Mat-Su Day School
Student Handbook

Preparing Our Students for Positive Educational Opportunities

2025-2026

2360 N. Tait Drive
Wasilla, AK 99654
Phone – (907) 864-6000
Website – http://matsuk12.us/mds

Dear MDS students, parents, and guardians,

Welcome to the Mat-Su Day School (MDS)! Our kindergarten through twelfth grade school is a great place to learn and to grow, and we encourage each student to take full advantage of classroom and activity learning opportunities. Our students learn the characteristics of a productive community member: being Safe, Respectful, and Responsible!

This MDS handbook clarifies policies and procedures pertaining to student life. It is the responsibility of each student and guardian to read, understand, and abide by the rules and regulations set forth in his handbook and the Student Rights and Responsibilities section of the MSBSD Board Policies.

Please let me know if you have questions and have a fantastic year!

Sincerely,

Mr. Josh Wilhelm – Principal

Joshua.wilhelm@matsuk12.us

Philosophy

The Mat-Su Day School Behavior Support Program is grounded in the belief that all students can and want to be successful. Success breeds success, and the needs and best interests of students must drive all decisions. All stakeholders' participation is crucial to student success.

Mission Statement

The Mat-Su Day School is an alternative transitional school that offers behavioral, social, and emotional learning with an emphasis on academics for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Our mission is to prepare students to reach their maximum potential within their boundary school.

Positive Action Statement

You feel good about yourself when you do positive actions

AND

There is a positive way to do everything.

OVERVIEW

Mat-Su Day School (MDS) is a Tier 3, highly structured special education setting designed to support students with emotional and behavioral goals as outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Placement at MDS is a collaborative decision made by the IEP team after a comprehensive review of a student's behavioral data. This placement is made when the IEP team determines that MDS represents the student's Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and provides the most effective pathway for educational success.

At the core of MDS's mission is the development of long-term academic and behavioral success. Students participate in a structured and supportive program that emphasizes emotional regulation, behavioral growth, and positive social interactions. The overarching goal is to prepare students for a successful transition back to their boundary school when appropriate.

MDS implements the NEEDS-SEB Model: 3-Tiered Support System, developed by Dr. Clayton R. Cook and Dianna Browning Wright, M.S., LEP, as the foundation of its behavioral support framework. (see p. 8). An addition to many interventions, this model incorporates a points and levels system that uses real-time behavioral data to guide IEP team decisions. Students move between levels based on behavioral choices, allowing for individualized and responsive support.

Our school culture is grounded in the principles of safety, respect, and responsibility. We foster strong relationships between students and staff, maintain small class sizes, offer targeted support through additional personnel, and promote consistent collaboration with families and community partners. Staff engage in weekly data dialogues and professional development focused on evidence-based behavioral practices, with early-release Wednesdays dedicated to training and reflective collaboration.

In addition, MDS integrates the Character Strong Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum, also developed by Dr. Cook. Through daily SEL instruction during homeroom, students build emotional intelligence, strengthen self-regulation skills, and contribute to a positive school climate.

MDS implements both general and special education curricula approved by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD), ensuring students remain aligned with the academic expectations of their boundary schools. At the high school level, the Academy of Blended Learning Education (ABLE) program offers flexible, individualized instruction tailored to each student's learning needs.

MDS staff are trained and certified in the relational, conceptual, and technical components of the MANDT System—MSBSD's designated, relationship-centered program focused on the prevention, de-escalation, and safe response to challenging behaviors. This training supports a culture in which every individual feels emotionally, psychologically, and physically safe. https://www.mandtsystem.com/

School Hours of Operation:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday
- 8:00am – 2:30pm

Wednesday
- 8:00am – 1:30pm

Transportation

Students enrolled at MDS are eligible for special education transportation services. Buses arrive at school by 8:00 AM, and students transported by private vehicle are also expected to arrive at that time. Please note that supervision is not available prior to 8:00 AM.

Only Durham School Service buses or parent/guardian-approved drivers may transport students to and from school. Parents or guardians must notify school administration in advance regarding who is authorized to transport their child. Students are not permitted to drive themselves or arrange their own transportation.

