Student-Parent Handbook

2025-2026

Mercer Area Elementary School

The Leaders of Tomorrow Are Learning Here Today

301 Lamor Road
Mercer, PA 16137

Phone: 724-662-5102
Fax: 724-662-5103

Principal's Message for Students

Welcome to another exciting school year at Mercer Area Elementary School! In this handbook you will find important information about the policies of the school and our expectations of you while you are a student in this building. There are four main rules that will guide you through each school day: ***Be Safe, Be Kind, Be Respectful***, **and** ***Be Responsible.*** As you continue to get older, YOU will be held more accountable for the decisions that YOU make. Sometimes there are negative consequences for negative behavior. On the other side, there are often positive consequences for positive behavior. The School Wide Positive Behavior program has been established to reinforce those positive choices and promote positive decision making at the individual and school level. Remember this above all, you have the power to make choices and shape who you will become as a person, so be sure to make the right ones.

We want to equip you with the necessary skills so that you can be successful as you advance into the middle school, high school, post-secondary education, and/or the workforce. While it may seem distant, your future will be here soon. Your time at the elementary school is a stepping stone into a much larger world. There are many skills (both academic and social) that you can take with you from the elementary school into your future. We stand by the motto of the elementary school: ***The Leaders of Tomorrow Are Learning Here Today.***

We continue to learn from our experiences. It is more important than ever that we meet our challenges and overcome our obstacles by working together. You have many people in this school district that care about you and are rooting for you. This includes not only your teachers and administrators, but also paraprofessionals, bus drivers, support staff, custodians, and many others. Without question, there will be challenging times ahead. There will be times during the school year that you will be challenged and may become frustrated and it may seem that the best option is to give up. Regardless of the day, activity, location, teacher, or assignment you owe it to yourself to give your absolute best effort. We ask you to try your best in everything that you do. Do not give up on yourself because Mercer Elementary will not give up on you! We are sincerely happy to have you with us at Mercer Elementary and we look forward to having a successful school year together.

Principal's Message for Parents

As we embark upon a new school year, we would like to thank you for entrusting the Mercer Area Elementary School with the responsibility of educating your child. This is not a task that we take lightly. We recognize and understand that **YOU** will be the most important teacher in the life of your child. Our staff members are only with your children for approximately seven (7) hours each day during the school year. To put this in a different perspective, during the course of a calendar year your children only spend 14% of their time in this school building. The majority of their time is spent under your guidance. It is because of this that it is crucial that we establish a **partnership**, where we are working together for the progress of your children. More so than ever, we recognize that in order for your child to be successful at Mercer Elementary, we must work together.

Communication is the key to make this endeavor work. Our teachers are encouraged to maintain open lines of communication between the classroom and the home. We would like to encourage you to do the same. While there may be times when disagreements arise, we all owe it to your children to work together and have a professional relationship. How you choose to communicate with your child about their school experience is critical. If you share nothing but criticism and negativity about the school, the staff, and the expectations, understand that these will become engrained with your child and heavily shape their opinions about the school. Please talk with your child each day about his/her school activities. In many instances, larger issues may be avoided as a result of constant communication between all parties. I implore you to take an active part in your child's academics. Even as your children become older, the research shows that continuing to read with your child can have a positive outcome on their education. Please supervise the completion of homework and provide an environment at home that is suitable for home studies. A lifelong commitment to learning can open the door for your child to be exposed to limitless opportunities. We look forward to working as your partners during the upcoming school year.

Mr. Gregory R. Acre
Principal

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Mercer Area School District Board of Directors

Mr. David Lengel	Board Member; President
Mr. Shane Nugent	Board Member; Vice President
Mr. Arthur Amos	Board Member; Treasurer
Mr. Rodney Bobby	Board Member
Mr. Matthew Hazi	Board Member
Mrs. Aimee Peters	Board Member
Mr. Derek Stotsky	Board Member
Mr. Steven VanWoert	Board Member
Mr. J. Jarrett K. Whalen	Board Member
Mr. Michael Stabile	Board Secretary (Non-Member)

Mercer Area School District Central Administration – 724-662-5100

Dr. Ronald Rowe	Superintendent
Dr. Michael Piddington	Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Michael Stabile	Business Manager/Board Secretary
Mr. Mark Roman	Transportation Director
Mrs. Lynn Long	Office Manager/ Administrative Secretary

Mercer Elementary Office Staff – 724-662-5102

Mr. Gregory R. Acre	Principal	gacre@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Kristen Sansone	Dean of Students	ksansone@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Allyson Rust	School Counselor	arust@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Beth Ellison	Nurse	bellison@mercer.k12.pa.us
Ms. Sharilynn Jones	Main Office Secretary	sjones@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Brittany Milliren	Main Office Secretary	bmilliren@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Ruthie Hazlett	Elementary Greeter	rhazlett@mercer.k12.pa.us

Mercer Area School District Special Education Staff – 724-662-5102

Mrs. Amanda Simpson	Special Education Director (K-12)	asimpson@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Jillian Braden	Certified School Psychologist	jbraden@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Renee Masson	Special Services Secretary	rmasson@mercer.k12.pa.us

Instructional Staff Directory

Kindergarten

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Mrs. Carrie Schmid	cschmid@mercer.k12.pa.us

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Mrs. Kerry VanWoert	kvanwoert@mercer.k12.pa.us

Grade 4

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Mr. David Urey	durey@mercer.k12.pa.us

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Mrs. Amy Murray	amurray@mercer.k12.pa.us

Grade 6

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Mrs. Meredith Safran	msafran@mercer.k12.pa.us

Title I Teachers

Ms. Ava Park	apark@mercer.k12.pa.us
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Mrs. Kristen Sansone	ksansone@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Nancy Smith	nsmith@mercer.k12.pa.us
Ms. Lisa Wishart	lwishart@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Amanda Jockel	ajockel@mercer.k12.pa.us
Mrs. Kathy Grossman	kgrossman@mercer.k12.pa.us

Gifted/Pre-Algebra

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Math Lab

Ms. Lisa Wishart	lwishart@mercer.k12.pa.us

Art

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Library

Mrs. Janice Langdon	jlangdon@mercer.k12.pa.us

Music

Mrs. Beth Weller	bweller@mercer.k12.pa.us

Physical Education

Mrs. Wendy McClure	wmcclure@mercer.k12.pa.us

STEM

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Speech/Language

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Support Services

Mrs. April Edney	aedney@mercer.k12.pa.us	Life Skills/Autistic Support
Mrs. Julie Harris	jharris@mercer.k12.pa.us	Learning Support
Mrs. Bridget Kniess	bkniess@mercer.k12.pa.us	Learning Support
Mrs. Joni Kostelnik	jkostelnik@mercer.k12.pa.us	Learning Support
Ms. Ava Park	apark@mercer.k12.pa.us	Learning Support
Ms. Haley Wells	hwells@mercer.k12.pa.us	Learning Support

MERCER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mercer - Coolspring - E.Lackawannock - Findley - Jefferson

Mercer Area School District Mission Statement

The mission of the Mercer Area School District, with community support, is to educate each student to be an involved responsible citizen. Upon graduation, all students will be prepared to succeed in an ever-changing society by utilizing critical thinking and lifelong learning to become stewards of their communities.

Mercer Area Elementary School Vision Statement

The vision of Mercer Area Elementary is to challenge each student to the best of their ability, strengthening both their academic and social skills in preparation for future academic development and community involvement.

Important Dates



Please be advised that these dates/times are tentative and may be subject to change:

Kindergarten Orientation	August 25
First Day of School for Students	August 27
No School for Students or Staff	September 1
Student Orientation Meetings	September 2 – September 5
NWEA Fall Testing Window	September 8 – September 30
Elementary Picture Day	September 11
Elementary Open House	September 18
Progress Reports Due (MP1)	September 29
Elementary Conferences	October 9 – October 10
Students dismissed 2 hours early	
No School for Students or Staff	October 13
Marking Period Ends (MP1)	October 30
Marking Period Begins (MP2)	October 31
Report Cards Distributed (MP1)	November 6
Elementary Veterans Day Program	November 11 (9:30 a.m.) (Gymnasium)
Elementary Picture Make-Up Day	November 12
Early Dismissal for Students and Staff	November 26
No School for Students and Staff	November 27 – December 1
Progress Reports Due (MP2)	December 5th
Elementary Band & Chorus Holiday Concert	December 10 (9:00 a.m./1:00 p.m.) (LGI)
No School for Students and Staff	December 22 – January 2
NWEA Winter Testing Window	January 5 – 30
No School for Students; In-Service for Staff	January 19
Marking Period Ends (MP2)	January 21
Marking Period Begins (MP3)	January 22
Report Cards Distributed (MP2)	January 28
Elementary Spring Picture Day	February 19
No School for Students; In-Service for Staff	February 6
No School for Students or Staff	February 16
Progress Reports Due (MP3)	February 25
No School for Students; In-Service for Staff	March 20
Kindergarten Registration	March 23-27
Marking Period Ends (MP3)	March 30

Marking Period Begins (MP4)	March 31
No School for Students or Staff	April 2 – April 6
Report Cards Distributed (MP3)	April 8
PSSA ELA Test (Grades 3-6) Window	April 20 – April 24
PSSA Math Test (Grades 3-6) Window	April 27 – May 1
PSSA Science Test (Grade 5) Window	April 27 – May 1
PSSA Make-Up Exam Window	May 4 – May 8
No School for Students or Staff	May 1
NWEA Spring Testing Window	May 4 – May 29
Progress Reports Due (MP4)	May 6
Elementary Band & Chorus Spring Concert	May 15 (9:00 a.m./1:00 p.m.) (LGI)
Stanford Achievement Test (Grade 2)	May 18 – May 22
No School for Students or Staff	May 25
Report Cards Distributed (MP4)	June 5
Last Day of School for Students	June 5
No School for Students; In-Service for Staff	June 8

Hours of Operation

Hours of Operation- Academic Year

The hours of operation for the elementary school are from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Please contact the main office at 724-662-5102 if you desire an appointment with administrators beyond normal operating hours.

7:30 a.m.	Elementary office opens
7:30 a.m.	Students admitted into building
7:45 a.m.	Students released to classrooms
8:10 a.m.	To be marked "Present" students need to be **in their classrooms** no later than 8:10 a.m.
2:50 p.m.	Student dismissal begins
3:00 p.m.	Pony express parent pick-up begins at main entrance
3:30 p.m.	Elementary office closes

Hours of Operation- Summer

The summer hours of operation for the elementary school are from 8:00 a.m. to Noon; 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Arrival/Dismissal Procedures



Arrival

The elementary school day begins for students at 8:10 a.m. At that time, all students should be in their appropriate classrooms. **Students should not arrive before 7:30 a.m.** Students that arrive between 7:30 and 7:45 a.m. will report directly to the cafeteria. Students will be supervised in the cafeteria until they are released to their classroom at 7:45 a.m. Students that arrive after 8:10 a.m. must stop in the office to receive a tardy slip before entering the classroom. Adults dropping off a student after 8:10 a.m. must report to the main office and sign in the student.

Parent Drop-Off

For the safety of the students, please do not enter the bus unloading/loading zone in the front of the school between the times of 7:30- 8:05 a.m. If you are dropping off your child, pull into the main entrance and drive straight back into the circular loop. In order to maintain a safe drop-off and maintain traffic flow, please refrain

from parking your vehicle and walking your children into the school building during these drop off times. If your child has a health problem that warrants special consideration, please contact the building principal. Note that the students must be in their classrooms no later than 8:10 a.m. Please account for morning traffic congestion.

Dismissal

Elementary students will be dismissed between 2:45 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. Bus will depart elementary school at approximately 3:00 p.m.

Parent Pick-Up/Pony Express

Students not riding home on the bus are considered Pony Express Riders. If you plan on picking up your child via Pony Express, please send a note in with your child. If a change is necessary during the school day (either moving from Pony Express to bus or vice versa), it is highly recommended that parents call the Main Office. Teachers do not have constant access to their emails, Class Dojo messaging, Remind messaging, etc. and may not receive those direct messages in adequate time before dismissal.

For the safety of the students and staff**, please do not enter the bus unloading/loading zone in the front of the school between the times of 2:30-3:00 p.m.** To help reduce confusion at the end of the day, it is highly encouraged that parents do not pick up their children between 2:30 – 3:00 p.m. Cars are not permitted in the diagonal bus parking spaces between this time. Those picking up students will need to park in the **soccer field lot** directly across from the school or in open parking spaces beside the building and remain there until ALL busses have left campus. Please refrain from parking on property or lots that are not a part of school district property. For the safety of everyone, please park your vehicle only in designated parking spaces. It is highly recommended that parents and guardians picking up their Pony Express riders leave their vehicle parked at the soccer field and walk over to the main entrance after the last bus leaves the parking lot.

Parents are not permitted to pick up their student directly from the class lines or parked school bus without signing out their child at the main office. For the safety of all students and staff members, persons picking up for Pony Express are NOT permitted in the front sidewalk area (signified by the dashed box in the map below).

- On the gym side of the building- parents will not be permitted past the flag pole until after the busses have pulled out of the parking lot
- On the music side of the building- parents will not be permitted past the beginning of the brick sidewalk until after the busses have pulled out of the parking lot.



For the safety and security of our students, we will not begin dismissing these Pony Express riders until all of the buses have left the elementary campus. The checkout process will take place at the main entrance doors of the elementary when the buses pull out of the parking lot (approximately 3:00 p.m.). Each elementary student should have an annually completed Pony Express form on file that grants permission to those specific individuals who are authorized to pick up. Students will not be released to individuals not on that form or without specific permission from the parent/guardian. Photo identification may be required when picking up a student to ensure that the student is released to the appropriate adult.

School Grounds – Loitering

For the safety of all individuals, loitering on school grounds is not permitted while school is in session. The playground areas are off limits to anyone other than school students, staff, and authorized persons during the school day.

Parents/guardians picking up their children for Pony Express are not permitted in the front, side, or rear parking lots prior to Pony Express dismissal. Parents/guardians who are picking up their children at the end of the school day during Pony Express will be directed to park in the Soccer Lot until 3:00 p.m.

Enrollment/Transfers

Kindergarten

Children who have reached the age of five (5) on or before August 31, 2025 will be permitted to enter into Kindergarten. Preliminary registration of kindergarten students is conducted during the month of March preceding their entrance to school. A kindergarten orientation is held in August for incoming kindergarten students and parents. Information regarding orientation will be mailed to parents/guardians in early August. The Mercer Area School District follows the immunization requirements as established by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Please note that students who are not compliant with these immunization requirements risk exclusion from school.

The child's original birth certificate, two (2) pieces of evidence that prove residency, any applicable custody paperwork, and immunization record must be presented at the time of registration. Without proper immunization, students will not be admitted into kindergarten.

Students Entering from Other School Districts

A student who transfers from another school district should register at the elementary office as soon as possible. The child's original birth certificate, two (2) pieces of evidence that prove residency, immunization record, any applicable custody paperwork, transcripts, and report card (if available) must be presented at the time of the child's registration. It is also important to know if the child has been receiving special education or Title I services.

Enrollment paperwork can be picked up at the elementary office during normal hours of operation. This enrollment paperwork can also be found on the school district website.

Students Transferring Out of the Mercer Area School District

To transfer from the Mercer Area School District, parents/guardians should notify the elementary school office at least one week prior to leaving. Students leaving the district must return all school property and have all obligations satisfied before being cleared for withdrawal. The Mercer Area School District will forward student records upon request by the new school.

Student Records

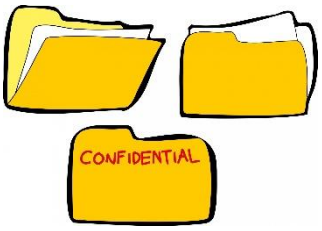
Change of Address and Phone Numbers

A parent/guardian should immediately notify the school of any change in address, telephone number, or emergency contact. Parents/guardians may complete a "Request for Change of Transportation and/or Address" form. *This is critical to let the school know should there be an emergency.*

Legal Custody

Separated or divorced parents are advised of their obligation to inform the school about the situation in the home and provide written documentation about the custody status of the child. Information that the parents should make available to the school include court orders or directives related to custody and access to the child; shared custody plans; documents fixing responsibility for the child's care and well-being. Parents and guardians maintain the responsibility for ensuring that the school has possession of the most updated agreements and orders.

Student Records



A permanent record file of each student's biographical data, health records, standardized test scores, and grades is maintained by the school district. These records are considered confidential information and will not be released to any agency outside the school without written permission from the parent/guardian. If the student moves or transfers to another school system, permanent records are forwarded to the new school system if a forwarding address is available or has been provided, or upon request from the new school.

Federal regulations give both biological parents the right to access their child's educational records unless there is a court order, state statute, or legally binding document specifically prohibiting access. It is the responsibility of the parent seeking to deny access to the records to provide the school district with a copy of the court order or other documentation which limits or controls access to student records. Each parent will have access to the child's records unless the school district has received a copy of a court order or similar legal document which limits the access. This protocol is utilized even if only one parent has custody of the child.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of the student's educational record. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program in the U.S. Department of Education.

FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he/she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have been transferred are "eligible students."

Schools may disclose, without consent, "directory" information such as a student telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. However, schools must tell parents and eligible students about directory information and allow parents and eligible students a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA. The actual means of notification (special letters, inclusion in the school district calendar, student handbook, or newspaper article) is left to the discretion of each school.

Attendance

Student Attendance

Research verifies that a strong association exists between consistent school attendance and academic achievement. The classroom environment is considered to be the most meaningful and essential component of the instructional process. Class absences limit opportunities for classroom interaction and direct participation with teacher and student. Therefore, regular class attendance is imperative if students are to accomplish their educational goals.

