

DeSoto Secondary School Student/Parent Handbook 2025-2026



DeSoto Secondary School Mission Statement

Our Mission is to create a safe, positive, and welcoming learning environment for all students that provides support needed for individual accomplishment of his/her personal educational goals.

School Motto

"It is your life - but only if you make it so."

-Eleanor Roosevelt

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Bobby Bennett

DESOTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Mrs. Jami Schueneman

District 1

Dr. Sharon Goodman

District 2

Mrs. Karen Chancey

District 3

Mrs. Asena Mott

District 4

Mrs. Kelly Mercer

District 5

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Director of Student Services
Dr. Amy Bennett
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Foreword

Welcome to DeSoto Secondary School. We are excited to embark in our fourth year at DeSoto School District. We are confident that with the committed team of staff, students, parents, school district employees, and community members we are fortunate to be working together; we are destined to have another successful and productive school year.

The pages to follow contain the policies, procedures, and expectations of DeSoto Secondary School. The contents herein will be discussed in class with all students during the beginning week(s) of the school year and will be used as a source of reference during the 2025-2026 school year.

IT IS REQUESTED THAT BOTH STUDENTS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS READ THIS HANDBOOK CAREFULLY. PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN THE LAST PAGE TO INDICATE THAT BOTH STUDENT AND PARENT/GUARDIAN HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE CONTENTS OF THIS HANDBOOK. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

All Policies Apply

This handbook contains policies, procedures, and guidelines for matters that are essential to the operation of the school. It is in no way intended to attempt to contradict, change, override, or replace existing county or state established guidelines, policies or statutes. It is requested that comments, corrections, and recommendations for additions, changes, or modifications be submitted to the office. Periodic revisions will be made based on review of recommendations made as well as changes in District policy.

District Vision

Empowering every student with knowledge, skills, and opportunities to succeed in college, career, and life through innovation, collaboration, and unwavering support.

District Mission Statement

The School District of DeSoto County, in partnership with families and the community, is committed to:

- D**eliver a safe, inclusive, and engaging learning environment,
- O**pen communication to strengthen collaboration and belonging,
- G**uarantee all students have access to rigorous, high-quality instruction, and
- S**hape responsible citizenship to inspire future leaders.

DeSoto Secondary School Philosophy

At DeSoto Secondary School, we believe every student has the right and responsibility to strive to reach his or her educational potential. Successful student education results from a safe, supportive, and challenging environment that gives each student the opportunity to explore, discover, and learn. To be the best we can be, we will:

- Honor individual differences
- Clearly define expectations.
- Hold each individual accountable for his/her own behavior.

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DeSoto Secondary School

Student Policies and Procedures

ARRIVAL TO SCHOOL

Students arriving at school on time are to enter the building at the bus entrance and report directly to the cafeteria. Students arriving at school after 10:00 will enter through the front office on the left side of the building and will be required to sign in by a PARENT/GUARDIAN, turn in their electronic devices and be electronically monitored. Due to the manner of how meals are delivered to Desoto Secondary School, students arriving after 9:45 will forfeit breakfast. Students arriving later than 11:15 will be unable to order lunch for that day.

School Hours

Breakfast: 9:15-9:45

Class Begins: 9:47

Dismissal: 3:56

ITEMS PROHIBITED IN SCHOOL

- ✓ Items such as lighters, matches, lasers, toy guns, bandanas, water guns, glass items, knives, rollerblades, and skateboards are prohibited. Students using skateboards or scooters as a means of transportation to and from school must leave them in the front office area upon arrival to school to be picked up at the conclusion of the school day.
- ✓ No **FOOD or DRINKS** other than bottled water are allowed in the classroom. Any lunch items brought on campus must be stored in the assigned area of the office/classroom upon arrival to school and must remain sealed until lunch time.
- ✓ Use of electronic devices, including, but not limited to: cell phones, tablets, iPods, radios, wireless devices, and cameras is restricted during the school day items may only be used under direct teacher supervision and for instructional purposes only.
- ✓ The school is not responsible for lost or stolen prohibited, restricted, or contraband items and will not investigate or attempt to recover such items.