Transportation-related inquiries (e.g., pick-up/drop-off times, rules, etc.) should be directed to **Durham School Services at (907) 885-3561.**

Arrival

Upon arrival at Mat-Su Day School, students will undergo routine safety screening that includes a visual inspection and the use of a handheld metal detector to ensure the safety and well-being of all students, staff, and visitors. Any contraband discovered during the screening will be confiscated, and appropriate disciplinary action may be taken in accordance with school board policy.

Attendance

Regular school attendance is a critical factor in student success. Parents, students, and staff are encouraged to work collaboratively to support consistent attendance. Students are responsible for coordinating with their teachers to make up missed assignments or classwork.

To report an absence:

- Use **ParentVUE**
- Or call the front office at **(907) 864-6000**

If your student will not be riding the bus on a given day, please also contact Durham School Services. If transportation goes unused for three consecutive days without notification, service may be suspended.

School Supplies

All necessary school supplies are provided by MDS. Students are not allowed to bring personal school materials from home.

Dress Code

MDS adheres to the MSBSD dress code (BP 5144.1) with additional guidelines that reflect the school's focus on safety, professionalism, and workplace readiness. Students are expected to dress in a manner consistent with community and professional standards.

Dress Code Guidelines:

1. Shirts must have sleeves (short or long) and extend to the waistband when standing (no tank tops or crop tops unless properly layered).
2. Head coverings (hats, bandanas, headbands, etc.) are not permitted indoors and must be stored in lockers.
3. Sagging pants are not allowed.
4. Bulky or heavy coats must be placed in lockers upon arrival.
5. Closed-toe shoes are required at all times; steel-toe boots are not allowed.
6. Bandanas are prohibited on school grounds, including as accessories.
7. Clothing must be opaque and not reveal undergarments.
8. Pajamas, lounge-wear, or sleepwear are not permitted.
9. Jewelry must be minimal—only small stud piercings are allowed; no spike, loop, or dangling accessories.
10. Chains (necklaces, bracelets, belts, etc.) of any size are not allowed. (Non-chained belts may be approved on a case-by-case basis).
11. Nail extensions are not permitted.

While students have the right to personal expression, attire must not pose safety risks or interfere with the educational process. Failure to comply with dress code expectations may result in disciplinary action.

Meals

Breakfast and lunch service are available at MDS. Students may bring their own lunch, which must be submitted to their homeroom teacher upon arrival and will be returned at lunchtime.

Please Note:

- Glass, ceramic, and metal containers are not permitted.
- Silverware from home is not allowed; MDS will provide appropriate utensils as needed.

Families are encouraged to apply for the **free or reduced-price meals program** through MSBSD.

- https://www.matsuk12.us/business-departments/nutrition-services/free-reduced-application

Drinks and Liquids

Water, milk, and occasionally juice are provided throughout the school day. Students are **not permitted to bring any liquids** from home. Any such items brought to school will be discarded before the student proceeds past the locker bank.

Electronic Devices

All personal electronic devices must be turned off and stored in student lockers during school hours. If a student fails to comply, the device will be confiscated and held in the office until a parent or guardian retrieves it.

MDS is not responsible for the loss, theft, or damage of personal devices.

In alignment with MSBSD Board Policy 5131.02, the use of cell phones and smartwatches is prohibited during school hours, including in classrooms, hallways, the lunchroom, and during recess.

Closed Campus Policy

MDS maintains a closed campus. Once students arrive, they are expected to remain within school boundaries for the duration of the school day. Leaving campus without permission is considered elopement and will result in disciplinary consequences.

MEDICATION

Prescription Medications:
Parents or guardians must bring prescription medications to the school in the original pharmacy-labeled container. The label must include the pharmacy's name and phone number, the prescribing doctor's name, the student's name, the medication name and dosage, and specific instructions for administration.

Non-Prescription Medications:
The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District may assist in administering certain approved non-prescription medications for short-term use. These include:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)
- Calcium Antacids (Tums)
- Lactose Enzymes (Lactaid)
- Cough Drops
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)

Any other non-prescription medications require written authorization from a licensed healthcare provider.

All medications must be FDA-approved, in their original, unexpired containers, and clearly labeled with the medication name, dosage schedule, and student's name. Medications must be delivered to the school by a parent, guardian, or a designated adult representative.