Compulsory Attendance

The compulsory school attendance age is that period in a child's life from the time the parent/guardian decides to have their child enter school, which shall be no later than the age of six (6) years until eighteen (18) years of age. All students who are enrolled in the elementary school fall under the compulsory attendance laws. Any student accumulating more than three (3) days of unlawful absence may be subject to the district's truancy procedures. Parents will receive a letter in the mail notifying them of unlawful absences when the student reaches three (3) unexcused days. If necessary, additional truancy letters may be sent to parents/guardians. If a student continues to accrue unlawful absences, further actions may be taken following the district's truancy procedures. These actions may include but are not limited to: required doctor's excuses for illness, truancy elimination plans through a Student Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIP), referral to the Student Assistance Program (ESAP), referral to Children and Youth Services (CYS) or other social services, and/or filing truancy charges through the district magistrate. A Student Attendance Improvement Conference may be scheduled with parent/guardian if the child accumulates ten (10) or more total absences during the school year. Once a student reaches ten (10) days of absence, the principal may require doctor's excuses for any absence thereafter.

Tardiness/Half Day Absences

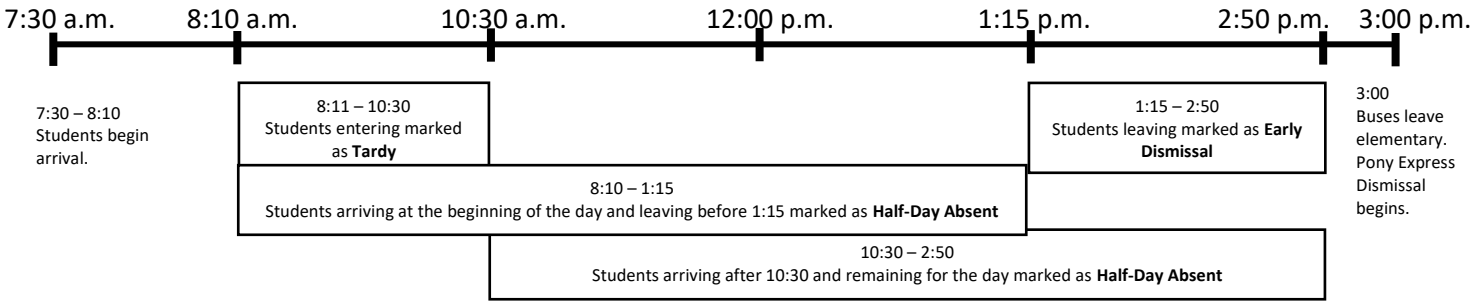
Tardy is a late arrival between **8:11-10:29 a.m.** Students are to be in their classrooms by **8:10 a.m.** Any student entering after this time must report to the school office to obtain a class admission slip. Additionally, the adult dropping off the student will also need to come into the office and sign in their child at the Greeter's Desk. School officials establish if a tardy is excused or unexcused. Unexcused tardies include car troubles, alarm failed, overslept, etc. Should a student accumulate 8+ tardies in a semester a referral may be made to the Elementary Student Assistance (ESAP) program and potential disciplinary action may be taken. **A student is considered "Half-Day Absent" if they arrive after 10:30 a.m.** Two "Half-Day Absent" attendance marks are the equivalent of one full day of absence. Please note that an accumulation of "Half-Day Absent" marks fall under the same attendance procedures as listed above.

Early Dismissal

If you anticipate an early dismissal or transportation change for your child, please send the teacher a written statement indicating time, day, and reason for the child's excuse. Last minute changes require calls to classrooms that interrupt instructional time for all students. If possible, please refrain from making dismissal changes after 10:30 a.m. For the safety of your child, no student will be permitted to wait outside. Please report to the office and sign him/her out.

A student will be marked as "Early Dismissal" if they leave between 1:15 – 2:50 p.m. Any student that leaves between 12:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. would be considered "Half-Day Absent".

Please note that if your child is picked up before the end of the school day, they are missing instruction and other important components of the school day. While it is understood that situations arise that require a student to be dismissed early, it should not be occurring on a regular basis. The parents/guardians of students accumulating more than ten (10) Early Dismissals during the school year may be notified in writing. Each situation will be evaluated by the building principal on a case-by-case basis. The principal may require a doctor's excuse for future early dismissals after that notification. If the early dismissals continue without proper documentation, the student may be marked for "Unexcused Half-Day".



Reporting Student Absence

If your child is absent from school due to illness or other reasons, please notify the school office at 724-662-5102 before 8:30 a.m. You may also complete a digital absence note using the school district website. To access this feature,

- Visit www.mercer.k12.pa.us
- Click on the Elementary School Tab
- Click on the Report Absence Tab which will open up a fillable document
- When finished, click Done which will submit to the elementary office

If a student has been absent, state law mandates that the student bring a note from his/her parent/guardian to explain the absence. The note should contain: *student's name, date of absence, reason for absence, and parent signature*. These may be submitted on any paper, but absentee slips are located in the back of our school calendar and are also available in the main office throughout the year. If a written excuse is not provided to the school within five (5) school days of return, absences will be categorized as "unexcused absence".

Definition of Attendance Terms

A. *Compulsory School Age*- The compulsory school age is that period in a child's life from the time the parent elects to have their child enter school, which shall be no later than the age of six (6) years until eighteen (18) years of age.



B. *Excused Absences*- Absences for the following reasons are excused:
   1. Personal illness
   2. Serious illness or death in the immediate family
   3. Impassable roads
   4. Authorized religious holidays
   5. Exceptionally urgent reasons approved by the principal
   6. Pre-approved, non-school sponsored educational trips or vacations

C. *Unexcused Absences*- Absences for the following reasons are unexcused:
   1. Absence because of parent neglect, skiing, hunting, fishing, visiting out of town, oversleeping, missing the school bus, working at home, etc.
   2. Absence because of truancy
   3. Shopping
   4. Birthday or other celebrations

D. *Unlawful Absences*- Any unexcused absence for students of compulsory school age is also unlawful unless the student has been suspended by the principal.

E. Excused Absence for Family Vacation- Parent/legal guardians and students are strongly encouraged to schedule family vacations at such a time as to not interfere with the regularly adopted school calendar. For the purposes of this policy, a family vacation is defined as a vacation where the student participates with one (1) or more of his/her parents/legal guardian. If there is no alternative to a family scheduled vacation during the time school is in session, the school will make every effort to cooperate. Please note that **permission will not be granted for educational trips during standardized or state testing.**

   Absence due to family vacation will be honored if:
   1. Requested in writing by a parent or legal guardian prior to the trip
   2. A student has not already exceeded 30 days of absence without medical verification
   3. The student has all assigned work completed upon the 1st day of returning from a pre-approved trip. Any assessments must be completed on the day of return unless other arrangements are made with the teachers.
   4. The trip must have educational merit.

Student Attendance and Missing Work

Students are required to make up all missed work within a maximum of one (1) school week (5 days) after returning from any absence. This includes students on a pre-approved trip of more than one (1) day. Teachers may require student's makeup work within a like number of days for any absence (i.e., two days of absence –two days to complete the missed work). If a student is absent on the day of a scheduled assessment they will be required to complete that assessment on the day he/she returns to school unless other arrangements are made with the teacher. Work that is requested and picked up/sent home due to an absence must be completed and turned in upon returning to school.

Attendance Eligibility for Participation in School Activities

Students participating in school-sponsored activities (basketball, wrestling, academic games, club invention, etc.) must be in school by 10:29 a.m. and remain in school or they are not permitted to participate or attend after-school sponsored activities later that same day. Exceptions to this attendance requirement may be made in the event that the student has a doctor's excuse for that absence.

Grading

Grade Reporting

Evaluation of student performance and a means of reporting performance are necessary and important functions of public schools. Procedures are intended to ensure clear, consistent, and fair procedures for achieving this end. Student performances will be measured against the standards established for the course in which the student is enrolled. At the elementary level, when students are grouped for reading or other instruction, their achievement will be compared to others within their group for purposes of determining a letter grade. Teachers will alert parents/guardians regarding difficulties a student may be having at any time. The evaluation of student progress and achievement is the continuing responsibility of each member of the professional staff. Grades reflect a student's progress both as to the quality of performance and the educational growth of the student.



All formal reporting of students' academic progress is distributed four times during the school year, at approximately 45-day intervals. These reports consist of developmental checklists and/or letter grades. Progress for all students in kindergarten, is reported quarterly showing achievement levels attained and skill sheets describe the expected skills for each quarter.

Grading Scale

A+ 97-100%	A 93-96%	A- 90-92%
B+ 87-89%	B 83-86%	B- 80-82%
C+ 77-79%	C 73-76%	C- 70-72%
D+ 67-69%	D 63-66%	D- 60-62%
F 59% and below		

O= Outstanding	S= Satisfactory	N= Needs Improvement
90-100%	70-89%	69% and below

Online Access to Gradebook

Parents/guardians have access to check the progress of their child through the online gradebook via Infinite Campus. Please contact the main office at 724-662-5102 if you need assistance accessing your child's gradebook through the Infinite Campus portal.

Progress Reports

The parents/guardians will be notified of their child's scholastic achievement. At the halfway point in the marking period, progress reports will be sent home for students who currently have a D+ (69.49%) or lower grade or an "N" in a class. Parents/guardians who have questions or desire a teacher conference should call the main office or contact their child's teacher.

Mustang Honor Roll

Students in grades 3-6 will be recognized for academic achievement throughout the school year. Honor roll will be calculated at the end of each quarter. Unified Arts courses will not be factored into the Honor Roll calculations. Additionally, any student with a "D" "F" or "N" in any course will be disqualified from the Honor Roll. Students will be recognized and provided with a small token of achievement for earning a place on the honor roll. The criteria for Mustang Honor Roll are as follows:



- High Honor Roll- Students who achieve all *A's
- Honor Roll- Students who achieve all *A's/*B's

**Please note that not all courses use an A-B-C grading scale. The principal will make the final determination in evaluating whether a student has met the requirements for High Honor Roll or Honor Roll.*

At the end of the school year a comprehensive Mustang Honor Roll will be calculated. Sixth Grade students who achieve High Honor Roll throughout the entire year will receive the Principal's Award for Educational Excellence.

Academic Integrity/Cheating

Students caught cheating, plagiarizing, copying homework, tests, or quizzes; removing testing materials from a classroom without permission, or using a paper from the Internet may be given a zero (0) on that assignment and will receive a disciplinary consequence. In addition, their name will be reported to the office and filed in the event of future violations. Repeated violations of the academic integrity policy will result in more severe disciplinary consequences.

Incomplete Work

An incomplete "I" will be given for any required course work not made up within the designated time limit. Those students who have not completed the required work during a marking period will be given an "F" or "N" for that marking period. Additionally, a comment indicating "Incomplete Work" will be printed on the student's report card. The student will receive a similar grade and comment in each of the succeeding marking periods until the required work has been satisfactorily completed. Only those students absent during the end of the marking period will be given a grade of "Incomplete". This will occur only when the marking period expires before the student returns to school or insufficient time is left in the marking period to complete the work. Students are encouraged to check with teachers prior to absences, if possible, to determine what class work will be missed.

Retention

The recommendation of the classroom teacher shall be required for promotion or retention of the student. The Child Study Team (CST) is instrumental in the evaluation of student data. The building principal shall be assigned the final responsibility for determining the promotion or retention of each student. In all cases of retention, the parents/guardians shall be fully involved and informed throughout the process. Parents/guardians shall be informed of the possibility of retention well in advance and a face to face meeting will be scheduled involving the parent, teacher, member of CST, and administrator. Academic achievement, attitude, effort, work habits, behavior, attendance, and other factors to learning shall be evaluated regularly and communicated to the students and parents/guardians. The district shall utilize multiple measures of academic performance as determinants in promotion and retention decisions.

Homework

The Importance of Homework

The Mercer Area School District believes that home study is an important part of the educational process. The district encourages the assignment of home study to extend knowledge, aid in mastery of skills, and develop creativity and independence in learning.

Student Responsibilities

Home study assists in teaching students to allocate/balance their time at home and school to reinforce and supplement long-term time management habits that will assist them in the future. Additionally, home study provides additional opportunities to supplement learning experiences. If the student is to succeed and profit from home study, he/she must:

- Take all necessary materials home
- Complete all assignments neatly and on time
- Ask for further explanation if original directions are not completely understood
- Arrange to make up missed assignments as required by the teacher
- Initiate a request for help when needed
- Balance his/her co-curricular activities with school assignments



Parent Tips for Homework Success

Homework provides a bond of common work between parent/guardian, child, and teacher which can be critical to a student's success in school. Home study brings the home and school closer together by allowing the parents to participate in their child's lifelong learning by encouraging good study habits and providing a learning environment in the home. Recognizing that parents/guardians and teachers will have an active part in making home study policy effective, the following suggestions are included. Parents/guardians should:

- Check the student's assignments each evening (earlier if possible)
- Encourage independence in completion of assignments
- To the greatest extent possible, provide a quiet, distraction-free place for the student to study
- Consult with the classroom teacher to understand the purpose of the home study, methods used by the school, and the type of help that will meet their child's needs
- Encourage the student to spend some time reading independently each evening
- Ensure that homework assignments are obtained during extended periods of absence
- Assist the student in balancing his/her extracurricular and out-of-school activities with school assignments
- Report to the teacher and principal all concerns regarding amount and content of homework assignments

Suggested Homework Guidelines

The following timeframe is a *suggestion* as to the time a student should spend on all homework assignments each night:

Kindergarten	10-15 minutes	Short and varied with brief parent/guardian directions
1st Grade	10-20 minutes	Informal with brief parent/guardian directions
2nd Grade	15-25 minutes	
3rd Grade	20-30 minutes	
4th Grade	30-40 minutes	
5th Grade	40-60 minutes	
6th Grade	50-80 minutes	

Please note that these are suggested times. There are many variables that impact the amount of time that is spent on homework (i.e. type of assignment, ability to complete in class, student engagement in activity, etc.).

Homework Assignments

Students are strongly encouraged to keep a daily list of homework assignments. Time is allotted during daily organizational time for older students to write the assignments in their notebooks. Students in the lower grades generally bring home a folder on a daily basis. The folder contains homework assignments as well as memos, notices, etc. from the teacher or school. **Parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to look over the folder with their child each day as well as any homework.**

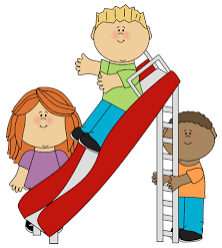
Requests for Make-Up Work

Requests for schoolwork should be made by parents/guardians of absent children no later than 10:30 a.m. This allows time for the teacher to organize the work and send it to the office where parents may pick it up after 2:30 p.m. Books will not be sent home with another child unless pre-arrangements have been made with that child's parents. Books will not be sent home with younger children who are not physically capable of carrying additional books.

Make-Up Work Policy

Students are required to make up all missed work within a maximum of one (1) school week (5 days) after returning from any absence. This includes students on a pre-approved trip of more than one (1) day. Teachers may require student's makeup work within a like number of days for any absence (i.e. two days absent – two days to complete the missed work). If a student is absent on the day of a scheduled assessment, they will be required to complete that assessment on the day he/she returns to school unless other arrangements have been made with the teacher.

Recess



According to the American Academy of Pediatrics there is a clear benefit to inclusion of recess, stating "…peer interactions during recess are a unique compliment to the classroom. The lifelong skills acquired for communication, negotiation, cooperation, sharing, problem solving, and coping are not only foundations for healthy development but also fundamental measures of the school experience."

In agreement with this ideology, Mercer Area Elementary School does not advocate for the consistent removal of recess for academic participation or incomplete assignments. Students who do not complete homework assignments can receive other consequences, which may include decreased grades and non-participation in other activities. However, there may be situations, such as disciplinary infractions, that will require the removal of a student's recess. **While there may be situations that will require the removal of this privilege, it should not be utilized as the sole, consistent method of behavioral modification.** It is important to recognize that each situation is unique and that the removal of recess will be determined by the classroom teacher and/or administrator on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, a reduction in recess time may be necessary to address behavioral concerns. If you have concerns regarding specific situations, please contact the classroom teacher. If those concerns are not addressed, please contact the main office.

Safety is of the utmost concern during recess. This includes proper attire. Parents should be sure that their child's clothing is suitable for outside activities. The elementary school uses the following guidelines for weather restrictions on taking students outside for recess. Please note that these temperatures include the heat index/wind chill.

- Children can play outdoors daily when weather and air quality conditions do not pose a significant health risk. Weather that poses a significant health risk includes wind child at or below 15 degrees and heat index at or above 90 degrees, as identified by the National Weather Services.
- Children can go outside when temperatures are at/above 15 degrees, including wind chill factor. Outdoor time should be limited to 20-30 minutes when temperatures are between 16-32 degrees. Students should be dressed in layers. Cover hands, feet, heads, and neck to prevent heat from escaping.

Additionally, there may be areas of the playground that are off-limits to students on account of student safety. Discretion is left to the supervising staff members. Student conduct during recess has been clearly established to promote an atmosphere of safety, kindness, respect, and student responsibility. Please reference the School Wide Positive behavior chart for further expectations on the playground.

