



# Employee Handbook 2023-2024 School Year

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# **Your Human Resources (HR) Department**

## **Team Members & Contact Information**

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Contact for the following items: Benefits, Job Postings, FMLA, Workers Comp and MSA Employee/Student Key Cards, Sunshine Club, HR Newsletter items, trainings taken.

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# Welcome

Hello and welcome to the Minnesota State Academies.

New employees, thank you for joining our MSA team. To our current employees, thank you for your continued service to MSA. Our students and our organization would not be successful without you. Each of your supervisors and the HR department strive to help each employee succeed in their positions. We cannot wait to see what each of you achieve in the coming school year.

This employee handbook defines who we are and how we work together. The MSA team will do everything possible to create a fair and productive workplace. As part of the MSA team we need your assistance to achieve this goal. We have created this handbook to guide you.

This handbook is not a contract or a guarantee of employment. The contents in this handbook do not override contract language. It is a collection of our expectations, commitments, and responsibilities to achieve success. Please read this employee handbook carefully and consult it whenever you need to.

## Getting to know MSA

For over 150 years, the Minnesota State Academies has provided educational services to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf/Blind and blind/visually impaired students who range in age from birth to 21. The Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD) and the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind (MSAB) are statewide public schools with dormitory options that serves students from all regions of the state. Our teachers are professionally trained and licensed in Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Blind/Visually Impaired education.

## Our Campuses

Our campuses have a mixture of historical and modern buildings and are designed with our students' individual needs in mind. MSAD and MSAB are only a mile apart, and both campuses often share resources and facilities. The small-town environment and family atmosphere help students, parents and staff feel safe and welcome.

# EMPLOYMENT BASICS

In this section, we explain our employee contract types and define our basic employment policies.

## Employment contract types

Employees at the agency are under a bargaining group contract depending on which contract the position is in – the bargaining units (BU) are:

(Click on the BU word then press the Ctrl key click your mouse to be taken directly to the contract)

AFSCME – American Federation of State, County, & Municipal Employees.

Positions in this unit: *Paraprofessionals (SEPA); Residential Educators (HST); Administrative Assistants (OAS); Custodians (GMW); General Repair Workers (GRW); HVAC/Plumbing Technicians (PME); Lead Groundskeeper/Groundskeeper; Electrician; Carpenter; Cooks; Lead Cooks; Food Service Workers; Occupational Therapist Assistant (COTA); Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN); Recreation Program Coordinators (RPA); Account Clerk Sr.; Braillists; Braille Technicians; Inventory/Supply Clerk (CSAS)*

Commissioners Plan (unrepresented).

Positions in this plan are: *Human Resources Director, Human Resources Specialist 1, Interpreter Coordinator, Interpreters (Sign Language Interpreter Specialists)*

Managerial Plan (unrepresented).

Positions in the plan: *Superintendent (Academies Administrator), MN Academies Directors, Executive Aide (Supt's office).*

MAPE – Minnesota Association of Professional Employees.

Positions in this unit: *Accounting Officers, Interpreters (Sign Language Interpreter Specialists), Director of Communication/Community Relations; School Information Systems Specialist; Rehabilitation Program Specialist (Assistive Technology); Assistant Dorm Program Coordinators*

MMA – Middle Management Association.

Positions in this unit: *Student Life Directors; Health Services Director; Director of Physical Plant Operations; Food Services Director; MSAD Assistant Director; Fiscal Services Director*

MNA – Minnesota Nurses Association.

Positions in this unit: *Registered Nurse; Registered Nurse, Sr.*

SRSEA – State Residential Schools Education Association.

Positions in this unit: *Teachers; Counselors; Psychologists; Social Workers; Speech Language Pathologists; Music Therapist; Audiologist.*

Consult with your bargaining group contract for specifics regarding your employment rights and other applicable procedures/regulations. If you have additional questions, contact the HR department for assistance.

## **Equal opportunity employment**

MSA is an equal opportunity employer. We do not tolerate discrimination against protected characteristics (gender, age, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, disability, veteran status.) We want all employees to treat others with respect and professionalism. In practice, this means that we:

- Hire and promote people based on bargaining unit language along with skills, experience or potential and try to reduce bias in every process (e.g., through structured interviews.
- Make accommodations to assist people with disabilities.
- Use inclusive, diversity-sensitive language in all official documents, signs, and job ads.
- Conduct diversity and communication training.

Apart from those actions, we commit to penalizing every discriminatory, offensive, or inappropriate behavior found to be factual and true. To do this properly, we ask you to report any discriminatory action against yourself or your colleagues to HR. MSA will not retaliate against you if you file a complaint. Any employee who retaliates or discriminates will face disciplinary action.

## **Recruitment and selection process**

Our hiring steps might vary across departments and roles, but we always aim for a process that is fair and effective in hiring great people. Supervisors, if you are hiring for an open position in your department, you will go through these steps:

- i. Identify the need for a new job opening.
- ii. Review job descriptions and job postings. Work with HR to make updates and/or changes.
- iii. Fill out and send to HR the HR Request Form.
- iv. Decide on interview timeframes and team members. Including a representative from HR is encouraged.

- v. Develop interview questions – Review questions with HR prior to interviews.
- vi. Review resumes routed to you from HR.
- vii. Screen and interview candidates.
- viii. Select the most suitable candidate.
- ix. Supervisors/Hiring Managers will send the name of the recommended candidate for the position to HR (include interviewers rating forms for each candidate, interview summary rating form, and the request to hire form).
- x. HR will conduct the reference checks and background checks (As a general rule, commission a background check for finalists only).
- xi. HR will advise Supervisors/Hiring Managers when to make a verbal offer based on the return of reference checks and background check.
- xii. HR will compile the posting folder information and send to the Superintendent for approval to offer the candidate the position.
- xiii. When reference and background checks are completed, HR will complete the offer letter and load it into the careers website and extend an email request to the candidate to review the letter and accept or decline through the website.