Important Note:
According to MSBSD Board Policy 5144.1, students are not allowed to possess any over-the-counter medications (such as No-Doze, aspirin, vitamins, herbal supplements, or liquid cold remedies). This includes items stored in lockers, backpacks, or vehicles.

Medication must be considered necessary for maintaining or improving the students' health and for supporting their participation in the school day. Extended use of non-prescription medications for purposes beyond temporary relief of minor symptoms may require evaluation by the school nurse, medical advisor, and principal. Approval will depend on whether the benefit to the student outweighs any risks, including potential misuse or disruption to others.

NEEDS-SEB Model: 3 Tiered Support System

At Mat-Su Day School, we use the **NEEDS-SEB Model**—a needs-driven, equity-focused, and evidence-based approach—to support students with intensive social, emotional, and behavioral needs. This model promotes lasting growth and helps students transition back to less restrictive, inclusive school settings.

We implement proven strategies that focus on building positive relationships, reinforcing appropriate behavior, and maintaining clear expectations and consistent consequences. Our **three Stages of Support** provide a structured, yet flexible system tailored to each student's needs, fostering meaningful progress and long-term success.

Stage 1: Supports for ***ALL***	**Stage 2:** Additional supports for ***SOME*** Students who require more support than Stage 1 after 6 weeks of data collection.	**Stage 3:** Additional supports for a ***FEW*** students who require more support than Stage 1 & 2 after 6 weeks of data collection.
1) Establishing relationships 2) Physiology to Learn 3) Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports 4) Social Skills & Social Emotional Learning 5) Proactive Classroom Management Strategies 6) Good Behavior Game 7) Points & Levels System 8) Progressive system of responding to problem behavior 9) Effective Academic Instruction 10) Achievement Time/Honors Outings 11) Neutral Room/Think Space 12) School-Home, communication & collaboration 13) Daily grade level debriefs 14) Weekly schoolwide meetings 15) Self-Governance meetings	1) Behavior contracting 2) Check-In/Check-Out with Mentor-based support 3) Behavior skills training with Mentor 4) Self-monitoring (if needed)	1) Functional Behavior Assessment (Depending on team decision) 2) Behavioral Intervention Plans 3) Additional counseling (if needed)

Wright, D. B., & Cook, C. R. (2021). *Supporting students with intense social, emotional, and behavioral challenges: The NEEDS-SEB model*. LRP Publications.

SCHOOLWIDE EXPECTATIONS

Students and staff at the Mat-Su Day School are expected to engage in the behaviors detailed below to provide a safe learning environment for themselves, other students, and for staff. All classes adhere to and implement these rules, which are tied to the daily point and advancement system. These expectations are posted in all classrooms.

- **Be Safe**
    - Honor personal boundaries
    - Resolve conflicts with appropriate and socially acceptable words
    - Use coping skills to safely deescalate
- **Be Respectful**
    - Use kind words and actions
    - Build others up and make them feel heard and important
    - Golden Rule: Treat others how you want to be treated
- **Be Responsible**
    - Follow directions
    - Support the learning of others
    - Be actively engaged in the task at hand

In addition to being safe, respectful, and responsible, our goal is to "catch students being good." Students are recognized and rewarded for positive behavior. In the classroom, students can earn "bonus bucks" on their point sheets for positive behavior in addition to having the opportunity to earn 10 points each time block. Students also earn "bus bucks" while being transported to and from the Mat-Su Day School. These are turned in to their homeroom teacher daily and reflected as bonus bucks during the morning routine. These bonus bucks can be used at the student store to purchase items.

THE POINT SHEET SYSTEM

Each student's behavior is tracked using a point sheet during the school day. They are expected to be **Safe, Respectful, & Responsible** and can earn up to 10 points per time block which includes an individualized **Positive Action Goal** the student chooses. Students can also earn **bonus bucks** for above and beyond positive behaviors that promote a positive academic environment.

Safe	3 points
Respect	3 points
Responsible	3 points
Positive Action Goal	1 point (Individualized and can be earned if all other points are awarded and a positive attitude is shown)

Daily total:

- **Elementary**: 12 time blocks = 120 points
- **Secondary**: 10 time blocks = 100 points

The point sheet is reviewed with the student daily and sent home. Detailed notes of student behavior are included on the back.

