convincing] — select one and use it **consistently** for students and employees), and issue a **written determination** with:
  - the allegations,
  - findings of fact,
  - conclusions applying the policy,
  - the **rationale** for each finding, and
  - any **sanctions** (for employees: per HR policy/contract; for students: per Code of Conduct) and **remedies** for the complainant.



## 7) Informal Resolution (Optional)

At any time after a formal complaint is filed—and **before** a final determination—RLA may offer **informal resolution**(e.g., mediation, restorative agreement) **if**:

- both parties **voluntarily consent** in writing,
- a trained, impartial facilitator is used, and
- the matter **does not** involve allegations that an employee sexually harassed a student.

## 8) Appeals

Either party may **appeal** the dismissal or the final determination within **[5–10] school days** based on: (a) procedural irregularity affecting the outcome; (b) new evidence not reasonably available earlier; or (c) conflict of interest or bias by the Coordinator, investigator, or decision-maker. An **appeals decision-maker** will issue a written outcome.

## 9) Emergency Removal / Administrative Leave

RLA may **temporarily remove** a respondent from a program or activity after an **individualized safety and risk analysis**, with notice and an opportunity to challenge the decision promptly. Employees may be placed on **administrative leave** consistent with HR policies.

## 10) Privacy, Retaliation & False Statements

- RLA will protect the **privacy** of parties and witnesses to the extent permitted by law and school safety needs.
- **Retaliation is prohibited** against anyone who reports or participates in a Title IX matter.
- Knowingly submitting **false statements or evidence** may result in discipline under applicable policies.

## 11) Timeframes

RLA strives to resolve Title IX matters **promptly** within **reasonably designated timelines** (e.g., investigation and determination typically within **[30–60] school days**, excluding good-cause delays). Parties will receive **written updates** if timelines are adjusted.

## 12) Recordkeeping & Training

RLA maintains required **records** (reports, investigations, determinations, appeals,

informal resolutions, training materials) for **at least seven (7) years**. Title IX personnel receive **annual training** on the policy, scope, impartiality, relevance, and how to avoid conflicts of interest.

## **Non-Retaliation**

Rising Leaders Academy prohibits retaliation against any person for reporting, participating in, or declining to participate in a Title IX matter. Concerns about retaliation should be reported to the Title IX Coordinator.

## **Additional Civil Rights Contacts**

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR): (800) 421-3481 | [ocr@ed.gov](mailto:ocr@ed.gov) | <https://www2.ed.gov/ocr>

## **Examples of prohibited discrimination and/or harassment:**

- Any slurs, innuendos or other verbal or physical conduct reflecting upon an individual's race, ethnic background, gender or disabling condition which has the purpose or the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive educational or work environment; has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's work or school performance or participation; or otherwise adversely affects an individual's employment or educational opportunities.
- The denial of or the provision of aid, benefits, grades, rewards, employment, faculty assistance, services, or treatment, on the basis of sexual advances or requests for sexual favors.
- Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an employee's employment or a student's educational opportunities; submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for educational or employment decisions affecting the individual; or such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or educational performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or educational environment.
- Any act of retaliation against an individual who reports a violation of the District's and school's policies on harassment, alleged discrimination and/or discrimination, or who participates in the investigation of a harassment, alleged discrimination or discrimination complaint will not be tolerated.

## **AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT**

Congress established the U.S. Department of Education (ED) on May 4, 1980, in the Department of Education Organization Act (Public Law 96-88 of October 1979). Under this law, ED's mission is to "Strengthen the Federal commitment to assuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual". Rising Leaders Academy complies with the American Disabilities Act.



## **DRUG FREE SCHOOL & WORKPLACE**

It is the intent of Rising Leaders Academy to comply with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1986 and other applicable law, which requires the school to maintain a drug-free workplace. Rising Leaders Academy has authorized the Executive Director and School Principal to develop procedures to carry out this policy. There is a zero-tolerance policy on the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession or use of a controlled substance, including alcohol. These substances are prohibited on all school property and at school sponsored activities. Employees are strictly prohibited from reporting to work or being on duty while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance. Students who are found to either be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or are found in possession of drugs or alcohol while on school campus, will be subject to disciplinary procedures, including up to dismissal from Rising Leaders Academy, for violation of our school code of conduct.

Rising Leaders Academy policy is to employ a workforce free from use of illegal drugs and abuse of alcohol, at any school function. Any employee determined to be in

violation of the policy by participating in unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of a controlled substance is subject to disciplinary action, which may include termination. It is a standard of conduct of employees of Rising Leaders Academy that employees shall not use illegal drugs or abuse alcohol.

### **Audio and Video Surveillance**

Rising Leaders Academy uses audio and video surveillance in common areas of the school to help ensure the safety and security of students, staff, and visitors. Signs are posted at school entrances to notify all individuals that recording is in progress.

Recordings may be reviewed and used as evidence in disciplinary proceedings, investigations, or as otherwise permitted by law. Students, staff, and visitors should have no expectation of privacy in areas under surveillance.