Standardized Testing (PSSA and Stanford Exams)

PSSA Test

Students at Mercer Area Elementary School in grades 3-6 will be assessed in the Pennsylvania System School Assessment (PSSA). Every Pennsylvania student in grades 3 through 8 is assessed in English/Language Arts and Math. Every Pennsylvania student in grades 5 and 8 is assessed in Science. The PSSA test is a standards-based, criterion-referenced assessment that is tied directly to Pennsylvania academic standards in the areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and Technology. Individual student scores can be used to assist teachers in identifying students who may be in need of additional educational opportunities, and school scores provide information to schools and districts for curriculum and instruction improvement discussions and planning. The PSSA tests will be administered during the following windows:

English Language Arts (Grades 3-6)
- April 20th – April 24th

Mathematics (Grades 3-6)
- April 27th – May 1st

Science (Grade 5)
- April 27th – May 1st

PSSA Make-Up Exam Window
- May 4th – May 8th

Stanford Achievement Test/ Stanford 10

The Stanford Achievement Test, also known as the "Stanford 10", is a standardized achievement test used by school districts in the United States and American schools abroad for assessing children. Mercer Area Elementary School administers the Stanford 10 to our students in second grade as part of our Child Find. This multiple-choice assessment helps identify student strengths and needs, leading to effective placement and instructional planning. Students will be assessed in the areas of Reading, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics, Language, Spelling, Science, and Social Studies. The Stanford 10 will be administered during the following window:

- May 18th – May 22nd

Code of Conduct for Standardized Tests

The following expectations are established for students that take the PSSA or Stanford Exam:
DO:

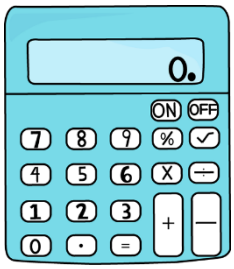
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Eat a good breakfast.
- Listen to, read, and follow all directions given.
- Ask questions if you do not understand the directions.
- Read each question carefully, especially multiple-choice items that ask for the "best answers." Also, be sure to read any open-ended items and writing prompts carefully before responding.
- Be careful when marking your answers so that you do not skip spaces or fill in the wrong sections.
- Make sure to completely fill in the bubble for your answer you select and erase completely any answers you change.
- Keep your eyes on your own test.

- Try to answer each test item.
- Check that you have completed all of the test items in the test section before closing your test booklet or submitting your final responses online.
- Report any suspected cheating to your teacher or principal

DO NOT:

- Bring notes with you to the test.
- Bring any electronic devices (cell phones, music players, etc.) other than an approved calculator, if applicable, to the test.
- Share a calculator with other students.
- Use the bubbles in the same answer booklet or either eliminate possible incorrect answers or possible correct answers. Mark only the bubble for the one correct answer you have chosen.
- Talk with others about questions on the test, during, or after the test.
- Take notes about the test to share with others.
- Leave an online test session until the session is complete or until instructed to do so.

PSSA- Calculator Policy



If a student chooses to use a calculator on the PSSA in sections where the calculator is permitted, the student must adhere to the guidelines listed below. It is the responsibility of the School Test Coordinator to ensure all calculator policies are implemented and followed, including making sure calculators have no programs stored in their memory other than those that are factory installed. Please note that if a student wants to restore a deleted program, he/she must back them up prior to the assessment. In addition, the memory must be cleared on the calculator following each test session of the assessment.

The following are examples of devices that are **not permitted** for the PSSA or Stanford Exams:

- Non-calculators such as cell phones, smart phones, PDAs, laptops, minicomputers, pocket organizers, etc.
- Calculators with infrared, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, or other beaming or wireless capabilities, unless the beaming or wireless capabilities are disabled.
- Calculators with QWERTY keyboards, typewriter-like keyboards, or keypads.
- Calculators with built-in Computer Algebra Systems.
- Calculators that make noise, have paper tape, need to be plugged in, or talk; these specific calculators can only be used as a required accommodation as stated in the Accommodations' Manual.
- Calculators shared by students during a test session.
- All non-factory programs or information stored in the calculator.

The Calculator Policy is intended to be a general description of what is not allowed. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list of specific calculators, devices, or technologies that cannot be used on the PSSA or Stanford Exams. Please note that as technology changes, this policy may also change.

For additional information regarding the PSSA or Stanford Exams please contact the elementary school office or visit the Pennsylvania Department of Education website at:
(http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/state_assessment_system/20965)

NWEA Tests

The students at Mercer Area Elementary School will participate in the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) tests. Throughout the school year, three benchmark assessments are provided to students in grades K-6. The NWEA test is an individualized diagnostic test that adjusts question difficulty based upon the strengths/weaknesses of the student. Students are tested in areas of Math and English Language Arts. The NWEA test results are then evaluated and used to address areas of individual need in the classroom environment. This information is used to assist in providing classroom and supplemental interventions. The tests will be given during the following windows:

- September 8th – September 30th
- January 5th – January 30th
- May 4th – May 29th

Safety and Security

Safe and Secure Schools

Our nation has been confronted with inexplicable acts of violence by students and adults against other students and teachers. These acts of violence have heightened everyone's awareness of the threat of violence that exists in all communities and schools. We believe that our staff, in cooperation with police and other community agencies, is prepared to deal with situations involving students that are cause for concern. There are procedures in place that are followed when and if a student behaves in a threatening manner. In such cases, we work with local law enforcement, medical officials, and a broad range of community agencies to resolve these problems. We also require parental help and the help of students to become fully informed of threatening behaviors. Please note that school district personnel are bound by various confidentiality laws. These laws are designed to protect everyone. The safety of our students and employees is the highest priority and all proper precautions are taken to ensure the safety of our students and staff.

Reporting Incidents

All verbal and physical threats must be taken very seriously. School officials and teachers will act accordingly. The involvement of all our students and parents is very important in maintaining the safety of our schools. Children may convey their concerns to an aide, teacher, counselor, or principal. **No safety concern is too small to be ignored**. You and your child can help by reporting any threatening behavior that you may hear or observe. Students are also are able to utilize the Silent Reporting Box in the Library hallway. Students are able to report incidents, concerns about safety, etc. using these reporting boxes, which will be monitored by the administration on a daily basis.

Safe2Say Something

Beginning in 2018 public schools in the state of Pennsylvania became a part of a reporting system called Safe2Say Something, which is an anonymous reporting system that can be utilized by students who wish to report safety concerns. There are three methods of reporting something to the Safe2Say hotline:

1. Mobile App
2. 1-844-SAF2SAY
3. www.safe2saypa.org

Fire/Safety/Intruder Drills

Schools are required by Pennsylvania State Law to conduct randomly scheduled fire drills on a monthly basis. Every effort will be made to conduct these drills when the weather is suitable for leaving the building. Students will also practice procedures for severe weather situations. Periodically, students will practice ALICE (Alert-Lockdown-Inform-Counter-Evacuate) training drills in preparation for an intruder situation. These safety drills are

conducted in order to ensure that students and staff members are best prepared to respond appropriately to a variety of emergency situations.

Photography/Video Consent
During the school year, your child may be photographed or video-taped for educational reasons. These reasons may include newspaper articles highlighting school activities, website photographs/videos, or television coverage of school events. **If you do not wish your child to be photographed or videotaped during the current school year for these reasons, please be sure to inform the building principal in writing of this request.**

Searches
School officials are authorized to search a student's personal possessions when there is reasonable suspicion that the student is violating the law, board policy, school rules, or poses a threat to the health, safety, or welfare of the school population. Prior to the search, the student shall be notified and given the opportunity to be present. However, when school authorities have a reasonable suspicion that there is a threat to the health, safety, or welfare of the school population, a search may be conducted without prior warning.

School Security- Cameras
In order to maintain safety standards for the students and staff, security cameras have been placed throughout the building and will continually record all activities within and outside of the building. Additionally, security cameras are located on school buses. Additionally, all telephone communications have the capability of being instantly recorded.



School Security- Resource Officers
The Mercer Area School District utilizes armed school resource officers in order to create a safer school environment. As a result, it is typical for an assigned school resource officer to be a prominent figure seen throughout the hallways and across school grounds during school hours.

Threat Assessment Team

Mercer Area Elementary School has an established Threat Assessment Team. The team is comprised of building administrators, school psychologist, nurse, guidance counselor, district superintendent, and law enforcement. A threat is a communication of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or expressed in some other form, such as via text messaging, email, or other digital means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended target(s) and regardless of whether the intended target is aware of the threat.

In the event that a threat is discovered, the appropriate course of action will be taken based upon the situation. The Threat Assessment Team will be convened to review the situation and complete a Comprehensive School Threat Assessment. Based upon the findings of the team, additional steps may be taken to appropriately address the threat.

School Closings/Delays

Emergency Closings
The Mercer Area School District will offer both text and email alerts to parents via the Blackboard Connect platform. Contact information for parents/guardians that is within the Infinite Campus Student Information System will be used to send out notification messages to families. As such, it is incredibly important to update the school with any changes that are made to telephone numbers and/or email addresses throughout the school year. Information on the mass notification system can be found on the Mercer Area School District website under "Family & Community – Parent Quick Links – School Notification Program". Local television and radio stations

also broadcast school delays and closings. Close of school will also be announced on the Mercer Area School District website.

Two-Hour Delays

In the event of a two-hour delay, students should not arrive at regular time, but instead two hours later. **Please do not send children to school prior to the appropriate time as there will not be appropriate supervision. Bus pick up will be two hours later than the regularly scheduled time.** For example, if the bus picks up your child at 7:15 a.m. on a regular school day, the bus shall pick up your child at approximately 9:15 a.m. in the case of a two-hour delay. Student arrival time for students being transported by parents/guardians for a two-hour delay is no earlier than 9:30 a.m.

School Wide Positive Behavior Support Program

School Wide Positive Behavior Support is an evidence-based systems approach for establishing the social culture needed for schools to be effective learning environments for all students. There are four key guidelines that have been established for all students:

Be Safe Be Kind Be Respectful Be Responsible

School Wide Positive Behavior Reward System – Blue Tickets and the BINGO Board

Students can earn a blue ticket when a staff member sees them following school expectations of being *Safe, Kind, Respectful, and Responsible* on a consistent basis. A certain number of tickets will be passed out each day by staff members. These staff members will change daily. Students should not be aware of which adult is passing out tickets.

1. Students who received tickets will report to the office.
2. Students pick a bingo chip with a number on it and receive a small treat with a certificate.
3. The students will autograph the Mustang Pride poster.
4. The number on the bingo chip will correspond with a number on the Mustang Pride Board. The students name will be placed on the square with the corresponding number.
5. When 10 names connect vertically or 20 names connect horizontally on the Mustang Pride Board we will have BINGO. Students whose names are on the winning row will be announced and receive a prize.
6. The board will then be wiped clean and the process will begin again.



School Rewards

Mercer Elementary School will make many attempts to promote positive behavior. These rewards will be infused throughout the school days and throughout the entire school year. These collective rewards will be adjusted in order to best motivate the student body. This may include classroom rewards for students who have won BINGO, free spaces on the BINGO board, extra recess, and many others. It is the intent of the School Wide Positive Behavior program to reinforce positive behavior for all students in the building.

Voice Volume Levels

There are four different voice levels that have been established as acceptable volumes throughout the building and grounds. Certain areas of the building have specific expectations. Refer to the School Wide Positive Behavioral Expectations Chart for examples. The voice levels are as follows:

Level 0 = No talking *Level 1* = Whisper talk *Level 2* = Group Talk *Level 3* = Outside Talk

Office Referral Forms (ORFs)

As part of our School Wide Positive Behavior program, a tiered system of documentation is used to ensure that students accountable for their actions. The behavioral expectations are taught and reinforced in all locations throughout the year. When student exhibit actions that do not meet the behavioral standards, it may be necessary for this student to receive an ORF.

Depending on the severity/frequency of the behavior, a student may be written up for either a *minor* or a *major* ORF. A student may be written up by any staff member (teachers, paraprofessionals, building staff, bus drivers, administrator).

If a student receives a *major*, the ORF is submitted to a building administrator. The referral is evaluated by the administrator and further course of action/discipline is determined based upon all factors. The principal/assistant principal maintains the responsibility of managing *major* referrals (meeting with the students, conversing with parents/guardians, and following up with the staff as necessary).

If a student receives a *minor,* the ORF is maintained by their classroom teacher. Depending on the situation, the *minor* may result in additional classroom-assigned consequences relating to that particular incident. A minor ORF is not submitted to the building administrator. If the student accumulates three (3) minors of the same category (i.e. three minor ORFs for disrespectful behavior or three minor ORFs for disruption), then that cluster of three (3) minors becomes a *major,* which is then submitted to the building administrators.

School Wide Positive Behavioral Expectations Chart

Settings → / Expectations ↓	Classroom/ Specials	Hallway	Cafeteria	Recess/ Playground	Bathroom
Voice Level	**Level 1**	**Level 0**	**Level 2**	**Level 3 Level 0 (in line)**	**Level 0 (hallway) Level 1 (bathroom)**
BE SAFE	• Keep hands and feet to self • Stay in your area • Walk (transitions) • All four legs of chair on floor • Bottom to bottom; back to back	• Walk on the right • Hands at your side	• Feet on floor • Bottom of bench • Food on table/tray • Stay at your table • 3-4 to a bench • Always walk	• Stay in boundaries • Show self-control through your actions and voice • Proper use of equipment	• Proper use of facilities • Keep hands and feet to yourself
BE KIND	• Value others opinions • Include others • Use manners	• Make eye contact and smile at others • Use manners	• Include others • Say "Please" and "Thank You" to cafeteria workers • Eat your own food	• Include others • Play fairly with others • Treat others kindly • Take turns	• Take turns
BE RESPECTFUL	• Listen • Raise your hand • Follow directions • Hands down when someone is speaking	• Show self-control through your actions	• Listen to adults in charge • Eat politely • Level 0 voice in serving line	• Line up quickly and quietly to the universal signal • Listen and respond to whistle	• Respect the privacy of others • Leave no trace behind
BE RESPONSIBLE	• Be organized and ready for class • Turn in completed assignments on time • Do your best work • Make good choices when assignments are complete	• Go straight to destination • Face forward • Follow directions • No food or drink	• Finish eating in a timely manner • Leave no trace behind	• Dress for the weather • Leave no trace behind	• Use time effectively, three people at a time • Flush, wash, leave • Tell an adult about any problems • Use the closest bathroom

School Wide Positive Behavioral Expectations Chart

Settings ➡ / Expectations ⬇	Bus	Special Activities	Arrival	Dismissal
Voice Level	Level 1	Level 0 (Universal Signal)	Level 1	Level 0 (inside) Level 1 (outside)
BE SAFE	• Keep hands and feet to self • Bottom to bottom • Back to back • Follow safety procedures	• Show self-control through your actions and voice	• Show self-control through your actions and voice • Walk on the right • Keep all items in your book bag and our book bag on shoulders	• Walk in the hallways and on sidewalk • Show self-control through your actions and voice • Remain in line until dismissed
BE KIND	• Use kind words and actions	• Show appreciation • Use manners • Keep eyes on speaker	• Take turns • Make eye contact and smile at others • Use manners	• Use manners
BE RESPECTFUL	• Listen to the bus driver • Show self-control through your actions and voice	• Respond appropriately • Remain quiet • Hands down when someone is speaking	• Hats off in the building	• Stay in your space in line • Hats off in the building • Listen to adult direction
BE RESPONSIBLE	• Leave your area clan • Follow bus rules • No eating, drinking, chewing gum	• Remain in area • Follow directions	• Be on time (before 8:10 a.m.) • Arrive after 7:30 a.m. • Go to breakfast/ classroom immediately	• Be on time • Pack up your book bag with your homework • Keep all items in your book bag and your book bag on your shoulders

Private Transportation

Private Transportation
We strongly encourage students to take the bus to school. A child is never tardy when they ride the school bus. If you drive your child to school and you are late your child will be marked tardy. Guidelines relating to circumstances as well as emergencies that will require you to transport your child to and from school are as follows:

- Students being transported by private vehicle should not arrive prior to 7:30 a.m.
- Parking is prohibited in the fire and bus zone lanes at all times
- Parents/guardians who choose to drive students to and from school during regular school hours should drop off and pick up their students in designated areas

Transportation Changes
For the safety of your child, your signed permission slip granting another individual permission to drive your child home should be presented to the classroom teacher. Students who are going home via private transportation for the purpose of visiting, birthday parties, etc. must bring a note from both families involved. Please note that this applies to only private transportation, not to school bus transportation.

After-School Transportation
Parents/guardians are required to provide transportation for their children when they participate in activities after regular school hours. This also includes students that are serving a detention.

Bus Transportation

Bus Expectations
The following rules are established for students riding the bus:



- When walking along the road to a bus stop, walk on the side facing traffic.
- Wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before entering or leaving the bus.
- Students will take the seats that are assigned by their driver as they board the bus.
- State law forbids students to stand in the aisle of the bus while it is in motion.
- State law forbids students to put hands, arms, or any body parts out of the bus windows.
- Students are not permitted to eat or drink on the bus.
- Abusive language, pushing, shoving, and/or fighting will not be tolerated.
- Students are not to tamper with, deface, or vandalize any bus or student property.
- Students should talk in a quiet and polite manner, refraining from loud talking or shouting that might distract the driver's attention.
- When departing from the bus to cross a road, students are required to cross in front of the bus and be cautious of traffic coming from either direction.
- No student is permitted to get off the bus at any stop other than his/her own.
- Students should go directly home from bus stops at the end of the day.
- The bus driver's directions shall be followed at all times. Any situation that needs attention should be reported to the bus driver at once, and he/she will bring this infraction to the attention of the principal.

Please allow five (5) minutes before and after the designated pick-up/drop-off time to account for variations in traffic and transportation situations.

Bus Drop-Off
In the interest of a safe, orderly, and pleasant ride on the school bus, students are expected to ride **ONLY THEIR ASSIGNED BUS**. Permission **will not** be granted for a student to ride the bus home or exit the bus with a friend, regardless of whether permission has been granted by both parties.

Bus Discipline Procedures
Riding the school bus is a privilege, not a right. As part of our School Wide Positive Behavior Support Program, the bus driver will file an Office Referral Form (ORF) with a building administrator if there is a discipline concern regarding student conduct on the bus. The administrator will contact the student and discuss the violation.