**Your Interview Team:** Supervisors will invite interviewers to be on the team. Each team must have no less than three interviewers; and at least one interviewer must be from another department. It is encouraged to include HR personnel to be on the interview team, especially if you cannot fulfill the three interviewer spots required for the interview team. Remember to keep your applicants informed of our hiring process and next steps in the process. Ask the HR team for help whenever necessary.

## **Attendance**

We expect you to be present during your scheduled working hours. If you face an emergency that prevents you from coming to work, contact your supervisor as soon as possible following the internal process established in your department/work area. We will excuse unreported absences in cases of serious accidents, acute medical emergencies with a doctor's note presented within a reasonable appropriate timeframe depending on the emergency. But, whenever possible, we should know when you cannot work. MSA supervisors/directors do have the right to ask you for a doctor's note at any time unless your bargaining unit contract specifies differently. It is strongly encouraged those employees who provide direct services/care to students avoid scheduling appointments and/or other leave requests during school days/direct care hours to maximize the educational benefits of our programs for the students.



## **Confidentiality and data protection**

We want to ensure that private information about employees is well-protected and MSA follows Minnesota's data privacy act. We also expect you to act responsibly when handling confidential information.

### **You must:**

- Lock or secure confidential information at all times.
- Shred confidential documents when they are no longer needed.
- Make sure you view confidential information on secure devices only.
- Only disclose information to other employees when it is necessary and authorized.
- Keep confidential documents inside MSA's premises unless it is absolutely necessary to move them.

### **You must not:**

- Use confidential information for your personal benefit or profit.
- Disclose confidential information to anyone outside of MSA.
- Replicate confidential documents and files and store them on insecure devices.
- Discuss another MSA employee or students' confidential information on social media, with community members, or during public events.

This is important for MSA's legal responsibilities, liabilities, and reputation. We will investigate and apply appropriate disciplinary action on any employee who breaches our confidentiality guidelines for personal benefit or profit.

We may also discipline any unintentional breach of this policy depending on its frequency and seriousness. We may terminate employees who repeatedly disregard this policy.

## **Dress code**

At MSA the attire is: Business/ Business Casual/ Smart Casual/ Casual depending on your position. This means at a minimum, slacks/jeans, appropriate shoes for the position, and blouses/shirts appropriate for the position. Conform to a more business dress code if you are in a position in which you attend meetings where professional attire is appropriate; you are representing MSA at such events. We expect you to be clean when coming to work and avoid wearing clothes that are unprofessional such as: workout clothes, short-cropped tops, inappropriate language on clothing, inappropriate tears/rips in jeans, and avoid shoes that could cause harm in positions where you work with students (i.e., no flip flops or high heels). Shorts and capris are appropriate only in

certain positions (get prior approval from your supervisor) during warm weather, and we expect them to be appropriate in length.

## **Conflict of interest**

When you are experiencing a conflict of interest, your personal goals are no longer aligned with your responsibilities towards us. For example, accepting a bribe may benefit you financially, but it is illegal and against State policies. Another example may be acting to benefit a friend or family member (i.e., providing extra information, support, or services to students/families). If we become aware of such behavior, you will lose your job and may face legal trouble.

For this reason, conflicts of interest are a serious issue for all of us. We expect you to be vigilant to spot circumstances that create conflicts of interest, either to yourself or for your direct reports. Follow our policies and always act in MSA's best interests. Whenever possible, do not let personal interests get in the way of your job. If you are experiencing an ethical dilemma, talk to your supervisor or HR and we will try to help you resolve it.

## **Cyber Security and Digital Devices**

This section deals with all things digital at work. We want to set some guidelines for using computers, phones, our internet connection, and social media to ensure security and protect our assets.

### **Internet usage**

Our internet connection is primarily for business. We expect you to temporarily halt personal activities while working. You may briefly conduct personal activities while on a break, i.e., lunch and 15-minute breaks.

You must not use our internet connection to:

- Download or upload obscene, offensive, or illegal material.
- Send confidential information to unauthorized recipients.
- Invade another person's privacy and gain access to sensitive information.
- Download or upload pirated movies, music, material, or software.
- Visit potentially dangerous websites that can compromise our network and computers' safety.
- Perform unauthorized or illegal actions, like hacking, fraud, or buying/selling illegal goods.

## **Cell phone**

We allow use of cell phones at work for work purposes. We ask you to follow a few simple rules:

- Use your cell phone for work purposes only.
- Handle personal calls/conversations during your breaks and use an empty meeting room or common area so as not to disturb your colleagues.
- Avoid playing games on your phone or texting during your work hours.
- Student time is student time – you should not be on your cell phones for personal reasons during your student contact hours.
- Do NOT use your phone for any reason while driving vehicles.
- Do not use your phone to take pictures or record or video record students or other co-workers, unless you have been appointed to do so for a school event; be respectful of the opt out picture taking for privacy reasons for some students and staff.
- Do not download or upload inappropriate illegal or obscene material using our internet connection.
- A protective cover provides protection/privacy of conversations on phones.
- Avoid using your cell phone on non-MSA networks to share confidential information about students.

## **MSA Email**

Email is essential to our work. We ask that you use your MSA email for work purposes only. We also ask that you do not use personal e-mail; text messages, or other social media avenues to conduct MSA business – all communication with students, parents/families, and other school personnel should be conducted using MSA email. Exception to the above statement are certain persons in Supervisor or Director positions who do not use a school provided cell phone.

### **Our general expectations are that you do not:**

- Sign up for illegal, unreliable, disreputable, or suspicious websites and services.
- Send unauthorized marketing content or emails.
- Send insulting or discriminatory messages and content.
- Intentionally spamming other people's emails, including your coworkers.

## **Social media**

We want to provide practical advice to prevent careless use of social media in our workplace.

We address two types of social media uses: using personal social media at work and representing MSA through social media at work or off duty hours.