Explanation of how points are earned in the Safe, Respectful, & Responsible categories during each time block:

- **3 points**:
  - A student earns 3 points when they display appropriate behavior with no staff interaction **or** correct their misbehavior with one reminder from staff.
- **2 points**:
  - A student earns 2 points when they display appropriate behavior after receiving an explicit prompt from staff in response to a misbehavior.
- **1 point**:
  - A student earns 1 point when a staff must label/explain the misbehavior and provide rationale for appropriate behavior. (Teaching Interaction).
- **0 points**:
  - A student will not earn any points if 2 or more teaching interactions are required in response to student misbehavior.

Safety Violations: Unsafe behaviors may result in Think Space and a level drop on the Advancement system. (see p. 14).

- **Note:** Depending on the severity of the student's behavior, steps may be skipped, or the behavior may result in suspension at the principal's discretion.

Achievement Time: Students who earn a minimum of 80% of their daily points are eligible to participate in Achievement Time, a structured incentive opportunity that may include activities such as open gym, games, or access to the student store.

- **Elementary Students** may earn Achievement Time twice daily: once before lunch and again prior to dismissal.
- **Secondary Students** may earn Achievement Time once daily, scheduled before dismissal.

Student Store: Students who earn Achievement Time are permitted to use their "bonus bucks" to purchase items in our student store before dismissal.

Neutral Room: Students who earn less than 80% of their daily points or those who misbehave during Achievement go to separate setting called Neutral Room (quiet time, no high-interest activities).

Breakfast/Lunch Conference: Disruptive behavior outside point blocks (e.g., buses, Neutral Room) may result in a conference with staff during breakfast or lunch. This time is spent away from peers and no points are earned.

Point Sheet Example

DAILY ACHIEVEMENT REPORT

Positive Action Goal:	Student's Name:
Engaged in Positive Actions	Today's Date:
	Level Placement:
SAFETY VIOLATION CODES	Guided Reflection:
Practice Time Behaviors	1. How was my day? 1 2 3 (circle 1=needs improvement, 2=satisfactory, 3=outstanding)
PA = Physical Aggression VA = Verbal Aggression E = Elopement UL = Unsafe Learning Environment	2. Coping skill I used today
	3. My favorite part of the day was

KEY: 3 =appropriate behavior and 1 reminder 2 = appropriate behavior with explicit prompt 1 = teaching interaction needed 0 = two or more teaching interaction P= Practice Time

MR= Morning Routine; bus behavior, entering building, conduct at lockers, breakfast, hallway behavior to home room. MR Bonus Bucks=Bus Bucks

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS	*MR*	AM HR/PA	1st	2nd	3rd	Lunch	4th	5th	6th	PM HR
Safe										
Respectful										
Responsible										
Positive Action Goal										
Safety Behavior Codes										
PERIOD BY PERIOD TOTAL — — — — — —										
Bonus Bucks Tally										
Bonus Bucks Total										

TOTAL PTS /	Daily %	Points Earned = (1 pt each % pt over 85)		Total Bonus =		Banked =	
Safe/Respectful/Responsible/ P.A. Sum	Honors Criterion = 85%			Bonus Points Total		Points Earned + Bonus	

Name:		Individualized Goal
Date:	Level:	
Safety Behavior Codes PA= Physical Aggression E= Elopement VA= Verbal Aggression UL= Unsafe Learning Environment		

KEY: 3= appropriate behavior and 1 reminder 2= appropriate behavior with explicit prompt 1= teaching interaction 0= two or more teaching interactions TS= Think SpaceTime

Morning Block

	SAFE	RESPECTFUL	RESPONSIBLE	INDIVIDUALIZED	BEHAVIOR	TOTAL
AM & Positive Action						
Math						
Literacy						
P.E.						
Writing						

AM Honors Check	Earned Points:	Total Points Possible: 50	Percentage:

Afternoon Block

	SAFE	RESPECTFUL	RESPONSIBLE	INDIVIDUALIZED	BEHAVIOR	TOTAL
Achievement Time #1						
Recess						
Lunch						
Math						

PM Honors Check	Earned Points:	Total Points Possible: 40	Percentage:

Final Block

	SAFE	RESPECTFUL	RESPONSIBLE	INDIVIDUALIZED	BEHAVIOR	TOTAL
Achievement Time #2						

Daily Point Summary	**Earned Points:**	**Total Points Possible: 100**	**Percentage:**	**Bonus Points:**

ADVANCEMENT SYSTEM

Students may transition to their boundary school after completing the Mat-Su Day School Advancement System. The requirements for moving through the weeks and levels are shown in the diagram on the next page. It is important to note that students will only advance to the next week or level if they earn the behavior percentage and complete the time required. Only a safety violation will result in a level drop to Week 1 of the previous level where the student was last successful.