The administrator considers the nature of each violation and disciplines students according to established procedures. The nature of the offense and age of the student can/will determine discipline level and action authorized by the administrator. Disciplinary consequences will be determined on a case by case basis by administration. Repeated violations could result in suspension of bus riding privileges. Parents/guardians shall be informed of all disciplinary actions. In some cases, it may be deemed necessary for a student to be removed from the bus for disciplinary reasons. Students removed from the bus are not excused from attending school. Absenteeism as a result of a bus suspension would constitute an illegal absence.

Personal Items on the Bus
Students are not permitted to bring any live animals, firearms, explosives, or anything of a dangerous or objectionable nature on the bus. Backpacks, band instruments, or any school project shall not be placed in aisles or areas near the entrance or emergency door. Items of this nature will not be allowed on the bus unless they can be held on the pupil's lap without endangering the safety of other pupils. Students who must take large, heavy objects to and from school should arrange for private transportation.

It is highly recommended that electronic devices such as radios, iPods, CD players, gaming devices, cell phones, etc. of any type shall not be permitted on the bus. The bus drivers are responsible to establishing consistent regulations regarding the possession and use of these items. **If such devices are permitted by the driver, students possessing a cell phone/mobile device are not permitted to film/record others on the school bus at any time**. The school and/or bus company is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged items.

Through the School Wide Positive Behavior program, students at Mercer Area Elementary may receive Bus Bucks for exhibiting consistently positive behavior on the school bus. It is up to the discretion of the driver to make the determination for what constitutes the receiving of a Bus Buck or other bus incentive.

Communication

Parent/Teacher Conferences
During the course of the school year concerns may arise which may affect students, parents/guardians and the school. Parents/guardians are urged to solve a problem as it develops by contacting the staff member most directly involved with the concern. Often a concern is caused by a lack of communication among parent/guardian, student, and school. By keeping in contact with the child's school and teacher, parents/guardians often can solve and avoid problems or misunderstandings which may arise otherwise. Parent/teacher conferences are scheduled once a year; however, conferences may be scheduled at any time the parents or teachers believe it would be advantageous. Both parents and teachers are encouraged to schedule conferences as needs arise throughout the school year. The pre-established conference dates are established for the following dates:

- Thursday, October 9th – Act 80 Early Dismissal
- Friday, October 10th – Act 80 Early Dismissal

Communicating with Your Child's Teacher

When calling to speak with a teacher, please understand that a teacher will not be excused from class to speak with a parent/guardian. Parents/guardians may leave a message for the teacher by dialing 724-662-5102. When available, the teacher will return the call. The parent/guardian and teacher should speak when the teacher is at school where information regarding the student is available and a meaningful conversation can take place.

Email is another manner of communicating with teachers. Email addresses are accessible on the Mercer Area School District website, in this handbook, or follow the pattern: <firstinitial><lastname>@mercer.k12.pa.us. Please allow teachers sufficient time to respond to your email since they are teaching classes and supervising students during the majority of each day.

Student Telephone Usage

If parents/guardians find it necessary to telephone a message to their child, someone from the main office will be available for relaying the message. When possible, all instructions should be given to a child **before** he/she leaves for school. Student use of office telephones will be restricted to emergencies only. Please understand that contacting a student via student cell phone is not desired, since students are required to keep their cell phones in their backpacks. It is not permitted for students to use personal cell phone devices to make telephone calls or send text messages during the school day.



Classroom Visitations

There may be a time when a parent or other visitor may request to observe a classroom. The purpose of an observation would be to gather insights into instructional strategies and/or the curriculum, or to learn more about the school. Classroom observations can disrupt the educational environment as students may be easily distracted when a visitor enters the learning environment. Therefore, procedures for classroom observation have been developed to assist in managing this process. Ultimately, the building principal may grant permission for classroom observations if the request is deemed appropriate. To ensure order and safety in the schools, it is necessary to establish guidelines governing classroom visits. They are as follows:

- The building principal must be contacted regarding a parent or community member's visitation request
- The building principal will contact the teacher and they will arrange a time and date for the visit
- Forty-eight (48) hour notice is required before a classroom visit is scheduled
- A visit should last no longer than forty-five (45) minutes
- The visitor shall remain in the back of the classroom as a non-participating observer
- The visitor shall respect the teacher's authority in the classroom and shall not interfere with the classroom discipline plan
- Any visitor that violates these guidelines may be denied future visitation privileges

School Partnership with Parents and Community

Parents as Educational Partners (PEP)

Mercer Area Elementary School is fortunate to have a dedicated parent group which supports our school and provides enrichment activities that extend the school curriculum. PEP is instrumental in creating and organizing building fundraising activities. Through these efforts, PEP has been able to provide materials and resources to the students, funded field trips, and financed projects that directly improve the school experience for our students. All parents are encouraged to join this organization that provides so much support for all students at the elementary school. Please check our elementary school website and the PEP Facebook page for future meeting dates and times.

Parent Opportunities

For parents wishing to become more involved with the school community, there are many different opportunities. Parents/guardians have the opportunity to join the Elementary Parent Advisory Committee (EPAC), attend district

committee meetings and school board meetings, become involved with Title I and Federal Programs, and many others. Additional opportunities and resources can be found through Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV (www.miu4.org) and the National Parent Teacher Association (www.pta.org) websites.

Cafeteria/Food Services



Food Services

Students are to eat their meals in the school cafeteria, unless otherwise stated in a child's Individualized Education Plan. Well-balanced, hot, and cold lunches are available to students. Students are also permitted to carry their lunches. In case of a food allergies, a signed written request from the parent/guardian or doctor is required to substitute a drink or meal items. This request must be renewed each school year.

Breakfast and Lunch Prices

In July 2022, the Mercer Area School District was approved for participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Food Service Program beginning in the 2022-2023 school year and continuing through the 2025-2026 school year. This means that free breakfast and free lunch will be provided to the students at no cost. Please note that free meals do not include extras and snack items. Students that want a double lunch or an extra entrée will be charged for the additional food items. If you wish to manage your child's cafeteria account you can visit www.schoolcafe.com or make checks payable to Mercer Area School District – Cafeteria Account.

If you are interested in setting up an online account, please visit the district website and follow the steps to register with School Café. Through this online site, parents can view their child's account balance, review spending, sign up for automatic payments, etc.

Free and Reduced Breakfasts and Lunches

The Federal Government provides the opportunity for families to apply for free and reduced-price lunches. Applications are distributed to all students at the beginning of the school year. An application must be submitted for each family in school. Applications may be filed at any time during the school year. The qualifications and income guidelines that determine who would qualify are available from the office of the Director of Food Service. Any questions regarding the program should be referred to Mrs. Jane Ferguson, Food Services Director at 724-662-5104 ext. 23.

Cafeteria Regulations

1. Pizzas, fast foods, etc. may not be delivered to the students during lunch periods. The school operates a closed cafeteria.
2. Students may not move to between tables during the lunch period unless the monitor has given permission.
3. Only the proper number of students for which the table has been designed may be seated at the table.
4. Students will not push ahead of others in the lunch line. Teachers/monitors will send such violators to the rear of the line.
5. Food should never be handled unless the student intends to purchase it.
6. Students should observe good table manners.
7. Tables are to be left clean for the next lunch period.
8. Proper respect for teacher, monitor, supervisor, custodians and fellow students must be exhibited at all times.
9. Any directions or procedures outlined by cafeteria supervisors must be followed.
10. Students are not permitted to share food with other students in the cafeteria.

Cafeteria Expectations

Lunchroom monitors supervise students during lunchtime. No child is forced to eat his/her lunch; however, good eating habits are encouraged. The following expectations will be upheld in the lunchroom:

- Good manners should be practiced at all times.
- Trays are to be emptied and returned to the dish window.
- All students are to move into the cafeteria quietly and orderly and dismiss from the area in the same manner.
- Sit in assigned grade level area.
- Remain seated until the lunchroom monitor dismisses students.
- Participate in appropriate conversation and behavior.
- Put all trash in cans and leave your area clean.
- Use quiet voices.



Dismissal Procedures- Cafeteria

1. Students must be seated at their tables before they will be dismissed.
2. All lunch trays and utensils should be returned to the proper area before dismissal.
3. Students will not be dismissed until their tables and seating areas have been checked for cleanliness by the cafeteria monitors.
4. Students should leave the cafeteria in an orderly fashion.

Mustang Café

In an effort to promote positive student behavior in the cafeteria, the elementary school has enacted a rewards program during lunch for students in grades 1-6. Students exhibiting good behavior both in the school building and in the cafeteria have the opportunity to be selected by the school staff to receive the Mustang Café reward. If students are selected for the café, they are given the opportunity to eat at a special group of tables that day. The winners are able to select two (2) students from the same grade level to join them at the special table as part of their reward. Students exhibiting good behavior and demonstrating positive choices have a greater likelihood of being selected for recognition at the Mustang Café.

Miscellaneous Information

Student of the Month

Elementary staff members have the opportunity to nominate students for Student of the Month. These nominations will be accepted and evaluated by the elementary administration before making the determination of recipients. Students consistently exhibiting ***Safety, Kindness, Respectfulness,*** *and* ***Responsibility*** have the potential to be nominated.

Lost and Found Items

Please write your child's name on all jackets, coats, lunch boxes, hats, etc. Many items are lost throughout the year and this will help return lost items. Articles found at school are taken to the main office. Articles of clothing, books, school bags, and lunch boxes that are properly marked with the child's name will be returned promptly. All unmarked items will be taken to the "Lost and Found" box. Any unclaimed items at the end of the school year will be donated to a local charitable organization.

Student Money

If you are sending money to school with your child (snack, lunch, and book orders) please put all money in an envelope and write on the envelope the child's name, teacher's name, and the purpose for which the money is sent to school.



Private Birthday Party Invitations

To preserve a cohesive classroom environment, invitations to private birthday parties **will not** be distributed in school, unless the entire classroom is being invited or if a boy is inviting all boys or a girl is inviting all girls in his/her classroom. For confidentiality purposes, classroom lists cannot be provided for these invitations.

School Sales

Students are not permitted to sell products for groups not associated with the school during the school day. Only sales with prior approval of the principal and in accordance with the Mercer Area School Board of Education will be permitted during the school day.

Additionally, students are not permitted to sell items to their classmates during the school day or on school buses. These items include, but are not limited to: trading cards, 3D printed objects, food, drinks, necklaces, bracelets, etc.

Delivery of Lunches/Articles to Students

If it is necessary to bring articles of clothing, lunches, instruments, etc. to school during the day, please drop them off in the main office. In order to minimize classroom disruptions, these articles are not permitted to be delivered personally to classrooms and/or children. Please label all articles with the child's name and room number. Packed lunches are to be sent with the student.

Pets

Due to a number of students with allergies and our concern for safety issues, pets of any type are not permitted on school property. This includes, but is not limited to: dogs, cats, reptiles, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, etc.

Classroom Parties/Wellness

The administration and School Board is committed to providing a school environment that promotes student wellness, proper nutrition, nutrition education, and regular physical activity as part of the total learning experience. It is recognized that intermittently throughout the year, there will be classroom and grade-level celebrations. The use of food as a reward will be discouraged. Celebrations and classroom parties may consider and encourage healthy food choices with consideration for special dietary needs. Additionally, please note that there may be an extreme food allergy or medical food restriction in your child's classroom. Please coordinate with the classroom teacher before sending food with your child as a classroom treat. Teacher and parents/guardians are always encouraged to consider non-food options for classroom celebrations.

Classroom Placements

Student Classroom Placement Procedures

To foster an atmosphere conducive to learning, many factors are considered when balancing classroom assignments including: learners' range of academic achievements, social mixture, gender balance, individual learning styles, student personalities, and interactions. Students benefiting from being together or separated, overall student behavior, teacher recommendations, and class size are also considered when determining placements. Teacher input and collaboration is a crucial piece of establishing these balanced classes. Parent/guardian requests will be heard by the principal; however, please understand that it is not guaranteed that these requests will be fulfilled. If a parent wishes to make a classroom placement/teacher request, these requests must be made prior to June 1st. This will provide adequate time for the teachers and administration to review all class placement factors. The principal will make the final determination of the student classroom placement after all factors have been considered.

Curriculum/ Extra-Curricular Offerings



Music

Several opportunities are available to students in grades five (5) and six (6). Students wishing to play in the instrumental band may do so beginning with lessons in grade five. Full instrumental band and choral concerts are scheduled and performed during the school year.

Curricular Activities

There are various co-curricular opportunities for students during and after school hours. Activities are offered periodically throughout the school year. Information will be sent home with your child to announce details about these additional learning opportunities.

Field Trips

Field trips to places of interest are sometimes scheduled by classroom teachers throughout the school year. These trips are designed to supplement different aspects of the classroom curriculum. Parents will receive notices of field trips in advance of the scheduled trip date and will be asked to sign one field ern. Should the need arise for the removal of this privilege, the parent/guardian will be notified in advance of the trip.



Care of Materials

Textbooks

The Mercer Area School Board recognizes its responsibility to provide textbooks or workbooks for the use by the students. These textbooks are the property of the school district. Therefore, payment for loss or damage beyond normal wear and tear shall be the responsibility of the student, his/her parents or legal guardians.

Equipment

Students are responsible for the proper care of all supplies and equipment per the Code of Conduct. Payment for loss of such supplies and equipment, or misuse on the part of the student, will be the responsibility of his/her parents or legal guardians.

Support Services

Guidance Counselor

The guidance counselor provides social, emotional, behavioral, and academic counseling in individual, small group, and classroom settings. The guidance counselor is proactively involved in the anti-bullying programs and Social Emotional Learning programs in our school by means of collaboration with all teachers and staff. In their academic role, the counselor participates in the Elementary School Assistance Program (ESAP), Child Study Team (CST), and Tier II Team.

School Counseling Department Mission Statement

It is the mission of Mercer Area School District's school counseling program to facilitate each student's person/social, academic, and career development and prepare them to live as productive members of society and help the students reach their future goals.

Small Groups

Mercer Area Elementary School has incorporated school wide behavioral expectations for all students. In addition, we have incorporated Social-Emotional Learning through Character Strong and Satchel Pulse into our curriculum with expectations that are taught in the classrooms. Our school has clearly defined these behavioral expectations in all school environments; classroom, halls, restrooms, playground, cafeteria, and bus. Each student will be taught these expectations at the beginning of the school year. Some students may need some additional supports to help them with these expectations. Through collaboration and data collection, your child might be chosen for a small group during the school year held by the guidance counselor, Mrs. Allyson Rust. Friendship, social skills, feelings, decision making, and bullying are just some examples of the topics which may be focused upon during small groups. You will be notified if your child is chosen for a small group by Mrs. Rust. **If you do not wish for your child to participate in these small groups during the current school year for any reason, please inform the school in writing of this request.**

Special Education

Students who experience academic difficulties within the general education curriculum, classroom, or school building may be referred for assessment after accommodations and modifications in the least restrictive environment have been exhausted through the classroom teacher, Title I teacher, administration, and Child Study Team (CST) intervention. Parents may refer students for special education evaluation by contacting a building administrator, in writing, with a reason for referral. Services are provided for students who are eligible and demonstrate a need for special education. Should a student qualify for special services, curricular/instructional accommodations for exceptional students shall be provided as outlined in the students Individualized Educational Plan. Contact Mrs. Amanda Simpson, Director of Special Education, if you have questions about Special Education.

English Language Learners

Students in grades K-6 who speak another language at home may be eligible for English language instruction depending on their individual needs.

Gifted Education

Services are provided for students who are eligible and demonstrate a need for gifted education. Curricular/instructional accommodations shall be provided as outlined in the student's Gifted Individual Educational Program (GIEP). Contact Dr. Michael Piddington if you have questions about Gifted Education.

Elementary Student Assistance Program (ESAP)

The goal of the ESAP team is to provide assistance to students who may be experiencing difficulties that interfere with their academic success. A core team of trained and certified school and community professionals assist with identifying those barriers and developing an action plan to address the issues-at-hand. At times, students may be dealing with a variety of barriers, such as low self-esteem, academic difficulties, peer or family relationship problems, grief & loss, substance abuse, or other possible social or emotional concerns. This program is voluntary and works with the student, family, school, and community resources to assist the student in having a more successful school experience. Students and families have the opportunity to participate with the team throughout the entire process. If you have questions regarding the Elementary Student Assistance Program, please refer your questions to Mrs. Allyson Rust, Elementary Guidance Counselor.



Child Study Team (CST)

The goal of the Child Study Team is to intervene to assist teachers in improving student achievement using research-based interventions matched to the instructional need and level of the student. A school administrator, classroom teacher, Title I teacher, school counselor, speech/language therapist, school psychologist, and other support staff who would provide valuable insight, comprise the core team of the Child Study Team. Utilizing all available student data, the team works to provide interventions to best support students who may be in need of further academic assistance. Progress monitoring and intervention adjustments both within the classroom and through individual/small group support is crucial to the Child Study Team process. This team follows the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII) and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) intervention framework to

support the teacher by assisting in developing strategies and interventions and/or a more comprehensive plan to address the student's challenges.