### **Using personal social media**

Specifically, we ask you to:

- Avoid using social media during work hours (breaks are fine).
- Ensure others know that your personal account or statements do not represent MSA. For example, use a disclaimer such as “opinions are my own.”
- Do not share MSA news that is not officially announced. Do not post pictures taken at work or school event of students/colleagues/self. You may share posts that are publicly shared on the MSA social media pages.
- Avoid any defamatory, offensive, or derogatory content. You may violate an MSA policy if you direct such content towards colleagues, parents, or students.

### **Representing MSA through social media**

- If you are on MSA social media accounts or speak on MSA’s behalf, we expect you to protect MSA’s image and reputation. Specifically, you should:
- Be respectful, polite, and patient.
- Avoid speaking on matters outside your field of expertise when possible.
- Follow our confidentiality and data protection policies. Ensure accessibility of your posts.
- Correct or remove any misleading or false content as quickly as possible.

Please refer to [MSA Policy # 524](#) for further details about Appropriate Use of Electronic Communication and technology.

## **Employee relationships**

We want to ensure that relationships between employees are appropriate and harmonious. We outline our guidelines, and we ask you to always behave professionally.

## **Friendships at work**

Employees who work together may naturally form friendships either in or outside of the workplace. We encourage this relationship between peers, as it can help you communicate and collaborate. But we expect you to focus on your work and keep personal disputes outside of our workplace.

## **Employment of relatives**

Everyone at MSA should be hired, recognized, or promoted because of their skills, character, and work ethic. We would not like to see phenomena of nepotism ([policy 426](#)), favoritism, or conflicts of interest, so we will place some restrictions on hiring employees' relatives.

To our agency, a "relative" is someone who is related by blood or marriage to an employee. This includes parents, grandparents, in-laws, spouses or domestic partners, children, grandchildren, siblings, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, stepparents, stepchildren and adopted children.

As an employee, you can refer your relatives to work at MSA. Here are our restrictions:

- You must not be involved in a supervisory/reporting relationship with a relative.
- You cannot be transferred, promoted, or hired inside a reporting relationship with a relative.
- You cannot be part of a hiring committee, when your relative is interviewed for that position.

If you become related to a supervisor or direct report after you both become employed at MSA, we may have to move one of you to another supervisor.

## **Workplace visitors**

If you want to invite a visitor to campus, please ask for permission from your supervisor first. Also, inform your building's front desk person of your visitor's arrival. Visitors should sign in and show identification.

When you have office visitors, you also have responsibilities. You should:

- Always tend to your visitors (especially if they are underage.)
- Keep your visitors away from confidential records.
- Prevent your visitors from socializing with your colleagues on religious subject matters, gathering donations, or requesting participation in activities while on our premises.

# WORKPLACE POLICIES

Policies help us build a productive, lawful, and pleasant workplace. All employees should read all employee policies; they are located on MSA's website under the heading About Us.

## **On-Call Use (Policy 441 & Appendix 441A)**

In the evenings (After 4:30 pm Monday – Friday) and on weekends, employees who work the evenings and overnight shifts may need supervisor assistance or guidance in certain situations. Employees should first contact the Assistant Dorm Programs Coordinator for their campus – if that person is not available or unable to handle the situation, they should call the Student Life Director. If that person is not available, then call the On-Call phone number (507-339-1270) and follow the guidelines located in the “Guide to Emergency Procedures” booklet posted in all areas of campus buildings.

Use your best judgment: Any time the situation appears to be an extreme emergency such as a fire, an intruder, or a violent situation, do not go through the steps of calling the assistant dorm coordinator, or the student life director, or the on-call number. Immediately call 911, and then notify the student life director and the on-call supervisor.

## **POSSIBLE SITUATIONS REQUIRING AN ON-CALL CONTACT**

1. When a student's immediate safety/well-being is of concern.
2. Suicide ideation/attempt.
3. Use, sale, distribution of drugs, alcohol, or other chemicals by students/staff
4. Possession/use of firearms, weapons, explosives, etc.
5. Medical situations requiring more than basic first aid, or those situations beyond the scope of the health services staff, or in the absence of the health services staff.
6. Parent issues requiring immediate attention. (Serious incidents or discussions requiring knowledge/expertise beyond evening staff's capabilities).
7. Guest housing issues requiring immediate attention (urgent needs such as lack of access to rooms or buildings; need for additional rooms or furnishings; etc.).
8. Emergencies (e.g., fire, power outage, weather, utilities failure).
9. Facility issues that require intervention (fire/trouble alarms, leaking roofs, keycard issues/building access, etc.).
10. Unauthorized person(s) on campus call 911.

11. Incidents involving suspected physical/sexual abuse or neglect.
12. An acting-out student (physically) when CPI or other interventions are not working or if staff on duty need assistance to manage or control the situation.
13. Staff person is suspected of being impaired or unable to perform work while on duty.
14. Community crisis (e.g., prison escape, hostage situations, shooting)

## **Harassment and Violence Policy #413**

To build a happy and productive workplace, we need everyone to treat others well and help them feel safe. Each of us should do our part to prevent harassment and workplace violence. This policy applies to all employees of MSA, and third parties who have business interactions with MSA.

Any form of harassment or discrimination based on protected class is strictly prohibited. Individuals who believe they have been subject to harassment or discrimination based on protected class or retaliation as described in this policy, are encouraged to file a report with an appropriate authority, as set forth in Section II of this policy.

Any form of retaliation directed against an individual who opposes, or reports protected class harassment or discrimination, or who participates in any investigation concerning protected class harassment or discrimination, is strictly prohibited, and will not be tolerated. Violations of this policy by MSA employees will be subject to discipline, up to and including discharge. Violations of this policy by third parties will be subject to appropriate action. Sexual harassment is specifically addressed by HR/LR Policy #1329 Sexual Harassment Prohibited.

### **Definitions and Terms**

Protected class harassment or harassment based on protected class: Unwelcome conduct or communication that is based on actual or perceived membership in a protected class, including stereotypes of protected classes, which has a negative effect or is likely to have a negative effect on the complainant and/or on the workplace or public service environment.