- **Orientation**: All students will begin on Orientation. Students on Orientation are learning the rules, expectations, and choosing to make positive corrections to their behavior.

- **Apprentice**: Students who have advanced to an Apprentice are still working to handle difficult situations but demonstrate a willingness to keep trying. They are reflective and recognize that they have choices in handling themselves and others.

- **Mentor**: Students who have achieved Mentor status are role models in the school. They are respectful, take their education seriously, and assist others.

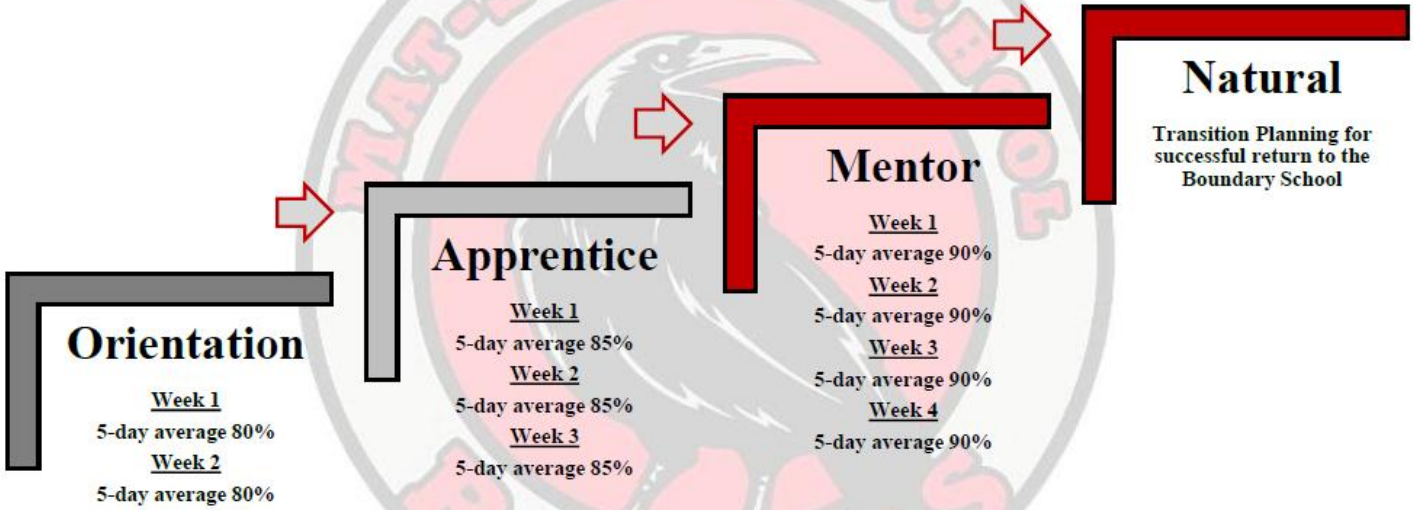
- **Natural**: After students have successfully completed "Mentor," they will transition to the "Natural" level. Preparations begin at this level to transition a student to their least restrictive environment. Students will no longer carry a point sheet, and they will be subject to "Natural" consequences. They will have access to all "Mentor" level privileges and may only go back to lower levels if a safety violation is committed.

Please note that boundary school and school year factors may play a role in transition times. Placement is an IEP team decision. The team will convene at the boundary school to review data, develop a plan, and amend placement.

Honors Outings: Students who are Apprentices and Mentors may earn the privilege of attending off campus Honors Outings. These are fun excursions in the community where our students can practice their social skills and appropriate behaviors in a community setting. When on an outing, students are expected to be role models representing the Mat-Su Day School.

Mentor Only Outings: Students on the Mentor and Natural levels may earn the privilege of attending "Mentor Only" outings. The same rules as Honors Outings apply.