Federal Programs – Title I, II, IV

Title I Services



The Title I program is a federal initiative that has been developed to provide additional educational services to students in the areas of reading and mathematics. Mercer Area Elementary School has been designated as a School-wide Title I School, meaning that all students in the elementary building are eligible to receive Title I services. Title I teachers have been assigned to specific grade levels, classroom teachers, and content areas to provide direct assistance for children in the areas of reading and mathematics. Please note that Title I support is not the same categorization of special education learning support. Title I classrooms are comprised of small instructional groups that will focus on one of three main areas 1) re-teaching, 2) pre-teaching, and 3) enrichment. The students receiving Title I services continually change during the school year since small groups are determined around individual need. Title I teachers collaborate with the classroom teacher to identify specific areas of need and students who would benefit from additional small group support. Meetings and programs between the school and home environment are held throughout the school year to inform parents/guardians about reading and mathematics strategies. **If you do not wish for your child to participate in the Title I program during the current school year, please inform the Title I Coordinator, Mr. Greg Acre, in writing of this request.**

Title II Services

Mercer Area Elementary School receives federal funds for our participation in Title II-A programming. The purpose of this program is to provide grants to State educational agencies and subgrants to local educational agencies to

1) Increase student achievement consistent with the challenging State academic standards
2) Improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders
3) Increase the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools; and
4) Provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

Ultimately it is up to the discretion of the school district to determine where this grant will be most effectively used. For the past number of years, the Mercer Area School District utilized the II-A funding to satisfy the category of *increasing the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools.* By continuing to utilize this resource, we are able to reduce the class size in the primary grade levels.

Title IV Funding

Mercer Area Elementary School receives federal funds for our participation in Title IV programming. During the 2025-2026 school year, Mercer Area School District will be dispersing all Title IV funds into the Title II program (class size reduction).

Special Education Services

It is the responsibility of the Pennsylvania Department of Education to ensure that all children with disabilities residing in the Commonwealth, regardless of the severity of their disability, and who are in need of special education and related services, are identified, located, and evaluated. This responsibility is required by a federal

law called the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA 2004).

The IDEA requires each state educational agency to publish a notice to parents via website, newspaper, or other media at the beginning of each school. The IDEA requires this notice to contain certain information. Pennsylvania law requires each school district to fulfill this notice requirement by providing an annual public notice

The school district is required by the IDEA to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities who need special education and related services. Pennsylvania has adopted state laws which conform with the IDEA and which school districts must follow. In Pennsylvania school age children with disabilities who need special education related services are identified as a child with a disability.

Students are exceptional if they need specially designed instruction and have one or more of the following physical or mental disabilities: autism/ pervasive development disorder, serious emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, deafness or hearing impairment, specific learning disability, intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, blindness or visual impairment, and speech or language impairment.

In Pennsylvania, students also qualify as exceptional if they require specially designed instruction and are determined to be mentally gifted.

The IDEA requires the provisions of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities between 3 years of age and the school district's age of beginners. In Pennsylvania, a child between 3 years of age and the school district's age of beginners who has a development delay or one or more of the physical or mental disabilities listed above is identified as a child with a disability.

These children are afforded the rights of school age exceptional children, including screening, evaluation, individualized education program planning, and provisions of appropriate programs and services. The Pennsylvania Department of Education is responsible for providing programs and services to these children under Act 212 of 1990, the Early Intervention Services System Act.

Screening:
Each school district must establish and implement procedures to locate, identify, and evaluate students suspected of being exceptional. These procedures include screening activities, which include but are not limited to review of group-based data (cumulative record, enrollment records, health records, and report cards); hearing screening (at a minimum of kindergarten, first, second, third, seventh, and eleventh grades); vision screening (every grade level); motor screening; and speech and language screening.

Through the district's Student Assistance Program and elementary school's Child Study Teams (CST), parents and members of the professional staff have the right to request screenings.

Except as indicated above or otherwise announced publicly, screening activities take place in an ongoing fashion throughout the school year. Special arrangements can be made so that screening can be conducted in the student's home school if the student cannot be brought to the school building. Contact the Director of Special Education, Mrs. Amanda Simpson (grades K-12) at 724-662-5102 if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Evaluation:
When screening indicates that a student may be exceptional, the school district will seek parental permission to evaluate. "Evaluation" means procedures used to determine whether a child has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education and related services that meet the child's needs. Procedures are used selectively with an individual child and does not mean basic tests administered to or procedures used with all children.

In Pennsylvania, this evaluation is called a multidisciplinary evaluation (MDE). It is conducted by a multidisciplinary team (MDT), which must include a school psychologist, a teacher and the parents. The MDE process must be

conducted in accordance with specific timelines and use procedural safeguard procedures. For example, tests and procedures used as part of the multidisciplinary evaluation may not be racially and culturally biased.

The MDE process results in a written evaluation report (ER). This report makes recommendations about a student's eligibility for special education based on the presence of a disability and the need for specially designed instruction. The evaluation report also makes recommendations for educational programming regardless of whether or not the team recommends that the student is exceptional.

Once parental consent for an evaluation is obtained, the school district has timelines and procedures specified by law, which it must follow.

Parents who think their child is a child with a disability may request at any time that the school district conduct a multidisciplinary evaluation. This request should be made in writing to the Director of Special Education Services. If a parent makes an oral request for a multidisciplinary evaluation the school district shall provide the parent with a form for written permission. Provision of Instructional Support (IS) activities do not serve as an immediate indicator for the parent or teacher to request a multidisciplinary evaluation. Instructional services are viewed, in most instances, as a means to provide intervention allowing the child to remain in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). However, there are cases where Instructional Supports are provided to assist a student during an MDE.

Parents also have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation. The school district must provide to parent, on request, information about where an independent educational evaluation may be obtained.

Educational Placement:
The determination of whether or not the student as exceptional is made by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. It is important to note that a single test or procedure may not be the sole factor in determining that a child is exceptional. The IEP team must include a Local Educational Representative (LEA), the student's teacher, special education teacher and the parents. If the student is determined to be exceptional an IEP will be developed.

An IEP describes a student's current educational levels, goals, objectives, accommodations/modifications, and the individual programs and services, which the student will receive. IEPs are reviewed on an annual basis. The IEP team will make decisions about the type of services, the level of intervention and the location of intervention.

Placement must be made in the least restrictive environment in which the student's needs can be met within special education and related services provisions. All students with disabilities must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who are not disabled.

Services for Protected Handicapped Students:
Students who are not eligible to receive special education programs and services may qualify as protected handicapped students and therefore be protected by other federal and state laws intended to prevent discrimination. The school district must ensure that protected handicapped students have equal opportunity to participate in the school program and extracurricular activities to the maximum extend appropriate for the individual student.

In compliance with state and federal law, the school district will provide to each protected handicapped student without discrimination or cost to the student or family, those related aides, services, or accommodations which are needed to provide equal opportunity to participate in and obtain the benefits of the school program and extracurricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the student's abilities. In order to qualify as a protected handicapped student, the child must be of school age with a physical or mental disability, which substantially limits or prohibits participation in or access to an aspect of the school program.

These services and protections for protected handicapped students are distinct from those applicable to all eligible or exceptional students enrolled (or seeking enrollment) in special education programs.

The school district or parent may initiate an evaluation of a student under the laws, which protect handicapped students. Parents who wish to have a child evaluated should contact the building principal and/or the director of special education.

Confidentiality:
Each school district protects the confidentiality of personally identifiable information regarding its exceptional and protected handicapped students in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and other applicable federal and state laws.

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords parents and students over 18 years of age ("eligible students") certain rights with respect to the student's education records. These rights are as follows:

1. The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days of the day the school receives request for access. Parents or eligible students should submit to the school principal (or appropriate school official) a written request that identifies the record(s) they wish to inspect. The principal will make arrangements for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.
2. The right to request the amendment of student's education records that the parent or eligible student believes are inaccurate or misleading. Parents or eligible students may ask the school to amend a record that they believe is inaccurate or misleading. Parents or eligible students may ask the school to amend a record that they believe is inaccurate. They should write the school principal (or appropriate school official), clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it is inaccurate. If the school decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, the school will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and advise them of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.
3. The right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent. One exception which permits disclosure without consent is disclosure to school officials with legitimate education interests. A school official is a person employed by the district as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel); a person serving on the school board; a person or company with whom the school has contracted to perform a special task (such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist); or a parent or student serving on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee, or assisting another school official in performing his or her task. A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an educational record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.
4. The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failure by the school district to comply with the requirements of FERPA. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA is: Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202-4605.

The addition of this information fulfills the state and federal requirements under 22 PA Code 14.121 and 34 CFR § 300.111 Child Find. Also, the addition of this information to the Annual Notice meets compliance requirements as per 34 CFR § 300.600 State monitoring and enforcement.

In accordance with 34 CFR § 300.624, please be advised of the following retention/destruction schedule for the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA), Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), and Keystone Exam related materials:

- PSSA, Keystone Exam, and PASA test booklets will be destroyed one year after student reports are delivered for the administration associated with the test booklets.
- PSSA and Keystone Exam answer booklets and PASA media recordings will be destroyed three years after completion of the assessment.

The school district maintains its education records in compliance with the guidelines for the collection, maintenance, and dissemination of pupil records. Category "A" data which includes the minimal personal data

necessary for operation of the school district will be maintained for a minimum time period of a 100 years. Category "B" data which includes verified information of clear importance, but not absolutely necessary to the school, over time, in helping the child or in protecting others will be maintained until the child leaves school. Category "C" data which includes potentially useful information, but not yet verified or clearly needed beyond the immediate present will be reviewed at least once a year and destroyed as soon as its usefulness has ended.

In addition, the school district may release "directory information" without parental consent unless a prior written objection to the release of such information is provided to the school district by the parent(s). "Directory information" includes the following: student's name, address, telephone listing, date and place of birth, photographs, videotapes, major fields of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, duties of attendance, honors and awards received. If you object to the disclosure of this information, you must submit a written letter of objection to the school district on or before end of September. Written objections should be mailed to Mercer Area Schools, 545 West Butler St., Mercer, PA 16137.

Procedural Safeguards:
Procedural safeguards protect the rights of parents and students. These safeguards include the following:

1. Parent's consent is always required prior to conducting an initial (for the first time) evaluation or a reevaluation, initially placing a child with a disability in a special education program, and disclosing to unauthorized persons personally identifiable information.
2. The school district must notify parents in writing whenever it wants to begin, change, or discontinue special education and related services. Along with this notification, the school district will provide the parents with a comprehensive, written description of their rights.
3. Parents who disagree with such actions proposed or refused by the school district have the right to request a hearing by an impartial third party using a procedure called due process. School districts also have the right to initiate due process in certain situations. During a due process procedure, a student must remain in the last agreed upon educational placement (a status called pendency). Due process procedures are governed by timelines and procedures in Pennsylvania law.
4. Due process usually begins with a pre-hearing conference between the school district and the parents, although either party may waive the right to a pre-hearing conference. Throughout due process, any person, including an attorney, may represent parents. If a pre-hearing conference does not resolve the dispute, the parent may request an impartial due process hearing with an independent hearing officer.
5. Due process hearings are oral personal hearings and are open to the public, unless the parents request a closed hearing. The decision of the hearing officer shall include finding of fact, a discussion, and conclusions of law; the decision may be appealed to the appropriate court.

Pennsylvania has also made mediation services available throughout the Commonwealth at Commonwealth expense. Mediation services help parents and agencies involved in a dispute over special education to attempt to reach a mutually agreeably settlement with the assistance of an impartial mediator. Mediation does not deny or delay a party's right to a due process hearing.

Each school district must make available, upon request, printed information regarding special education programs and services and parent due process rights. This printed information is available from building administration.

Mode of Communication:
The content of this notice has been written in straightforward, simple language. If a person does not understand any of this notice, that person should contact the school district or IU and request an explanation.

The school district or IU will arrange for an interpreter for parent(s) with limited English proficiency. If a parent is deaf or blind or has no written language, the school district or IU will arrange for communication of this notice in the mode normality used by the parent (e.g. sign language, Braille, or oral communication).

For further information, contact the district's director of special education, Mrs. Amanda Simpson, (grades K-12) at 724-662-5102 or via email at asimpson@mercer.k12.pa.us.

The Mercer Area School District will not discriminate in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices, based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, religion, ancestry, or any other legally protected classification. Announcements of this policy are in accordance with the state and federal laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1966. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. For information regarding grievance procedures, services, activities, programs and facilities that are accessible to and usable by handicapped persons or, for inquires regarding compliance with the above nondiscriminatory policies, please contact Dr. Michael Piddington, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Mercer Area School District, 545 West Butler Street, Mercer, PA 16137 or at 724-662- 5100.

Mercer Area School District will make reasonable accommodations to its programs and services to assure access to all persons. If, because of a disability, you require an accommodation please contact the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator at 724-662-5100.

School Health Services

General Information- Health Services

School health services are provided through the combined efforts of the school, the nurse, school physician, school dentist, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The Health Office is an important part of the school. Students receive nursing care, first aid, treatment of illness or injury occurring in school, physical exams, and some screening exams. The nurse is available during school hours. Please feel free to phone the school and ask to be connected to the Health Office if your child is experiencing a health-related issue or to inquire about the school's medication policy.

Illness/Accident

The parent/guardian or designee will be contacted by the nurse if her assessment of an illness or accident requires parent/guardian attention during the school day. It is important that each parent/guardian provide one or more emergency telephone numbers with a designated person who can be contacted when the parent/guardian is unavailable. No student will be sent home during the school day without parent/guardian or designee notification.



Administering Medications during School Hours

There are times when students must receive medication during school hours. A medication whether prescription or over-the-counter (OTC), may only be administered with written permission from the physician or parent/guardian. In either case, the medication must be in a properly labeled container from the pharmacy or in the original commercial packaging in the case of OTC medication, and brought to the Health Room by the parent/guardian.

Possession/Use of Asthma Inhalers

The Board shall permit students to possess asthma inhalers and to self-administer the prescribed medication used to treat asthma when such is parent authorized. Possession and use of asthma inhalers by students shall be in accordance with state law and Board policy. Self-administration shall mean a student's use of medication in accordance with a prescription or written instructions from a physician, certified nurse practitioner, or physician assistant. The student shall be made aware that the asthma inhaler is intended for his/her use only and may not be shared with other students. **The student shall notify the nurse immediately following each use of an asthma inhaler.** Before a student may possess or use an asthma inhaler during school hours, the following is required:

1. A written request from the parent/guardian that the school complies with the order of the physician, certified nurse practitioner, or physician assistant.
2. A statement from the parent/guardian acknowledging that the school is not responsible for ensuring the medication is taken and relieving the district and its employees of responsibility for the benefits or consequences of the prescribed medication.

3. A written statement from the physician, certified nurse practitioner, or physician assistant that states:
    - Name of the drug
    - Prescribed dosage
    - Times medication is to be taken
    - Length of time medication is prescribed
    - Diagnosis or reason medication is needed, unless confidential
    - Potential serious reaction or side effects of medication
    - Emergency response
    - If the child is qualified and is able to self-administer the medication

Immunizations

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requires parents or guardians of students in grades K-12 to have their children immunized against various communicable diseases. Students who are not immunization compliant risk exclusion from the school setting until these immunization requirements are met, or if their doctor provides a medical plan outlining the dates for the next vaccines. Unless they have a medical or religious exemption, students of all ages are required to have the following vaccines:

- Four doses of tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis
- Four doses of the polio vaccine
- Two doses of the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine
- Three doses of the hepatitis B vaccine
- Two doses of varicella, or evidence of immunity from chicken pox

On the first day of school, unless the child has a medical or religious/philosophical exemption, a child must have had at least one dose of the above vaccinations or risk exclusion. If a child does not have all the doses listed above, needs additional doses, and the next dose is medically appropriate, the child must receive that dose within the first five days of school or risk exclusion. If the child does not have all of the doses listed above, needs additional doses, and the next dose is not medically appropriate, the child must provide a medical plan (red and white card) within the first five days of school for obtaining the required immunizations or risk exclusion. The medical plan must be followed or risk exclusion.

Handwashing Policy and Procedures

Purpose of Hand Washing

1. To reduce the spread of bacteria and viruses, from person to person and from people to contact surfaces.
2. To reduce germs and bacteria found on the hands to safe levels, to prevent or to eliminate the spread of bacteria and viruses, which increase the spread of illness.
3. To reinforce and practice personal hygiene practices with all students.
4. To provide opportunity for the students to develop correct hand washing procedures and then apply the procedures on a regular basis.

Hand Washing Procedures

1. Wash hands using soap and warm, running water, at least 100°F.
2. Vigorously rub hands during washing for at least 15-20 seconds (sing the Happy Birthday or Alphabet song) with special attention paid to the backs of the hands, wrists, between the fingers, and under the fingernails.
3. Rinse hands well while leaving the water running.
4. With the water running, dry hands with a single-use towel or a warm air dryer.
5. Turn off the water using a paper towel, covering washed hands to prevent recontamination from the dirty faucet.

Use of Hand Sanitizers



1. Hand sanitizers may be used in place of hand washing ONLY when access to soap and hand sinks are not available.
2. Only hand sanitizers containing 60-90% ethyl alcohol or isopropanol in concentration with equivalent sanitizing strength may be used as an adjunct to proper hand washing.

Role of the Student

1. Be familiar with the hand washing and hand sanitation policy of the school.
2. Become familiar with the proper steps of hand washing and know when to wash hands.
3. Develop good hand washing habits.
4. Take personal responsibility for washing hands not only at school, but when away from school.

Role of the Parents/Guardians

1. Encourage children by showing interest and displaying positive examples of hand washing.
2. Reinforce hand washing by setting the example and washing their hands according to when to wash hands.

Role of the Teacher

1. Demonstrate and present the steps to hand washing clearly and concisely.
2. Ensure that proper and adequate facilities are available and are in good working order.
3. Provide time prior to meals and snack for hand washing.
4. Reinforce hand washing by setting the example and washing their hands according to when to wash hands.
5. Consider assignments that permit the student to demonstrate handwashing comprehension.
6. Motivate students on when to and how to wash hands.