Protected classes under this policy are as follows: Race, Color, Creed, Religion, National origin, Sex (includes pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions), Marital status, Familial status, Receipt of public assistance, Membership or activity in a local human rights commission, Disability, Age, Sexual orientation, Gender identity, Gender expression for employees, and genetic information.

Protected class harassment and discrimination may take different forms including verbal, nonverbal, and/or or physical conduct or communication. Conduct based on

protected class may violate this policy even if it is not intended to be harassing. Protected class harassment and discrimination under this policy includes, but is not limited to, the following behavior when it is based on actual or perceived membership in a protected class, including stereotypes of protected classes:

- Offensive jokes, slurs, derogatory remarks, epithets, name-calling, ridicule or mockery, insults, or put-downs
- Display or use of offensive objects, drawings, pictures, or gestures.
- Physical assaults or threats
- Inappropriate touching of body, clothing, or personal property
- Following, stalking, intimidation
- Malicious interference with work performance
- Implicit or explicit preferential treatment or promises of preferential treatment for submitting to the conduct or communication.
- Implicit or explicit negative treatment or threats of negative treatment for refusing to submit to the conduct or communication.
- Discriminatory conduct based on an individual's actual or perceived protected class that segregates, separates, limits, or restricts the individual from employment opportunities, including, but not limited to, hiring, promotion, compensation, disciplinary action, assignment of job duties, benefits, or privileges of employment.

Sexual harassment is illegal, and we will investigate relevant reports. If an employee is found guilty of sexual harassment, they will be terminated.

Employees and third parties are strongly encouraged to report all incidents of protected class harassment and discrimination, whether the individual is the recipient of the behavior, an observer, or is otherwise aware of the behavior. Individuals are encouraged to report incidents as soon as possible after the incident occurs. Individuals may report to any of the following:

- a. Any of the agency's managers or supervisors
- b. The agency's affirmative action officer
- c. The agency's human resources office
- d. MSA management, up to and including the Superintendent.

If the report concerns a MSA Management personnel, the complainant may contact Minnesota Management and Budget's Office of Equal Opportunity, Diversity, and Inclusion or the MSA Board.

To ensure the prompt and thorough investigation of a report, the complainant may be asked to provide information in writing, which may include, but is not limited to:



- a. The name, department, and position of the person(s) allegedly causing the harassment or discrimination.
- b. A description of the incident(s), including the date(s), location(s), and the identity of any witnesses.
- c. The name(s) of other individuals who may have been subject to similar harassment or discrimination.
- d. What, if any, steps have been taken to stop the harassment or discrimination
- e. Any other information the complainant believes to be relevant.

Individuals are encouraged to use MSA's internal complaint procedure but may also choose to file a complaint externally with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR), or other legal channels.

## **Workplace violence**

Violence in our workplace is a serious form of harassment. It includes physical and sexual assault, destruction of property, threats to harm a person or property and verbal and psychological abuse. We want to avoid those incidents altogether, but we also want to be ready to respond if needed.

For this reason, we ask you to:

- Report to HR if you suspect or know that someone is being violent. Your report will be confidential, and we will investigate the situation with discretion.
- If you witness incidents of severe physical violence (e.g., ones that involve a lethal weapon.), for your safety, avoid getting involved. Immediately report the incident to your supervisor or the nearest administrator.

We will treat employees who verbally threaten others as high risk and they will receive appropriate discipline. If HR finds that an employee committed an act of violence, we will terminate that employee and possibly press criminal charges.

### **Get help early on**

Seek help from others early on to mitigate conflicts. For example:

- If you experience conflicts with a colleague, ask your manager for advice before tensions escalate. If these conflicts persist, ask HR whether you could attend conflict resolution seminars with your colleague.
- If you are experiencing personal or work troubles, ask for help from a mental health professional. Check with your insurance provider to determine whether

they cover any mental health services or ask HR for information on our Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Your discussions will remain confidential.

Our workplace is founded on mutual respect, and we will not allow anyone to compromise this foundation.

## **Respectful Workplace Policy #445**

The purpose of this policy is to build and maintain a workplace that is respectful and professional toward all employees, volunteers, contractors, and other persons visiting the workplace and public service environment at the Minnesota State Academies (MSA).

It is the Minnesota State Academies' policy to provide a positive environment in which all staff, members of the public and others doing business with the state are treated with professionalism and respect. Employees at MSA are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes this environment. Respect for others is fundamental to working in an effective, efficient, and innovative manner. Therefore, it is the intent of MSA to ensure a respectful workplace and public service environment free of disrespectful or unprofessional communications/behavior and provide an effective and no retaliatory problem-solving process that addresses concern regarding respectful or professional communications and/or behavior.

This policy applies to all employees of Minnesota State Academies. It also applies to non-status employees and non-employees such as volunteers and contractors.

Disrespectful and/or unprofessional behavior may or may not be intentional. Unintentionally disrespectful and/or unprofessional behavior may still violate this policy. Examples of disrespectful and/or unprofessional behavior include but are not limited to:

- Exhibiting aggressive behaviors including shouting, abusive language, threats of violence, the use of obscenities, and/or other non-verbal expressions of aggression.
- Behavior that a reasonable person would find to be demeaning, humiliating, or bullying.
- Deliberately destroying, damaging, or obstructing someone's work performance, work product, tools, or materials; and/or D. Use of this policy and procedure to make knowingly false complaint(s).

### ***Examples of bullying:***

- Sabotaging someone's work on purpose.
- Starting or spreading rumors about a person.
- Mean behavior towards a person.

## **Tobacco Free Environment (Smoking) – Policy 419**

There is absolutely no smoking, vaping, or tobacco use on either campus. Employees must go off campus to smoke during designated break times approved by their supervisor.