Mat-Su Day School Advancement System



NO SAFETY VIOLATIONS

The 5 days that make up a week within the level system do not need to be consecutive.
Day 1 of Week 1 of a new level will begin a new average.
A successful 5-day average will rollover and be averaged into the first day of the new week within the same level.
An unsuccessful 5-day average will rollover and be averaged in the first day of a **repeat** week.
Once the required average on a repeat week is earned, an advancement to the next week or level will occur regardless of the day.
*** **ONLY A SAFETY VIOLATION** will result in a Level drop to Week 1 of the previous level..***

STUDENT SAFETY

Safety Violations: If a student exhibits any of the following Safety Violations, the student will immediately move to Week 1 of the previous level where the student was last successful. If a student is unable (or unwilling) to maintain appropriate behavior in the school setting, the Think Space Time is an opportunity where they can "practice" the conduct they need to exhibit to return to class. The following are the general definitions of Safety Violations.

Physical Aggression

- Physically aggressive toward school property or others.

Elopement

- Leaving the classroom, wing, building, or school property without permission. This also includes when a student refuses to go where they have been instructed to go.

Verbal Aggression

- Using words to make students or staff feel unsafe.

Unsafe Learning Environment

- Continual disruption of the classroom, beyond the interventions of staff using a systematic method of redirection, such that it becomes an unsafe environment, and the student has not earned any of their safety points as outlined on our School-wide Expectations on page 9.

Think Space Time: Think Space Time is assigned when students commit a Safety Violation. This restricts access to reinforcing activities and implements a task-based consequence, which will vary in length depending on the severity of the violation. Once the tasks are completed, students are welcomed back enthusiastically and begin receiving high rates of reinforcement for adhering to the rules.

If a student creates a mess or destroys property during a safety violation, they will need to clean up, mend, or repair whatever was affected. If repair cannot be completed by the student (for example: destruction of school computers, windows, etc.), the parent or guardian of the student may be billed for the repair cost of the item.

Students who have engaged in a safety violation that results in Think Space are not permitted to attend Honors Outings that are happening in the same week as their safety violation.

Please note: The principal of Mat-Su Day School may exercise discretion to impose suspension and/or contact law enforcement when a student's behavior poses a safety risk and warrants such a response.

****Every student deserves to have a safe environment to learn and grow****

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Life Skills Program at Mat-Su Day School (MDS) is a specialized Tier 3 special education placement designed to support students with complex academic, behavioral, and functional needs. Placement in this program is determined by a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team when MDS is identified as the student's least restrictive environment (LRE). This decision is made collaboratively and only when the IEP team feels it is essential to the student's success.

While the Life Skills Program is distinct from the Behavior Support Program also offered at MDS, both share a common long-term goal: to transition students back to their boundary school when academic and behavioral data indicate it is their LRE. Students in both programs interact under structured, closely supervised conditions and may participate in shared school-wide incentives and activities.

The Life Skills Program provides a highly individualized and structured learning environment. It incorporates evidence-based behavioral interventions and instructional practices to help students develop core life, academic, and behavioral skills. Instruction is guided by daily data collection, which also informs ongoing communication with families through daily notes.

We utilize *Unique Learning Systems (ULS)*, the district's approved alternative curriculum, to provide accessible, standards-based instruction tailored to each learner's needs. For social and emotional learning (SEL), we implement *Circles*, a curriculum focused on healthy boundaries, self-awareness, and relationship skills.

The curriculum emphasizes both functional and academic development, including:

- Communication and emotional regulation
- Social skills and problem-solving
- Safety and self-advocacy
- Personal hygiene and self-care
- Time management and independent living
- Work readiness, skills training, and vocational exploration
- IEP-aligned academic and functional goals
-

Each student follows a structured daily schedule with support aligned to their individualized IEP goals and objectives. The Life Skills Program empowers students to build the confidence, independence, and essential skills necessary to thrive in school and beyond.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Mat-Su Day School Student Handbook serves as a supplement to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD) Board Policies. In the event of any conflict, MSBSD School Board Policies take precedence over the contents of this handbook.

I, parent or guardian of _____, have reviewed the Mat-Su Day School Student
(Student's Name)
Handbook with my child.

Printed name:_____

Signature:_____

Date: _____