Role of the School Nurse

1. Provide instructional materials for use in the classroom and restrooms which reinforce proper hand washing.
2. Assist the principal in instructing teachers on proper hand washing procedures.
3. Assist the classroom teacher in instructing students in proper hand washing procedures.
4. Communicate with the principal, food service manager, and teachers any concerns related to increases in visits to the nurses' office, which may be the result of improper handwashing.

Role of the Principal

1. Communicate the hand washing and hand sanitizer policy to teachers, parents/guardians, and students.
2. Organize in-service training for all building staff as part of the policy implementation.
3. Ensure the staff complies with the hand washing, sanitizing policy.
4. Coordinate the availability of supplies for hand washing: soap and single-use towels, in bathrooms and classrooms with hand sinks.
5. Evaluate and monitor the implementation of hand washing and hand sanitizing.

When to Wash Hands - Mercer Elementary School

1. Upon arrival to building or classroom
2. Before breakfast, if eating breakfast
3. After using the restroom facility
4. Before/After eating lunch or snack
5. Before/After arriving at special
6. Before/After recess
7. Before dismissal from building

If a sink is not available for hand washing, please use hand sanitizer.

Library Services



The Mercer Area Elementary Library is open from 8:15 – 11:40 a.m. and 12:15 – 2:35 p.m. each day. Book are checked out to students during each library class and should be brought to school each day in case their book is requested by a teacher. If a student does not return a book on his/her library day they will not receive another

book until the book is returned. There are no late fees. Students may receive and return books every day. If a book is lost or destroyed, the student assumes responsibility for paying for the book.

Students from Kindergarten through sixth grade will have library class on a five-day rotation. Kindergarten through second grade students receive an "S" grade for class participation. Students are tested in grades 3-6 and are given a grade of "O", "S", or "N".

There is a Parent Permission and Parent Review policy in place. In the school library collection, there are thousands of books that range in topics and reading levels. Due to the expansive nature of this library, there may be a book in this collection that a parent has deemed as controversial. Any book of this nature has received a label of "Parent Permission" from the Elementary Library. Should a child wish to check out one of these "Parent Permission" books, a permission slip will be sent home with that child PRIOR to the child receiving that book from the library. If you have any questions, please refer to the Mercer Area Elementary Librarian, Mrs. Janice Langdon at jlangdon@mercer.k12.pa.us.

School Policies and Discipline

In order to facilitate a favorable learning environment, school policies and procedures have been established. Students who violate school policies and procedures may be subject to disciplinary consequences. Since each situation is unique, all factors will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the administration before assigning disciplinary consequences. The following consequences, while not comprehensive, does provide a list of potential consequences that may be utilized to address negative behaviors:

Student conference	Parent conference	Loss of privilege
Time in office	Loss of recess	Restitution
Lunch detention	After-school detention	Friday detention
In-school suspension	Out-of-school suspension	Bus suspension

Lunch Detention

Lunch detention is monitored by a staff member and held in a location separate from the main cafeteria. Students are able to eat their lunch, but will not be permitted to socialize with peers during this time. Students who do not follow the rules of Lunch Detention will be assessed additional consequences. Lunch detention may be assigned by the administrator or cafeteria monitors. Please note that lunch detentions may be utilized in the event of transportation/schedule conflicts with after-school detention.

After-School Detention/Friday Detention

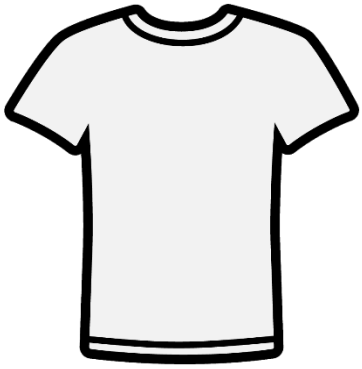
Afternoon detentions will be held after school. Depending upon the infraction, the detention may be assigned from 3:00-3:30 (30 minutes) or 3:00-4:00 (60 minutes). In the event of a scheduling/transportation conflict, morning detentions will be held from 7:30-8:00 a.m. (30 minutes) or 7:00-8:00 a.m. (60 minutes). Friday detentions will be held on Friday from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. (120 minutes). These longer detentions are utilized in the event of more severe or repetitive misbehaviors. Students should bring with them sufficient materials to study and/or read.

Detention is a place of strict discipline. Students/parents must make transportation arrangement for students to be dropped off and picked up accordingly. Neither bus nor van transportation will be provided. Students serving detention must remain busy on academic work. Those without work will be permitted to read during this time. Students will not be permitted to do sit with nothing to do, nor to sleep while in detention. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in further consequences. Detentions are assigned only by the administration. Parents will be informed of any scheduled detention prior to the date of detention through either written or verbal communication.

If the student is unable to serve their detention due to absence from school, the detention will be rescheduled to a future date. If the student willingly fails to serve or forgets to serve detention, that student will be assigned an

additional detention. Any student who fails to serve two consecutive assigned detentions will receive in-school suspension.

Dress Code



Mercer Elementary students are expected to come to school clean, neat, and dressed in a manner that is accepted as being in good taste. Clothing that disrupts or inhibits education or endangers the safety of others is not permitted to be worn in school. Therefore, guidelines have been established to assist the student in utilizing proper dress and grooming for school. The responsibility of parents/guardians to exercise their authority, dictates that they be concerned with the type of attire worn by their children because it is a direct reflection of his/her home, school, and community.

Compliance with the "Students Rights and Responsibilities" document is required: "Students are to dress and groom themselves so as to meet fair standards of safety and health, and so as not to cause substantial disruption to the educational process."

The school staff requests the cooperation of both students and parents/guardians. If there is a question as to the inappropriateness of dress, the building principal will make the final judgment. The school does not have extra clothing to lend to children. The administration reserves the right to adjust the dress code during the year to address issues that are in the best interest of the building and students within.

The following dress code has been enacted for the elementary building:

- Students should dress in a manner that is appropriate for school activities. For example, students should be dressed appropriately for physical activity on the day of gym class. Students should be dressed appropriately for outside recess in the winter months.
- Student shorts, dresses, skirts, etc. should be a length that is school appropriate.
- Students are not permitted to wear clothing that exposes their midriffs. Exposed undergarments are not permitted.
- Outerwear (coats, jackets, gloves) may not be worn inside during the school day unless granted permission.
- Clothing that displays offensive, provocative, or inflammatory words, sayings, symbols, or pictures, including those related to controlled substances such as tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs is unacceptable. Any clothing containing language or images that could be interpreted as harmful, dangerous, or inappropriate is also prohibited.
- Objects on clothing that can pose a potential hazard to other students should not be worn to school. This includes, but is not limited to spikes and studs on clothing and spurs on boots or shoes.
- Hats, bandanas, and hoods are not permitted to be worn during the school day. Bandanas are not to be worn as a head covering or on any part of the body/outfit (around the wrist, ankle, hanging out of the pocket).
- Sunglasses are not permitted to be worn during school unless medically necessary.
- Holes/torn garments are permitted. The holes and tears must be below fingertip length.
- No chains of any material are permitted. This includes, but is not limited to chains for wallets, chains on pants, shirts, etc.

Violation of the Student Dress Code

If the student is found to be in violation of the dress code, they will be asked to change into proper clothing that adheres to the school dress code. This may involve seeing the nurse for alternative clothing, clothing modification, or calling home for new clothing. The classroom teacher will address initial incidents with the student and will notify the principal of said violations. Repeat infractions may result in disciplinary action as determined by the administration.



Cell Phone/Electronic Devices

Student possession of cell phones and other personal electronic devices such as pagers, calculators, person assistants (PDAs), laptop computers, handheld computers, cameras, MP3 players, or any other devices designed to communicate, create, or store information is permitted at the discretion of the classroom teacher.

The personal electronic devices must be powered off or silenced during the school day unless otherwise permitted by the supervising adult. Use of personal or district technology devices that disrupt the instructional day or includes possession, viewing, sending or sharing video or audio information which has sexual, violent, or threatening content on school grounds, school events, or school busses is prohibited and will result in disciplinary action and/or confiscation of the personal device. Sending text, image, sound, video, or files for the purpose of cheating is grounds for confiscation and/or inspection of transmitted data. Students may not use such devices on school property and school-sponsored activities to access and/or view Internet websites that are otherwise blocked to students at school, such as but not limited to social networking sites. The following is prohibited while using such devices on school grounds: sending/displaying offensive messages or pictures; obscene language; harassing, bullying, insulting or attacking others; violating copyright laws; using another person's password/access codes; trespassing in another's digital files, work or folders.

Staff may confiscate the device when in use outside of the parameters of acceptable use guidelines listed here and in Board Policy. Administration will receive the device and hold until parent/guardian and/or the Mercer Borough Police Department inspect the device in the case of guideline violations involving a sexual, violent, or attacking nature. In the event that a student violates the cell phone/electronic device policy, the following steps will be taken:

- 1st offense – Warning; Device confiscated and returned at the end of the school day
- 2nd offense – One (1) after school detention; Device confiscated and must be picked up by parent/guardian
- 3rd offense – Two (2) after school detentions; Device confiscated and must be picked up by parent/guardian
- 4th offense – One (1) Friday detention; Device confiscated and must be picked up by parent/guardian
- 5th offense – One (1) in-school suspension; Device confiscated; Student must turn their cell phone into the office each morning for the remainder of marking period

If devices have been confiscated and require a parent pickup, this must be done before 3:30 p.m. Otherwise, the device may be picked up during the next school day. Conversely, iPads, Kindles **are permitted** in school exclusively for the utilization of reading literature. It is not recommended that students bring personal devices into the school. The owner assumes all risk of damage, theft, loss, or misuse of such devices. If these articles are lost, damaged, or stolen, the school **will not** take responsibility. Academic time will not be used to search for these articles if they are lost or stolen.

Fighting

Students engaging in physical violence against another will not be tolerated. Each situation be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Consequences will be levied against students who fight on school grounds or at a school-sponsored event. Consequences may include:

1. One (1) to three (3) days of in or out-of-school suspension
2. Informal hearing with parent/guardian
3. May file with the district magistrate
4. May be reported to local law enforcement
5. The school may also file charges on any student who deliberately attacks another member of the school community.

Shoving/Hitting

Under no circumstances is it acceptable for a student to cause physical harm to another student. This may include, but is not limited to: shoving, intentionally tripping, hitting, kicking, placing another student in a headlock, slapping, etc. Each event will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and all factors will be considered. Disciplinary consequences will be levied against students who cause, or intend to cause, physical harm to another student.

Gum
Chewing gum is not permitted in school, on the school bus, or at other school activities. The student will be asked to dispose of the gum. Repeat infractions may result in disciplinary action.

Trading Cards/Items
Exchanging personal items such as trading cards, toys, devices are strictly prohibited within the school environment. This rule is extended to the bus and extra-curricular activities. Students should not be exchanging personal items, such as Pokémon cards, for similar items, or money. Disciplinary consequences may be levied against students who violate this rule. If possible, original items will be returned to their original owner. Students are responsible for securing their own personal property and should not bring valuables to school. The district is not responsible for lost or stolen items. Academic time will not be used to search for these articles if they are lost or stolen.



Teacher/Student Interaction
Reasonable force may be used by school employees on all students in the following situations:

a) To quell a disturbance
b) To obtain possession of weapons or other dangerous objects
c) For the purpose of self-defense
d) For the protection of persons or property

Child Abuse and Sexual Abuse Reporting
Under the Child Protective Services, all professional school district personnel (administrators, teachers, and nurses) are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Reports of suspected abuse will be made immediately by telephone and a written report within 48 hours. Concerned citizens may also make a report of suspected child abuse if he/she has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is an abused child by calling the Child Abuse HOT LINE at 1-800-932-0313.

Firearms/Weapons/Dangerous Instruments
Any student who carries a weapon on school property, a school vehicle, or at any school event without proper authorization will be in violation of school policy. This also includes replica or look-a-like weapons. Act 26 of 1995 states a weapon includes but is not limited to any knife, cutting instrument, cutting tool, nunchaku, firearm, rifle, and other tool, instrument, or implement capable of causing serious injury.

Act 30 of 1997 requires expulsion from school for a period of not less than one year for any student who is determined to have brought or is in possession of a weapon on any school property, any school sponsored activity, or any public conveyance providing transportation to a school or school-sponsored activity.

The superintendent of schools may recommend on a case-by-case basis modification to the above item. In addition, the superintendent, in the case of an exceptional student, shall take all steps necessary to comply with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Employees/students must immediately report to a staff member any knowledge of the presence of a firearm/weapon on school property.

Terroristic Threats/Acts
The Mercer Area School District Policy Number 241 defines terroristic threats/acts as follows:

1. A threat to commit violence communicated with the intent to terrorize another.
2. To cause evacuation of the building.
3. To cause serious public inconvenience, in reckless disregard of the risk of causing such terror or inconvenience.
4. An offense against property or danger to another person.

When an administrator has evidence that a student has made a terroristic threat or committed a terroristic act, the following process shall be followed:

1. The principal shall immediately suspend the student.
2. The principal shall promptly report the incident to the superintendent.
3. The superintendent may report the student to law enforcement.
4. The superintendent may recommend expulsion of the student to the Mercer Area School Board.

Theft

The stealing of school property or personal belongings of others is considered theft. Students are responsible for securing their own personal property and should not bring valuables to school. The district is not responsible for lost or stolen items.

Tobacco

The use of tobacco in the school building, in vehicles while parked on school property, or any part of the school grounds is strictly prohibited by local school regulation, School Board regulations, and regulations of the Department of Public Instruction of Pennsylvania. These regulations include all social events and athletic programs on and off school property.

Punishment for breaking the above policy is established as follows:

1. Pupils violating the tobacco policy will be fined $50.00 (plus court costs) for each offense according to the appropriate State Acts.
2. Pupils may be required to attend smoking support sessions with the school nurse.
3. First offense- Three (3) days in-school suspension
   Second offense- Three (3) days out-of-school suspension and filing with District Magistrate
   Third offense- Ten (10) days out-of-school suspension and a school board hearing with consideration for expulsion.
   Other offenses- School board hearing for additional suspension or possible expulsion.
4. If after a single offense, a pupil should not have a tobacco violation for three school years, the offense will be stricken from their record.

Vape Devices, E-Cigarettes, and Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems

Students who are found to be in possession of a vape device, e-cigarette, or other Electronic Nicotine Delivery System (ENDS) on school property will face the following consequences.

First Offense:

1. Student will be suspended out-of-school for three (3) days.
2. Charges may be filed with the district magistrate. This filing will be waived if the student completes a tobacco intervention identified by the Mercer Area School District (cost to be paid by the parent/guardian).

Second Offense:

1. Student will be suspended out-of-school for five (5) days.
2. Charges may be filed with the District Magistrate. Students would be required to complete a tobacco cessation program identified by the Mercer Area School District (cost to be paid by the parent/guardian).

Third Offense:

1. Student will be suspended out-of-school for five (5) days.
2. Charges will be filed with the District Magistrate. The student will have a formal hearing with the Mercer Area School Board Disciplinary Committee.

Possession of Devices or Materials Such as Lighter, Papers, Pipes Used in Smoking

If a student is in possession of devices or materials, i.e. lighter, papers, pipes, used in smoking will be punished as follows:

- First offense- One (1) day in-school suspension
- Second offense- Two (2) days in-school suspension
- Third offense- Three (3) days in-school suspension
- Fourth offense- Three (3) days out-of-school suspension
- Fifth offense- School board hearing for additional suspension or possible expulsion



Drugs and Alcohol Policy

Mercer Area School District prohibits the use, misuse, receiving, selling, or distribution by pupils of drugs (controlled substances), "look-a-likes," drug paraphernalia, marijuana, or alcohol on school property, school buses, and during or prior to attending activities under school district enforcement agency. A parental conference is mandatory in these situations. Students violating this policy will result in a ten (10) day out-of-school suspension and a hearing before the Board of Education for further suspension or possible expulsion. In addition, student violators will be reported to law enforcement authorities.

Exclusion from School

Exclusion from school includes temporary suspension, full out-of-school suspension or expulsion. Students will be permitted an education while suspended. However, make-up work will be the student's responsibility and must be attended to immediately upon his/her return to school. While on suspension, students may not be on school property, use of school buses, or attend extra-curricular activities unless authorized by the principal.

Temporary Out-of-School Suspension

Temporary suspension will mean exclusion from school for an offense from a period of one (1) to three (3) days by the administration. The student will be informed of the reasons for the suspension and will be given an opportunity to respond before the suspension becomes effective. A parental conference will be held before the student is readmitted into school. This may be done via telephone or personal conference.



Full Out-of-School Suspension

Full suspension means exclusion from school for a period of four (4) to ten (10) days by the administration. An informal hearing will take place before the administration within the first five (5) days. The hearing will involve the student and the parents/legal guardians. The purpose of the informal hearing will be to enable the student to give his/her side of the case and to encourage the student's parent/legal guardians to meet the administration to discuss how future offenses can be avoided.

Offenses Potentially Warranting Suspension

The following examples include, but are not limited to offenses that may warrant suspension:

- Possession, use, being under the influence or selling of alcoholic beverages on or about the school premises or school buses before, during, or after school. Please refer to the section entitled "Drugs and Alcohol Policy".
- Possession, use, being under the influence or selling drugs or narcotics on or about the school premises or school buses before, during, or after school. Please refer to the section entitled "Drugs and Alcohol Policy".
- Willful disobedience to school personnel
- Willful disobedience of school directions and regulations
- Habitual truancy from school or classes
- Refusal to comply with in-school suspension

- Repeated suspensions
- Possession of a dangerous weapon
- Physically attacking a student or school district employee
- Willful or threatened destruction, damage, defacing of school property or property of school district employees
- Actions or threats that endanger the lives or well-being of students and faculty (i.e. false fire alarms or bomb threats)
- Use of profanity or obscene language or offensive behavior at school or school-related activities
- Sexual misconduct
- Repeatedly late to school
- Stealing school property of students or school district personnel
- Repeated violations of dress code policy
- Improper or forged signatures on school papers

Expulsion

Expulsion means exclusion from school for a period exceeding ten (10) days and may include permanent expulsion from the school attendance. In cases involving a possible expulsion, the student is entitled to a formal hearing, which is a fundamental element of due process. A formal hearing may be held before the entire Mercer Area Board of Directors or duly authorized Discipline Committee of the Board. The hearing committee's decision is advisory to the school board. A majority vote of the entire Board is required to expel a student.