## **Alcohol and Drug-free workplace – Policy 418.1**

The Minnesota State Academies is a drug-free workplace. Whether you are an employee, contractor, or visitor, you must not bring, use, give away, or sell any drugs on either campus, including during any school-sponsored trips. If you are caught with illegal drugs or show that you are under the influence of illegal substances, we will not tolerate substance addiction that results in violent, offensive, or inappropriate behavior, you will face disciplinary action up to and including termination.

### **Prescription drugs**

If you need to use prescription drugs for a limited time and you think they may impair your abilities to do your job, we advise you to talk to your supervisor as you may be eligible to use family medical leave.

## **Employee Code of Conduct (Policy #455)**

As an employee at the Minnesota State Academies, all policies mentioned above apply to you. We have some additional expectations about your behavior at work, which we outline here. We cannot cover every single case of conduct, but we trust you to always use your best judgement. Reach out to your supervisor or HR if you face any issues or have any questions.

## **Teleworking.**

Our temporary teleworking policy (MSA Policy#456) applies only to certain MSA employees identified by the MSA superintendent as eligible for temporary teleworking. Employees who provide direct services to students as well as those whose services cannot be provided by teleworking (i.e., physical plant staff; food services staff) are generally not eligible for teleworking under this policy.

In some situations, temporary teleworking arrangements can be made. Situations in which temporary teleworking arrangements might be made are as follows:

- 1) School Closures due to snow, extreme cold, or other weather conditions.
- 2) Poor road conditions preventing normal commute to work.

- 3) Unique needs due to scheduling or travel arrangements.
- 4) Unique situations requiring specific accommodations that are only available in alternate locations.
- 5) Incident requiring implementation of MSA's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) or Crisis Implementation Plan.

Identified employees will be notified by the Superintendent's office and required to complete a teleworking agreement, outlining the understanding between MSA and the employee regarding work expectations and conditions prior to any telework. The plan is not a contract and can be changed or canceled at any time at the discretion of MSA.

(The above information is an excerpt from the full policy – employees should read the full policy to understand teleworking in full).

***Individuals who desire a more permanent teleworking arrangement should consult with their supervisor and if approved, request a teleworking arrangement through the superintendent's office. (MMB HR/LR Policy #1422)***

## **Inclement Weather (Policy #625)**

Since the Minnesota State Academies are not fully subject to weather emergencies declared by the Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) office, especially when students are campus, determinations regarding student coverage, program needs, and staffing expectations are determined on a case-by-case basis. MSA provides continuous operations and are specifically exempt from declared weather emergencies. The superintendent and/or the on-call supervisor are responsible for making those determinations and communicating decisions with students, staff, and families, following procedures set forth in MSA Policy# 806 – Crisis Management. If the superintendent and/or the on-call supervisor determines that it is necessary to close school, following weather emergencies declared by the MMB and/or the governor, necessary arrangements will be made as outlined below.

### **EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 1) Employees scheduled for work are responsible to provide their own transportation to/from work and are responsible to make a reasonable and prudent effort to arrive at their job site on time for their shift.
- 2) Employees who are unable to report for work or may arrive late due to severe weather conditions should use the usual call-in procedure and may request vacation leave, use of compensatory time, or unpaid leave. It is up to supervisors' discretion to approve or deny leave requests.

- 3) When a determination of severe weather conditions has been made by the superintendent, meals and sleeping accommodations for employees who may not be able to make it home after their work shifts may be authorized.
- 4) Employees reporting for work as scheduled shall report to their regularly scheduled area but may be reassigned to conduct priority functions.
- 5) In the event of staff shortages, employees may be required to remain on duty until adequate staffing is available.
- 6) Employees are expected to remain on duty during scheduled work shifts unless specifically excused by the school administration and may be required to remain on duty past scheduled shifts until adequate staff is available.
- 7) Staff are responsible to ensure students who travel outdoors in winter weather are dressed appropriately for existing conditions.

### **SCHOOL CLOSINGS**

As weather conditions vary greatly across the state of Minnesota, school districts or bus companies transporting students to MSA are responsible for making decisions regarding safe travel to Faribault. The on-call supervisor will inform appropriate employees of changes in student's travel plans. In the case of a significant decrease in students returning to MSA, the on-call supervisor will collaborate with supervisors to adjust staffing levels to reflect the needs of students. Every attempt will be made to contact staff prior to their reporting to work.

If inclement weather conditions exist in Faribault on a day that students are scheduled to return, the superintendent may close the Academies until safe weather conditions return. If the Superintendent is unavailable, the on-call person will be solely responsible for the closure decision. In case of school closure, announcements will be made on WCCO radio and TV. Announcements may also be shared on the MSA websites and Facebook pages and/or parent/employee notification systems utilized by MSA. Once a decision is made to close, the on-call supervisor is responsible for ensuring bus companies and parents are contacted and notified of the closure. The on-call supervisor may utilize employees and supervisors to assist with this process.

In case of school closure, employees will also be notified. Essential employees necessary to maintain the safety and essential functions of the campuses will continue to be scheduled to work. (The work may be performed on campus or at alternate work sites as approved through MSA Policy #456 – Temporary Teleworking). Non-essential employees will not be scheduled to work and may request vacation leave, use of compensatory time, or unpaid leave for use during days when school is closed. If applicable, employees may be authorized for emergency pay as approved by the MMB in extreme weather incidents. The superintendent and/or the on-call supervisor will determine who are essential employees in the event of school closures and will communicate directly with those employees.

## **STUDENT SAFETY AT MSA**

Every effort will be made to ensure student safety during inclement weather while students are attending school. If it becomes necessary for students to travel outdoors, appropriate clothing will be monitored along with close supervision of students to ensure safety. As appropriate, busing will be provided to transport students between buildings (i.e., sub-zero weather, high wind chill factors). Transportation between the MSAB/MSAD campuses may be canceled if students cannot be transported safely on city streets. Campus directors will communicate any schedule changes with parents as appropriate.

# **COMPENSATION & DEVELOPMENT**

In this section, we outline our guidelines for compensating employees according to their employment status. We also describe our performance management and employee development policies.