Anti-Harassment/Anti-Bullying Policy

According to the U.S. Department of Justice and that National Association of School Psychologists, it is estimated that thousands of students miss school each day due to incidents related to harassment or bullying. It is the responsibility of the Mercer Area School District to create a school environment which is safe for children both physically and psychologically. As part of the guidance curriculum, an effort is made to differentiate between tattling (in which the motive is to get someone else in trouble) and reporting (the purpose of which is to alert the adults in the environment to verbal or physical actions which may be hurtful and/or create dangerous situations). Children are encouraged to be responsible reporters when they or others are being harassed or bullied. We are committed to respect the dignity of each person and to safeguard the students' rights to an educational environment in which harassment in any form is not tolerated. Each school has created a set of expected behaviors that is reviewed with all students.

The school district anti-harassment policy (#237) is available for review in the principal's office or online on the district website. Any person who believes that he/she has been harassed should report the incident to the principal. Guidelines for responding to allegations of harassment or bullying have been developed at the elementary level. A form is available for summarizing the complaint in writing. The principal is responsible for investigating such complaints to seek a resolution and for communicating with the parents of students involved.

Harassment/Bullying Guidelines

Students who are bullied or who observe others being bullied are encouraged to report such incidents to school personnel. **Please understand that incidents that go unreported may not be recognized by school personnel**. School personnel will investigate complaints promptly and corrective action shall be taken when allegations are verified. Confidentiality of all parties shall be maintained, consistent with the district's legal and investigative obligations. No reprisals or retaliation shall occur as a result of good faith reports of bullying. The policy will be disseminated to students and parents annually through communication such as the district website, classroom review, and be posted in prominent locations in each school building.

A student who violates this policy shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action consistent with the Code of Conduct, which may include:

- Counseling within the school
- Parental conference
- Loss of school privileges
- Transfer to a different proximity
- Exclusion from school-sponsored activities
- Detention
- Suspension
- Expulsion
- Counseling/therapy outside of school
- Referral to law enforcement officials

To ensure that parents and students are aware of the anti-harassment and bullying/cyberbullying guidelines at the elementary level, parents and students are asked to read and review the guidelines together and sign a form indicating such at the beginning of each school year.

Goals

The purpose of the Mercer Area Elementary Harassment/Bullying Guidelines are as follows:

1. To define harassment/bullying and the consequences of such behavior through clearly stated guidelines
2. To ensure fair and consistent enforcement of the policy following the established procedures

Definition

Harassment/bullying is any deliberate and repetitive act in which an imbalance of power is used in a willful manner to hurt, threaten, or frighten an individual(s). Harassment/bullying manifests itself in three forms: physical, verbal, and social.



Physical Harassment/Bullying includes, but is not limited to:

- Hitting, pushing, spitting, or kicking
- Damaging, stealing, or hiding another person's property
- Restraining or intimidating an individual
- Threatening an individual
- Unwelcomed touching

Verbal Harassment/Bullying includes, but is not limited to:

- Name calling, teasing, or belittling
- Spreading rumors in written or oral form
- Verbal threats of aggression or violence against a person or property
- Encouraging the harassment of others

Social Harassment/Bullying includes, but is not limited to:

- Pressuring people to do things against their will
- Unwelcomed gestures such as staring, whistling, or showing inappropriate material
- Making people feel different because of their physical or intellectual appearance

Disciplinary Action

Whenever a student engages in any of the above forms of harassment/bullying, disciplinary action will be taken. All incidents will be handled consistently through the outlined Procedures for Reporting Harassment/Bullying.

When determining disciplinary action, the following will be considered:

- Age of student
- Prior incidents
- Severity of incident



Disciplinary action may take the form of, but is not limited to:

- Free time restrictions (recess, morning time, etc.)
- Parental conference
- Suspension of school privileges (field trips, school activities)
- Detention
- Suspension
- Restitution

Student Responsibilities- Harassment/Bullying

1. Commit to not engage in any form of harassment/bullying
2. Immediately report an incident of harassment/bullying
3. Provide an accurate account of any incidents that have been witnessed

Teacher Responsibilities- Harassment/Bullying

1. Immediately intervene when harassment/bullying incidents occur
2. Immediately report any incidents using Elementary Harassment/Bullying Report form
3. Use "teachable moments" to educate about harassment/bullying
4. Maintain classroom as harassment/bullying free environment

Administrator Responsibilities- Harassment/Bullying

1. Assist teacher in implementation of the guidelines
2. Advocate for all teachers and students
3. Follow-up on reports within five school days
4. Issue consequences for infractions when needed

Counselor Responsibilities- Harassment/Bullying

1. Present guidelines to all students
2. Advocate for all teachers and students
3. Investigate reported incidents immediately
4. Communicate with parents of all students involved
5. Support students in planning for behavior change and skill building

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

The Mercer Area School District began implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program during the 2021-2022 school year. This universal bullying prevention program was adopted at both the elementary and secondary buildings. In conjunction with our Social-Emotional Learning and School Wide Positive Behavior programs at the elementary level, the Olweus program provides additional resources to the students to stand up against bullying behavior and promote a positive school culture that rejects bullying. Student anti-bullying expectations have been aligned with our four main school pillars:

Be Safe	If we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.
Be Kind	We will not bully others.
Be Respectful	We will try to help students who are bullied.
Be Responsible	We will try to include students who are left out.

Mercer Area School District Bullying Policy



No. 249 SECTION: PUPILS TITLE: BULLYING MERCER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
ADOPTED: January 23, 2023

1. Purpose: The Board is committed to providing a safe, positive learning environment for district students. The Board recognizes that bullying creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, detracts from the safe environment necessary for student learning, and may lead to more serious violence. Therefore, the Board prohibits bullying by district students.

2. Definition: Bullying means an intentional electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or series of acts directed at another student or students, which occurs in a school setting and/or outside a school setting, that is severe, persistent, or pervasive and has the effect of doing any of the following: 1) Substantially interfering with a student's education, 2) creating a threatening environment, or 3) substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school
Bullying, as defined in this policy, includes cyberbullying.
School setting means in the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at a designated bus stop, or at any activity sponsored, supervised, or sanctioned by the school.

3. Authority: The Board prohibits all forms of bullying by district students. The Board encourages students who believe they or others have been bullied to promptly report such incidents to the building principal or designee. Students are encouraged to use the district's report form, available from the building principal, or to put the complaint in writing; however, oral complaints shall be accepted and documented. The person accepting the complaint shall handle the report objectively, neutrally and professionally, setting aside personal biases that might favor or disfavor the student filing the complaint or those accused of a violation of this policy. The Board directs that verbal and written complaints of bullying shall be investigated promptly, and appropriate corrective or preventative action be taken when allegations are substantiated. The Board directs that any complaint of bullying brought pursuant to this policy shall also be reviewed for conduct which may not be proven to be bullying under this policy but merits review and possible action under other board policies. When a student's behavior indicates a threat to the safety of the student, other students, school employees, school facilities, the community or others, district staff shall report the student to the threat assessment team, in accordance with applicable law and Board policy.

4. Title IX Sexual Harassment and Other Discrimination: Every report of alleged bullying that can be interpreted at the outset to fall within the provisions of policies addressing potential violations of laws against discrimination shall be handled as a joint, concurrent investigation into all allegations and coordinated with the full participation of the Compliance Office and Title IX Coordinator. If, in the course of a bullying investigation, potential issues of discrimination are identified, the Title IX Coordinator shall be promptly notified, and the investigation shall be conducted jointly and concurrently to address the issues of alleged discrimination as well as the incidents of alleged bullying.

5. Confidentiality: Confidentiality of all parties, witnesses, the allegations, the filing of a complaint and the investigation shall be handled in accordance with applicable law, regulations, this policy, and the district's legal and investigative obligations.

6. Retaliation: Reprisal or retaliation relating to reports of bullying or participation in an investigation of allegations of bullying is prohibited and shall be subject to disciplinary action.

7. Delegation of Responsibility: Each student shall be responsible to respect the rights of others and to ensure an atmosphere free from bullying. The Superintendent or designee shall: develop administrative regulations to implement this policy, ensure that this policy and administrative regulations are reviewed annually with students, and review this policy every three (3) years and recommend necessary revisions to the board.

8. Guidelines: The Student Code of Conduct, which shall contain this policy, shall be disseminated annually to students. This policy shall be accessible in every classroom. This policy shall be posted in a prominent location within each school building and on the district website. The district may develop, implement, and evaluate bullying prevention and intervention programs and activities. Programs and activities shall provide district staff and students with appropriate training for effectively responding to, intervening in, and reporting incidents of bullying.

9. Consequences for Violations: A student who violates this policy shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action consistent with the Student Code of Conduct, which may include: 1) counseling within the school, 2) parental conference, 3) loss of school privileges, 4) transfer to another school building, classroom or bus, 5) exclusion from school-sponsored activities, 6) detention, 7) suspension, 8) expulsion

Equal Rights and Opportunities Policy

With the aim of assuring equal rights and opportunities within our community and to comply with Federal Laws (including Title IX of Education Amendments of 1972), State Laws, and State Departments of Education regulations concerning these, the Mercer Area School District reaffirms itself to be an Equal Rights and Opportunities School District. As an Equal Rights and Opportunities School District, it does not discriminate against individuals or groups because of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, or non-relevant handicaps and disabilities. The school district's commitment to nondiscrimination extends to students, employees, prospective employees, and the community.

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 states that no person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Sex discrimination under Title IX includes sexual harassment and sexual violence. Sexual Harassment is defined as conduct on the basis of sex that satisfies one or more of the following:
An employee of the recipient conditioning the provision of an aid, benefit, or service on an individual's participation in unwelcome sexual conduct.

Any unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the recipient's education program or activity.
Sexual assault (as defined in the Clery Act), dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking as defined in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

Inquiries regarding compliance with Title IX may be made to Equal Rights and Opportunities Director, or to the Director of Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, Welfare, Washington, D.C.
Issues dealing with Title IX should be brought to the attention of the Title IX Coordinator (Dr. Michael Piddington, Assistant Superintendent – 724-662-5100 or mpiddington@mercer.k12.pa.us) at the district's central office where copies of the district's Title IX Grievance Procedure also may be obtained.

COMPLAINT and GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE
Prohibition against Discrimination and Harassment/Title IX Sex Discrimination (including Sex-Based Harassment)
It is the policy of the District to maintain an environment for learning and working that is free from discrimination and harassment as defined herein and as defined with more specificity in Board Policy103 and Board Policy 104, and associated Attachments (including Grievance Procedures) to those Policies.

Students are specifically notified that the District does not discriminate on the basis of sex, and prohibits sex discrimination, including sex-based harassment, in any education program or activity that it operates, as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§1681 *et seq.*, and its regulations, 34 C.F.R. Part 106, including in admission and employment.

Inquiries about Title IX may be referred to the District's Title IX Coordinator, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights ("OCR"), or both.
The District's Title IX Coordinator is:
Dr. Michael G. Piddington, Assistant Superintendent/Title IX Coordinator
Mercer Area School District
545 West Butler Street, Mercer, PA 16137
Email: mpiddington@mercer.k12.pa.us
Telephone Number: 724-662-5100 ex. 27

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights may be contacted at:
U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights
Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Bldg

400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-1100
Telephone: 800-421-3481
FAX: 202-453-6012; TDD: 800-877-8339
Email: OCR@ed.gov
https://ocrcas.ed.gov/contact-ocr

To report information about conduct that may constitute Title IX sex discrimination, including sex-based harassment, or make a complaint of Title IX sex discrimination, please refer to the District's Nondiscrimination Policies and Grievance Procedures, which can be located on the District's website under Board Policies, Policy 103 (Students) and Policy 104 (Employees): https://www.mercer.k12.pa.us or contact the District's Title IX Coordinator.
In the event of a conflict between this section and Board Policies 103 and 104, and associated Attachments, the language of Board Policies 103 and 104 and associated Attachments shall prevail.

Definitions
"Discrimination" shall mean to treat individuals differently, or to harass or victimize based on a protected classification including race, color, age, religious creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, national origin, marital status, pregnancy and/or handicap/disability.

"Harassment" is a form of discrimination based on the protected classifications listed above consisting of unwelcome conduct such as graphic, written, electronic, verbal or nonverbal acts including offensive jokes, slurs, epithets and name-calling, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, physical assaults or threats, intimidation or other conduct that may be harmful or humiliating or interfere with a person's school or school-related performance when such conduct is:

1) sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive; and
2) A reasonable person in the complainant's position would find that it creates an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational environment such that it deprives or adversely interferes with or limits an individual or group of the ability to participate in or benefit from the service, activities or opportunities offered by the District or a school.

It shall be a violation of this policy to harass a student or District employee. Bullying can be a form of harassment. A student's sending, sharing, viewing, selling, purchasing or otherwise disseminating of obscene, pornographic, lewd, sexually explicit or nude images, photographs or video content of another student may be considered harassment.

"Title IX Sex Discrimination" – includes discrimination on the basis of sex stereotypes, sex characteristics, pregnancy or related conditions, sexual orientation and gender identity.

"Title IX Sex-Based Harassment" - Title IX sex-based harassment is a form of sex discrimination and means sexual harassment and other harassment on the basis of sex, including:

1. *Quid pro quo harassment* - a district employee or other person authorized to provide a district aid, benefit or service explicitly or impliedly conditioning the provision of a district aid, benefit, or service on an individual's participation in unwelcome sexual conduct.
2. *Hostile environment harassment* - unwelcome sex-based conduct that, based on the totality of the circumstances, is subjectively and objectively offensive and is so severe or pervasive that it limits or denies a person's ability to participate in or benefit from a district education program or activity. Determination of whether a hostile environment has been created is a fact-specific inquiry that includes consideration of factors, including but not limited to:
    a. The degree to which the conduct affected the complainant's ability to access the district's education program or activity;
    b. The type, frequency and duration of the conduct;
    c. The complainant's and respondent's ages, roles in the district education program or activity, previous interactions and other relevant factors;
    d. The location and context in which the conduct occurred; and
    e. Other sex-based harassment in the district's education program or activity.

3. *Sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking*.
    a. *Dating violence* means violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim and where the existence of such a relationship is determined by the following factors:
        i. Length of relationship.
        ii. Type of relationship.
        iii. Frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship.
    a. *Domestic violence* includes felony or misdemeanor crimes committed by a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse or intimate partner, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving federal funding, or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction.
    b. *Sexual assault* means a sexual offense under state or federal law that is classified as a forcible or nonforcible sex offense under the uniform crime reporting system of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
    c. *Stalking,* under Title IX means stalking on the basis of sex, for example when the stalker desires to date a victim. Stalking means to engage in a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to either:
        i. Fear for their safety or the safety of others.
        ii. Suffer substantial emotional distress.

Such conduct must have taken place during a district education program or activity and against a person in the United States to qualify as sex-based discrimination or harassment under Title IX. This includes conduct that is subject to the District's disciplinary authority. An education program or activity includes, but is not limited to, academic, extracurricular, research, occupational training and other education programs and activities of the district. The District is obligated to address a sex-based hostile environment in a district education program or activity, even when some conduct is outside the district's program or activity, or outside of the United States

Violations of this Discrimination/Harassment Policy, as set forth more fully in Board Policy 103 and associated Attachments, including acts of retaliation as described in the Policy, may result in disciplinary consequences under applicable Board policy and procedures up to and including referral for expulsion from the District.

Reports of Title IX Sexual Harassment and Other Discrimination and Retaliation and Grievance Procedure:
The Board encourages students and third parties who believe they or others have been subject to Title IX sex discrimination, including sex-based sex harassment, and any other discrimination or harassment as defined in this Policy and Board Policies 103 and 104, to promptly report such incidents to any District employee (but preferably the building principal) or the Title IX Coordinator. A person who is not an intended victim or target of discrimination but is adversely affected by the offensive conduct may file a report of discrimination.
The student's parents/guardian or any other person with knowledge of conduct that may violate this Policy is encouraged to immediately report the matter to any District employee (but preferably the building principal) or the Title IX Coordinator.

The complainant (the alleged victim) or the individual making the report may use the Discrimination/ Harassment/Bullying/Hazing/Dating Violence/Retaliation Report Form (an Attachment to Policies 103/104) which has been developed for purposes of reporting an incident or incidents in writing; however, verbal reports of an incident or incidents shall be accepted, documented and the procedures of this Policy and the relevant attachments followed. A copy of this Report Form can be accessed on the District's website at https://www.mercer.k12.pa.us and through the building principal or the Title IX Coordinator. The rights of complainants and respondents (the accused) are outlined in detail in Policies 103/104 and associated Attachments, which outline the District's applicable Grievance Procedures.

Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH)

Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program was established to ensure homeless youth have access to a free and appropriate public education while removing barriers that homeless children face on a daily basis. Its goal is to have the educational process continue as uninterrupted as possible while the children are in homeless situations.

Definition of Homelessness

Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Act defines "homelessness children and youths) as individuals lacking a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence. Furthermore, this includes,
Children and youths who are:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship.
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
- Living in emergency, transitional, or domestic violence shelters.
- Abandoned in hospitals.
- Children and youth whose primary nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings.
- Children and youth whose living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations or similar settings.
- Children and youth living as migratory children in conditions described in previous examples.
- Children and youth who are living as run-away children.
- Children and youth who are abandoned or forced out of homes by parents/guardians or caretakers.
- Children and youth living as school-aged parents in houses for parents if they have no other living accommodations.

School of origin is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled, including pre-school. When the student completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the school of origin shall include the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools. Unaccompanied youth is defined as a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Enrollment/Placement

To the extent feasible and, in accordance with the student's best interest, a homeless student shall continue to be enrolled in his or her school of origin while he or she remains homeless or until the end of the academic year in which he or she obtains permanent housing. Parents/Guardians of a homeless student may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the student is actually living or other schools. If a student is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the district liaison will assist the student with placement and enrollment decisions and give priority to the views of the student in determining where he or she will be enrolled.
If after such consideration, the district determines that it is not in the student's best interest to attend the school of origin or the school requested by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth, the district shall provide the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of the reasons for its determination. The explanation shall be in a manner and form understandable to the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth and shall include information regarding the right to appeal.

The selected school shall immediately enroll the student and begin instruction, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to district policies. However, the district may require a parent/guardian to submit contact information. The district liaison may contact the previous school for oral confirmation of immunizations, and the school shall request records from the previous district, pursuant to Board policy. Homeless families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment.

School/Health Records
The receiving school district may contact the district of origin for oral confirmation that the student has been immunized but must not be a barrier to enrollment. Oral confirmation between professionals is a sufficient basis to verify immunization with written confirmation to follow within thirty (30) days. The instructional program should begin without delay after the enrollment process is initiated and should not be delayed until the procedure is completed.

The enrolling district's liaison will assist the parent/guardian/student in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization or medical records.

The district will support families with accessibility to health-related resources — not limited to access to a physician, dentist, and other specialty doctors.

The district may assist with transportation for access to medical providers as well as assist with overcoming barriers related to insurance.

Education Records
Information about a homeless student's living situation shall be treated as a student education record subject to the protections of the Family Educational Right and Privacy Act (FERPA) and shall not be deemed to be directory information.

Homeless students shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other district students including, but not limited to: transportation services, school nutrition programs, vocational programs & technical education, preschool programs, programs for students with limited English proficiency, and educational services for which students meet eligibility criteria, such as programs for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and gifted & talented
students.

Placement/Disputes/Complaints
If the district is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the district shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the student's placement.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian/student will be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. The parent/guardian/student will be referred to the school district liaison, who will carry out the state's grievance procedure as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of an unaccompanied student, the school district liaison shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

If disputes or complaints of noncompliance rise regarding the education of homeless students,
the following steps shall be taken:

- The person filing the complaint shall first contact the school or district through the school district liaison, the principal, and/or Superintendent to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and, most likely, to be able to resolve it quickly.
- If Step 1 is not successful or is not possible under the circumstances, contact should be made with the Homeless Project Education Liaison, or the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will accept complaints directly through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.
- Individual cases may be referred to the PDE's Office of Chief Counsel and the Office of the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, as needed, by the State Homeless Coordinator.

PDE will deliver a response within fifteen (15) business days of the receipt of the complaint. The complaint may arrive in the form of a copy of the school district letter or on the Dispute Letter Form, if given directly to a Liaison of the Homeless Initiative.

Transportation

The Mercer Area School District shall provide transportation for homeless students to their school of origin or the school they choose to attend within the school district.

If the school of origin is outside district boundaries or homeless students live in another district but will attend their school of origin in this district, the school districts shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs of the transportation.

Mercer Area School District Transportation Coordinator:
Mr. Mark Roman 724-662-5100 ex. 40 mroman@mercer.k12.pa.us

Fiscal Responsibilities

The following guidelines will be followed in cases when the education of the student is provided by the district where the homeless student is temporarily living. The guidelines shall also apply in cases when the district of prior attendance, where that is not the district the student attended when permanently housed, will educate the student:

- Homeless individuals not in facilities (shelters) or institutions, as well as homeless individuals living in hotels, motels, cars, tents, or doubled-up with a resident family, shall be reported and reimbursed as resident students.
- For homeless individuals in temporary shelters, the educating school district will send a form for the determination of district residence for students in facilities or institutions to the presumed district of residence.
- If the form is acknowledged by the resident district, the educating district will enter the student on its rolls as a nonresident student from the acknowledging resident school district. The educating district will bill the resident district for tuition and will report membership data according to state child accounting procedures.
- If the form is disclaimed and a district of residence cannot be determined, the student will be considered a ward of the state. The educating district will enter the student on its rolls as a nonresident ward of the state and will report membership according to state child accounting procedures. The Department of Education will pay tuition to the educating district based on membership reported to child accounting.

In cases when the education of the student is provided by the district of origin, where that is the district, the student attended when permanently housed, the district will continue to educate a homeless student for the period of temporary displacement and should maintain the student on its rolls as a resident student.

In cases when the student becomes permanently housed during the academic year and continues in the school of origin, which is not the district of new residence, the educating district will continue to educate the formerly homeless student on its rolls as a nonresident student.

Training

Offered by the Coordinator of Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program. The district's liaison shall arrange professional development programs for school staff, including office staff. School personnel providing services to homeless students, including enrollment staff, shall receive professional development and support to:

- Improve identification of homeless students.
- Understand the rights of such children, including requirements for immediate enrollment and transportation, and
- Heighten the awareness of, and capacity to respond to, the educational needs of such children.

Free and Reduced Meals

All Mercer Area School District students receive free meals (breakfast and lunch) during the school year.

Family Engagement

Families are a valued member of our community and an essential part of a child's success. Opportunities for participation in school and building sponsored events are communicated in a variety of ways throughout the school year. If you need assistance to participate, please contact your building principal, Mr. Gregory Acre

Community Partnerships

The school district partners with community agencies to support families through collaboration. Some community partnerships include but are not limited to:

- Mercer County Behavioral Health Commission
- Mercer County Children and Youth Services
- Mercer County Department of Human Services
- Mercer Rotary
- Mercer Area Chamber of Commerce
- Mercer VFW Post #6345
- American Legion Post 159

Academic Supports

Students have access to numerous academic supports. This assistance is based on the need of each individual student. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Title I supports & services
- Multi-tiered Intervention Supports
- After School Tutoring
- Credit Recovery
- McKinney Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act: https://www.education.pa.gov/K12/Homeless%2OEducation/mckinneyvento/Pages/default.aspx

McKinney-Vento Liaison

If you believe that you and/or your family is currently in a situation similar to any outlined above, please contact Dr. Michael Piddington, Assistant Superintendent via phone (724-662-5100 ex. 27), email (mpiddington@mercer.k12.pa.us), or in person in the central office located in the back of the middle-high school building.

Liaison Responsibilities:
The school district's liaison shall coordinate with:

- Local service agencies that provide services to homeless children, youth, and families.
- Other school districts on issues of records transfer and transportation.
- District staff responsible for the provision of services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Individuals with Disabilities Act.
- State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.

The district's liaison shall provide public notice of the educational rights of homeless students in schools, family shelters, soup kitchens, public libraries, and locations frequented by parents/guardians of homeless children.

The district liaison shall provide reliable, valid, and comprehensive data to the coordinator of Pennsylvania's Education for Children/Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program in accordance with federal and state law regulations.

Volunteers/School Visitors

Parents, guardians, and community members can make many valuable contributions to the students at Mercer Area Elementary School. Volunteers and visitors can enrich and extend the curriculum by sharing hobbies, career expertise, and cultural knowledge. If you are interested in serving as a school volunteer or helping with classroom activities, please contact your child's teacher or administration. The safety of the children at Mercer Area Elementary is the highest priority. All non-staff members entering Mercer Area Elementary School fall into one of two categories: ***visitor*** or ***volunteer***.

Visitor- Definition
A **visitor** is someone who comes into the school building to assist under the direct supervision of a staff member. Examples of visitors include: a presenter, a class speaker, or a guest reader. A visitor will only have interaction with the children under the supervision of a Mercer Area School District staff member.

Visitor- Requirements
Visitors are not required to have clearances, but will be required to show a valid U.S. Driver's License or state-issued identification card to enter the building during the school day. Visitors must complete a "Visitor Registration Form" which will be kept on file in the event of future visits. *Visitors must sign in upon arrival, sign out at departure, and must wear security name tags while they are in the building or activity area.*

Volunteer- Definition
A **volunteer** is someone who has an ongoing presence in the school and whose role requires them to have routine interaction with students in a supervised or occasionally not directly supervised basis. Volunteers are classified into two distinct categories: Chaperone Volunteers or Non-Chaperone Volunteers.

Non-Chaperone Volunteers for school-sponsored activities must complete the following requirements PRIOR to the experience:

- Mercer Area Elementary School Volunteer Form

Examples of Non-Chaperone Volunteers include:

- Classroom helpers, classroom party assistants, book fair helpers, Christmas workshop assistants

Chaperone Volunteers for school-sponsored activities must complete the following requirements PRIOR to the experience:

- Mercer Area Elementary School Volunteer Form
- Act 34 – VOLUNTEER Pennsylvania State Police Clearance (Free)
- Act 151 – VOLUNTEER Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance (Free)
- Act 114 – FBI Criminal History Report ($23.25) or Waiver Form (if applicable) (Free)

These clearances must be issued within one (1) year of the date of service. Chaperone Volunteers MUST submit this clearance information to the Superintendent's Office prior to any contact with children

Volunteer- Requirements
Volunteers are required to have all necessary clearances PRIOR to any interaction with our student population. Volunteers will be required to show a valid U.S. Driver's License or state issued identification card to enter the building during the school day. Volunteers must sign in upon arrival, sign out at departure, and must wear security name tags while they are in the building or activity area.

Visitors/Volunteers Expectations
Visitors/Volunteers are expected to follow the instructions of the staff member who is responsible to orient the visitor to the learning activity and to the expectations of the learning. Discipline remains the responsibility of the staff member in authority. Visitors/Volunteers are encouraged to redirect students to the task at hand, but are not

permitted to directly administer student discipline. A visitor/volunteer will never assume the responsibility of a professional staff member. Visitors/Volunteers are not permitted to take pictures of students other than their own unless prior permission is granted by the administration.

Technology

The purpose of this section is to acquaint you with the Mercer Area School District's Acceptable Use Policy in regards to the student use of technology-related Equipment and Software in the educational arena. The permission form must be returned to Mercer Area Elementary School before your child is allowed to access technology resources in the school district. Students with network account access will be given filtered access to the Internet for the purposes of homework, research, and/or other school-related activities. Any Internet activity engaged in by a student that is not specifically assigned by a teacher may result in revocation of all computer privileges for a specified time or the remainder of the school year.

Accountability of Regulations

1. Access to Technology-Related Equipment, including the use of Internet and e-mail is a privilege, not a right.
2. All of the rules and regulations for the use of Technology-Related Equipment and Software listed below are based on School Board Policy #237, the Federal Children's Internet Protection Act, and Title 18, article 3933 of Pennsylvania Computer Law.
3. Violating any of the rules and regulations contained herein will result in the loss of the student's network account and all rights associated therein.
4. Additional consequences for violation of said rules may include:
    a. Restricted network access
    b. Disciplinary action
    c. Legal action including, but not limited to criminal prosecution under appropriate state and federal laws.

Student Network Account

All computers in the school district are connected to central points of control called servers. The servers offer several levels of security to protect the privacy and confidentiality of student files. Each student is given a place of storage (a folder) on a server for the purpose of safely storing educationally related items such as homework assignments, research media, and software projects. Materials stored in student folders will be subject to regular review by teachers or administrators for the purpose of maintaining system integrity and ensuring responsible use of the network. The following actions are not permitted when using the network.

- Account Theft – Logging in or attempting to log into the network using an account other than your own
- Data Theft – Attempting to access a folder other than your own
- Cheating – Using an account to claim another person's intellectual products or to inflict social consequences on another (i.e. copying assignments, sharing classroom materials without teacher permission, etc.).

Computers/Devices (Expected Usage and Responsibilities)

All computer systems in the school district are the property of the Mercer Area School District and shall be treated as such. A computer system is defined as the computer itself and any such peripheral devices attached to that computer. A general level of care will be expected when a student is using one such computer system. The following violations of computer use will result in disciplinary action or criminal charges as set forth by state and federal law:

- (Defacement) - A student shall not cause physical damage to any part of a computer system including intentionally marking or defacing the outer casing of the tower and associated drives, monitor, keyboard, or mouse.

- (Disassembly) - A student shall not remove or physically alter any part of a computer system including removal of any parts of a mouse, disassembly of the case which houses the CPU (Central Processing Unit), removal of keys from a keyboard, or the removal of authorized labels and manufacturer's logos.
- (System Tampering) - A student shall not alter the electronic settings of the monitor or computer in any way which would affect another user or that computer.
- (Unauthorized Installations) - No one shall download or install any type of software on any computer system without the expressed permission of the District Technology Technician. (Software that conflicts with the operation of the computer system or software that violates legal licensing agreements will be referred to the proper authorities for prosecution under state and/or federal computer law). This includes Instant Messaging programs, Internet plug-ins or add-ons, Customized Search Toolbars, or any program that taps into the Windows Registry or places a shortcut on the Start Menu.
- (Electronic Vandalism) - The contamination, deletion, or reconfiguration of data; degradation of system performance; distribution of unsolicited advertising; propagation of computer worms/viruses; and other similar behaviors are considered to be vandalism and may result in cancellation of user privileges, disciplinary action in accordance with school policy, as well as prosecution.

<u>Internet and Email</u>

The Federally passed Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires Internet Access to be strictly filtered in public areas such as public schools and libraries. Such equipment is installed in the Mercer Area School District to filter inappropriate content from the Internet. It should be understood that inappropriate web sites are developed on a daily basis which may cause a minimal lag time in the updating of such filtering databases. It is not humanly possible to filter 100% of inappropriate content. However, web sites are screened by the appropriate teacher prior to taking students to that site. Access to the Internet will be provided to those students which have an approved permission form on file. Permission forms are good until graduation except: (1) If the parent notifies the school district in writing that the student is no longer granted such permission, or (2) the student's permission is revoked due to violations of rules set forth in this document, or (3) a new policy is developed. The Internet will be used for educational research, communicating for collaborative purposes with a peer, teacher, college/university professor, or researcher located elsewhere in the world, or other class projects under the guidance and direction of the teacher. The following are violation of the rules of Internet and E-mail usage:

- (Pornography) - The purposeful viewing or downloading of any non-educational material including material deemed inappropriate by the classroom teacher, school administrator, or school board.
- (Electronic Theft) - Any illegal downloading or copyrighting media for unauthorized use.
- (Electronic Threats) - Transmitting or receiving material that is in violation of any federal, state, or local law or policy (i.e. threatening or terrorist material, obscene material, material protected by trade secret, or material obtained through intrusion of another network).
- (Hacking) - No student shall use any means to compromise the security of the network (i.e. seeking passwords or ways around security measures, remotely controlling a computer from another, or attempting to access unauthorized sections of a server).
- (Chatting) - Participating in chat room sessions which are not monitored or assigned by a teacher.
- (Gaming) - No student shall engage in using computers for playing games or other non-educational activities unless pre-approved as curriculum-related by the teacher responsible for that student at the time.
- (IM) - Using Instant Messaging programs for any communications during school time.
- (Unauthorized E-mailing) - Using an E-mail account which was not assigned to the student by a teacher or the District Technology Technician.
- (Electronic Harassment) - Do not send abusive messages of any nature.
- (Vulgarity) - Always use language that is appropriate and devoid of vulgarities.
- (Confidentiality) - Do not reveal personal addresses, phone numbers, or forward any message without the appropriate permission; all information and communications accessible on the Internet are considered private property.
- (Excessive Bandwidth Usage) - While connected to the Internet, do not use the network in a manner that would disrupt the use of the network by others.
- (Data Loss Disclaimer) - The Mercer Area School District is not responsible for loss of data resulting from delays, non-deliveries, service interruptions, or other damages that may occur while using the Internet.

- (Internet Information Disclaimer) - The Mercer Area School District assumes no responsibility for the accuracy or quality of information obtained through the Internet. Use of such information is at the users own risk.
- (Social Media) - Students are not permitted to access social media websites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) without prior permission from the administration for an educational purpose.

School-Issued Devices/Chromebooks

Mercer Area School District is committed to utilizing technology to enhance the 21st century classroom and improve student achievement. By focusing on the effective integration of technology in and out of the classroom, our students will be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to become responsible electronic citizens in a rapidly changing digital society.

Students in grades K through 4 will have access to a school-issued device (i.e. tablets in the early primary grades, laptops/Chromebooks in the upper grades). These devices will remain at the school and are not transported between the home and school. Students with access to these devices are subject to the Acceptable Use Policy.

Students in grades 5 and 6 are a part of the school district's 1:1 technology program. These students will receive a separate 1:1 Handbook that provides specific parameters, responsibilities, expectations, additional optional insurance coverage, and information regarding their school-issued Chromebook. Students will be responsible for 1) signing the 1:1 usage agreement and 2) paying the technology fee prior to them receiving their device. Students will not receive their devices until these items are satisfied.

COVID-19 Addendum

The school district has developed a Health and Safety Plan in accordance with Section 2001(i)(1) of the American Rescue Plan. If there are adjustments necessary to building and district operations throughout the school year, this will be updated on the school district website. Rather than placing information in the handbook, please consult the school district website. The district will comply with all orders issued by the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and/or apply, to the extent feasible, guidance from the CDC for the reopening and operation of school facilities in the 2025-2026 school year.