## **Compensation Status**

There are two types of employees under FLSA guidelines:

- **Non-exempt employees**, who are covered by the FLSA's minimum wage and overtime provisions.
- **Exempt employees**, who are not covered by the FLSA because they meet three exemption criteria: (a) they are paid at least \$455 per week, (b) they are paid on a salary basis, and (c) they perform exempt job duties ("executive," "professional" and "administrative.") Most employees must meet all three criteria to be exempt.

If you are unsure as to whether you should be exempt or not, please ask HR to clarify your status.

## **Payroll**

We pay your salary or wages every other Friday through direct deposit into your specified bank account. If you close your bank account, you need to notify payroll at x6607. If you wish to have your paycheck deposited into a new account, simply make those adjustments in your self-service payroll site. If you need assistance with that process, notify payroll (see the appendix section for payroll codes and tips for time entry).

## Performance management

We have built our performance management practices to:

- Ensure you understand your job responsibilities and have specific goals to meet.
- Provide you with actionable and timely feedback on your work.
- Invest in development opportunities that help you grow professionally.
- Recognize and reward your work in financial or non-financial ways (e.g., employee awards.)

To meet these objectives, we have:

- Established performance reviews which can be conducted quarterly, semi-yearly, or yearly. During these reviews, your supervisors/manager will fill out your performance evaluation report and arrange a meeting with you to discuss it. Through these discussions, managers aim to recognize employees who are good at their jobs and identify areas of improvement. There will not be any forced ranking or other comparison between employees as our goal is to help all employees improve and develop their careers.
- Instructed all supervisors/managers to meet with those they supervise individually or as a team frequently throughout the year to provide feedback and talk about their work and motivations. This way, you can receive feedback in a timely manner and avoid surprises during your annual performance review.

## How we expect supervisors/directors to lead employees

If you manage a team, you are responsible for your team members' performance. To conduct effective regular meetings and performance evaluations, we expect supervisors to:

- **Set clear objectives.** Your team members should know what you expect of them. When you first hire someone to your team, ensure they understand their job duties and that they have received a position description. Set specific goals for each team member (and team-wide if applicable.) Revisit those goals during annual/bi-annual/quarterly performance reviews.
- **Provide useful feedback.** During scheduled meetings with your team members, give them both guidance and praise, as appropriate. Be fair and specific to help them understand and implement your feedback.
- **Keep your team members involved.** There should be two-way communication between you and your team. Make your expectations clear, but always take your team members' motivations and aspirations into account. Discuss training and development opportunities that may interest your team members.

- **Keep logs with important incidents about each one of your team members.**  
These logs help you evaluate your team, but may also prove useful when rewarding, promoting, disciplining, or terminating your team members.

## **Employee training and development**

We owe our success to our employees. We want employees to feel confident about improving their efficiency and productivity. We also want to help our employees achieve personal growth and success. Development is a collective process. Team members and managers should regularly discuss learning needs and opportunities.



# BENEFITS

In this section, we describe what we offer to our employees.

## Health/dental/optional Insurance

Employee health is important to us. We do not discriminate against people with disabilities or health conditions, but we want to do everything possible to help employees stay healthy. For more information about our insurance package, contact HR. The State of MN offers health, dental, life, vision, short-term disability, and long-term disability.

According to the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), you may choose to continue your group health benefits for a limited period after leaving MSA. This can happen after you experience a qualifying event, i.e., termination for reasons other than gross misconduct and reduction in your hours of employment. Covered spouses and children may also be able to extend their health coverage after certain qualifying events. You will receive information in the mail from SEGIP (State Employee Group Insurance Program).

## Wellness at MSA

MSA promotes employee health and wellness. The MSA Wellness committee meets several times throughout the year to create and organization health wellness activities for our employees. We encourage our employees to submit wellness activity suggestions through our suggestion email box at [MSAsuggestionbox@msa.state.mn.us](mailto:MSAsuggestionbox@msa.state.mn.us)

## Summer Balloon Deduction

The Employee Benefits Division of Minnesota Management & Budget (MMB) uses an insurance balloon deduction process for employees who do not work during part or all of the summer months. The insurance balloon deduction process allows these employees to continue to receive health, dental and optional insurance coverage during the summer when they are not working.

The balloon deduction covers the months of April through August and consists of approximately ten pay periods. This means employees can calculate the total cost of their balloon deduction by multiplying their bi-weekly cost of health, dental and optional insurance coverage by ten or eleven. Employees can find their bi-weekly cost of insurance by viewing a previous paystub. Balloon deduction amounts will vary among employees since it is based on the insurance coverage selected by an employee.

The summer balloon process does not include any flexible spending accounts or long-term care accounts. Employees will be billed from CNA for their long-term care accounts. Employees' Medical Dental Expense Account (MDEA) deductions will stop but coverage will remain active.

## **Workers' compensation**

We strive to keep our workplace safe, but accidents may happen occasionally. Employees who are injured at work can receive wage replacement, medical care, and rehabilitation benefits according to workers' compensation laws, when appropriate. Please inform your supervisor of your injury as soon as possible and fill out a first injury report.

## **Employee Expense Reimbursements**

There are some expenses that we will pay directly on your behalf (e.g., hotel rooms for work-related travel.) But we ask you to keep track and report on those reimbursable expenses that you pay yourself. We reimburse employee expenses that are related to:

- Business travel
- Education and trainings with pre-approval.
- Meals

Not all travel expenses are reimbursable. For example, we will pay for your transportation to an airport for work-related travel, but not to a museum for a personal visit. Before traveling for business, contact fiscal services to clarify which expenses are reimbursable within your particular trip.

Please keep receipts for all reimbursable expenses, no alcohol should be listed on the receipt as there is no reimbursement for alcoholic beverages. You can submit the reimbursement form to fiscal services on the approved reimbursement form found in the staff portal on MSA's website.

## **MSA Car Use**

You may use an MSA car if you:

- Need it as an indispensable part of your job.
- Need it to conduct business for MSA or to transport students/others to MSA-related activities/events.

Either way, the car belongs to MSA. To use the car, you should have a valid driver's license and if you transport students as part of your job duties you must pass the Type

Ill course. You must also complete the Driver's Licenses Vehicle Use Agreement located in your self-service payroll site.

On our part, we will ensure that our cars are safe and in good condition as well as appropriately insured.

### **Accidents**

If you are involved in an accident, contact local law enforcement and then our HR department immediately.

### **MSA-Issued equipment**

Certain employees may receive a cell phone, laptop, or other device. Any equipment we offer belongs to MSA and you may not sell it or give it away. You are also responsible for keeping our equipment safe and in as good condition as possible. If your equipment breaks or malfunctions, let us know so we can arrange to get it repaired.

### **Security of issued devices**

We advise you to keep your issued computer, tablet, and cell phone secure. You can do this if you:

- Keep all devices password protected.
- Ensure you do not leave your devices unattended.
- Install security updates for browsers and other systems as soon as updates are available.
- Log into MSA accounts and systems through secure and private networks only.

### **College Student Loan Tuition reimbursement**

Did you know that as a state employee you are eligible for the Minnesota Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program visit this site to help you through the process <https://myfedloan.org/borrowers/forgiveness-discharge/>

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program is a federal program that forgives federal student loans for borrowers who are employed full-time (more than 30 hours per week) in an eligible federal, state, or local public service job or 501(c)(3) non-profit job who make 120 eligible on-time payments.

### **Special forgiveness loan programs for teachers**

Elementary and secondary school teachers who teach in high-needs school districts (those serving low-income families) may qualify for student loan forgiveness after five

years. The borrower must have taught full-time for five consecutive academic years at a qualifying school. Teachers who began their service after Oct. 30, 2004, may have up to \$5,000 of loan debt discharged. Highly qualified science, math and special education teachers may have up to \$17,500 discharged. Borrowers may search the Department of Education's database of qualifying schools to determine if they are eligible for teacher loan forgiveness.

## **WORKING HOURS AND PAID TIME-OFF INFORMATION**

In this section, we explain our provisions for your working hours and time off.

### **Holidays**

MSA observes the following holidays; however, please refer to your bargaining contract for a list of days that may not be listed here.

- *New Year's Day*
- *Martin Luther King Jr Day*
- *President's Day*
- *Memorial Day*
- *Juneteenth (check your bargaining contract/plan to verify)*
- *Independence Day*
- *Labor Day*
- *Veterans Day*
- *Thanksgiving Day*
- *Day after Thanksgiving Day*
- *Christmas Day*

If a holiday falls on a day when MSA does not operate (e.g., Saturday), we will observe that holiday on the closest business day, refer to the school calendar for those observed dates. MSA offers a floating day, which you can request off as a holiday any day you choose. It must be used by the end of each fiscal year (on or before June 30).

#### **1) Working on a holiday**

Refer to your bargaining contract for your rights and pay when working on a holiday.

### **Sick Leave and Vacation Leave**

Under your bargaining contract, you will find your accrual leave rate for each benefit. If you become sick, inform your supervisor as soon as possible, following established

procedures. Enter in your time entry SIK and place in the comments if it is for yourself, child, or family member covered under your bargaining agreement. For vacation in time entry, you do not need any comments. For leaves that are planned in advance, you must request the leave using the MSA leave request form (MSA website - staff portal). It is encouraged to make sure your leave is approved prior to making any travel plans or arrangements. Refer to your bargaining agreement for timelines regarding your vacation requests.

Occasionally, we may ask you to submit a physician's note for sick leave requests.

## **Family Medical Leave**

The U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act provides employees 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period with the same group health benefits for medical and family reasons. One of those reasons is to recover from a serious health condition or to care for an immediate family member with a serious health condition.

**Eligibility:** You must qualify for this leave by having worked at MSA for more than 12 months and have worked at least 1,250 hours within 12 months before your leave begins.

**What Employees Must Do:** As soon as you know you may be eligible to use this leave contact HR. Payroll will run a report to ensure you are eligible and for the correct form you will need to take to your doctor. A Doctor must fill out the form and return it via fax to HR.

## **Jury duty**

This is a paid leave - refer to your position's bargaining unit for jury duty leave; court appearance leave; and/or election judge leave.

## **Parental leave (PPL)**

Caring for a newborn is an exciting time for parents. We want to support new mothers and fathers in their first months of parenthood with paternity and maternity leave. If you are about to be a new mother or father (either through childbirth or adoption), talk to HR to arrange your leave. Please give us at least 30-day notice before your leave begins.

**Length of Leave:** Six (6) consecutive weeks to those who meet eligibility.

**Eligibility:** Employees are eligible if they meet eligibility for FMLA leave.

**Use:** Eligible employees must complete PPL within six (6) months of the qualifying event. At the Appointing Authority's discretion, employees may be allowed intermittent

or reduced schedule use of leave, which must be completed within 12 months of the qualifying event. PPL not used will not be carried over or cashed out. It will run concurrently with any unpaid leave(s) and employees shall not receive other types of paid leave (e.g., sick, vacation, compensatory time) for hours for which they are receiving PPL.

## **Voting Time Leave**

In accord with M.S. 204C.04 for employees eligible to vote in a state primary election, a presidential primary election, a state general election, an election to fill a vacancy in the US Congress, or in the office of the state senator or state representative provided that the leave is for a period of time long enough to vote during election day. It is encouraged that employees coordinate times with their supervisor to ensure coverage of essential duties during the shift.

# LEAVING MSA

In this section, we describe our procedures regarding retiring, resigning, or termination for our employees. We also refer to our progressive discipline process that may sometimes result in termination.

## Retirement

When you plan to retire, there are several steps you need to take, and the first step is to attend the State's Retirement Seminar five years or less prior to your anticipated retirement date. MSA follows MMB's guidelines for employees attending the State's retirement seminar (see below).

The second step is to provide HR (Kerry or Bridget) with your notice of intent to retire and we would appreciate it if you would contact us by April 1 for retirements occurring in at the end of the school year and August 1<sup>st</sup> for fall retirements, or at the very least, 30 days prior to your intended last day of work. HR will then be in contact with you to setup a meeting to do the paperwork needed prior to retiring.

### Retirement Seminar Guidelines

The State of Minnesota offers opportunities for employees to attend Retirement Seminars. Below is guidance on employee's eligibility to attend the Retirement Seminars along with how an employee should be compensated when attending one of the seminars listed below. If you have questions, please contact Kerry or Bridget in the HR office.

Enterprise Talent Development (ETD) offers the following retirement seminars:

- State Retirement Seminar (Less than 5 years until Retirement)

This seminar is designed for state employees within five years of retirement and for those who advise potential retirees. Many factors can help ensure a successful retirement. Discover retirement tools, which can help, estimate your pension and social security benefits. Information is also provided regarding the health care savings plan, state insurance benefits, state and federal tax changes, estate planning and deferred compensation benefits. This is a 2-day training. NOTE: An employee is encouraged to attend the MSA seminars but are eligible to attend this seminar with supervisor approval. An employee is eligible to attend the State Retirement Seminar one time during employment at either MSA or Enterprise Talent Development (ETD), within 5 years of retirement. If an employee requests to attend the seminar more than one time, a request must be made to their supervisor and approved by the Appointing Authority. Employee is eligible to be in paid status during the seminar. Hours paid while at the

seminar will not exceed the number of hours in a regularly scheduled workday. MSA employees are not allowed to flex their time; they will not be allowed to go in to work and work off the difference. Employee is not eligible for travel time, hotel expenses, overtime, meal reimbursement, mileage reimbursement or the use of a state vehicle.

- Pre-Planning for Retirement Seminar (More than 5 years until Retirement)

Pre-planning is essential. Whether you are five years or thirty years away from retirement, this seminar will provide valuable insight for planning your retirement and provide you the tools to protect your future. Determine if you are planning well enough for your retirement or if you will need to work longer than you expected. Analyze your unique retirement situation to successfully navigate your future with the proper preparation now. This is a 1.5-day training. NOTE: An employee is encouraged to attend the MSA seminars but are eligible to attend this seminar with supervisor approval. An employee is eligible to attend the preparing for retirement seminar one time during employment at either MSA or Enterprise Talent Development (ETD), with a projected retirement date of 5+ years from now. If an employee requests to attend the seminar more than one time, a request must be made to their supervisor and approved by the Appointing Authority. Employee is eligible to be in paid status during the seminar. Hours paid while at the seminar will not exceed the number of hours in a regularly scheduled workday. Corrections Officers are not allowed to flex their time; they will not be allowed to go in to work and work off the difference. Employee is not eligible for travel time, hotel expenses, overtime, meal reimbursement, mileage reimbursement or the use of a state vehicle.

MN State Retirement (MSRS) offers the following retirement seminar:

- Pre-Retirement Seminar

Free half-day seminar for those within five years of retirement. Topics: State Pension Plans, Social Security, MNDCP & HCSP. NOTE: An employee is eligible to attend the Pre-Retirement Seminar one time during employment, within 5 years of retirement. If an employee requests to attend the seminar more than one time, a request must be made to their supervisor and approved by the Appointing Authority. Employee is eligible to use vacation leave for the seminar. Employee is not eligible for travel time, hotel expenses, overtime, meal reimbursement, mileage reimbursement or the use of a state vehicle.

## **Resignation**

You resign when you voluntarily inform your supervisor and HR (Kerry or Bridget) by providing a written notice to resign as soon as you know you will no longer work for MSA. We prefer a written notice of your intent to resign which provides us with your last



day of work date (via email is fine), Send it to your Supervisor and HR (Kerry or Bridget). HR will meet with you to discuss your benefits going forward and for your exit interview.

You are not obliged to give us advance notice before resigning. But, for efficiency's sake, and to make sure our workplace runs smoothly, we ask that you give at least a two-week notice, if possible.

## **Progressive discipline**

Here we outline steps we will take to address employee misconduct. We want to give employees a chance to correct their behavior when possible and assist them in doing so. We also want to ensure that we thoroughly investigate and handle serious offenses.

Our progressive discipline process has six steps of increasing severity. These steps are:

1. Verbal Reprimand
2. Written Reprimand
3. Paid or Unpaid Suspension
4. Vacation Deduction
5. Demotion
6. Discharge

Different offenses correspond to different steps in our disciplinary process. Some incidents may warrant immediate discharge.

If you supervise employees, contact HR to assist you with the progressive discipline process. Remember each bargaining contract language regarding progressive discipline will need to be followed at all times.

Note: When a supervisor points out a performance issue, it is not necessarily a verbal warning and may be part of regular feedback.

Note: Keep in mind that we are not obliged to follow the steps of our progressive discipline process. Supervisors may skip or repeat steps at their discretion. Supervisors may treat circumstances differently from that described in this policy. However, we are always obliged to act fairly and lawfully and document every stage of our progressive discipline process. Depending on the severity of the violation we may terminate you directly without launching a progressive discipline process. For serious offenses we may terminate you without warning.

# HANDBOOK REVISIONS/UPDATES

We will always strive for fairness, equal opportunity, and penalize offensive and illegal behaviors. But, as laws, bargaining contract language, and our environment changes, we may revise and modify some of our policies.

We have established an annual revision of our handbook to bring it up to date with legislation and employment trends. We also ask you to contact HR if you spot any inconsistencies or mistakes. And, if you have any ideas about how to improve our workplace, we are happy to hear them.

Created: September 2019

Updated: November 2021

Updated: July 2022

Updated: July 2023

# EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Please sign to acknowledge that you have received and read this handbook and that you are committed to following our policies. Print and return this form (email or interoffice mail) to any HR staff person. If you need any clarifications, feel free to ask HR or your Supervisor.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Employee Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Employee Name