CAFETERIA EXPECTATIONS

The School District of DeSoto County participates in the Community Eligibility Option which allows our district to provide breakfast and lunch to all students free of charge.

Students are expected to follow the guidelines set forth in the cafeteria.

Cafeteria expectations

- 1) Stay in your assigned seats/don't table hop.
- 2) Raise your hand to request to leave your table.
- 3) Keep your table and area clean.
- 4) Talk quietly.

Possible consequences for cafeteria infractions: table reassignment, lunch detention, Discipline Referral.

Parent/guardians are welcome to eat with their student. However, it will be in a designated area, subject to administrative approval. Parents must check in at the front office and receive a visitor's pass before leaving the office area. Visiting parents/guardians may only bring food for their own student. Students are not permitted to receive food deliveries during the school day. Food from home should be brought by the student at the beginning of the day and given to their teacher for appropriate storage.

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

The School Board maintains that daily school attendance is essential to the educational success of each student. Students are expected to be in school and in class on time. Parents are expected to notify the school when their child is absent according to school guidelines

*Florida Statute 1003.4
School Board Policy 5200*

Compulsory School Attendance

Florida Statute 1003.21

School attendance is required of all students, kindergarten through age 16, unless otherwise exempt by law.

Students beyond Compulsory Attendance Age

Florida Statute 1003.21

All students over age 16 are required to comply with all school and School Board rules and regulations. All notices, report cards, attendance information, and other related information will be sent to the parent/guardian with the understanding that the parent/guardian is responsible for student progress, attendance, and behavior.

Students who are 18 years old or older and who are not dependents will be treated as the sole person responsible for their school records and other school-related matters.

Students between the ages of 16 and 18 must file with the School Board a formal declaration of intent to terminate school enrollment in order to be exempt from compulsory school attendance requirements.

Reporting Student Absence

Florida Statute 1003.23(2)

There must be communication between home and school regarding each absence. On the day of the absence, contact should be made with the school via phone call or email. A written excuse shall be submitted within three days of the student's return to school. Failure to provide a written excuse within this time frame may result in an unexcused absence.

Pattern of Non-Attendance

If a student has had at least five (5) unexcused absences within a calendar month or ten (10) unexcused absences within a 90-calendar day period, the student will be referred to the administrator and drop-out prevention specialist. If it is determined that there is a pattern of non-attendance developing, a meeting with the parent will be scheduled to identify and discuss potential remedies.

A student with fifteen (15) or more unexcused absences within (90) calendar days will be considered habitually truant from school in accordance with *Florida Statute 1003.01(8)*.

Excessive Excused or Chronic Absences

Students accumulating more than ten (10) chronic/excessive absences or absences which occur in patterns week by week at any time during the school year may be required to provide documentation at the request of administration. Failure to provide documentation at the request of administration may result in absences being considered unexcused with a possible referral to the Attendance Monitoring Committee.

NOTES:

1. Students accumulating as few as five (5) unexcused absences in a calendar month may be referred to the Attendance Monitoring Committee.
2. Students accumulating more than 15 unexcused absences in a 90-day period are subject to Driver's License revocation.
3. Absences for truancy referral are cumulative and carry over from the first to the second semester.
4. Parents/guardians must sign in all late or tardy students in the front office.

Types of Absences

Florida Statute 1003.23, 1003.24, 414.1251

For purposes of gathering statistical data, all absences will be recorded as being (a) excused, (b) unexcused, or (c) due to an out-of-school suspension. However, in the classroom, no distinction in the type of absence is necessary until notification is provided from the front office. Up to six (6) days of absences for illness per semester may be excused with a parent note.

- A. **Excused Absence** - An absence will be documented as excused for the following reasons:
1. Personal illness of student; medical evidence may be required by the principal or designee for absences exceeding five (5) consecutive days.
 2. Court appearance of the student
 3. Medical appointment of the student
 4. Pregnancy related issues
 5. Approved school activity
 6. Insurmountable conditions: Insurmountable conditions include extreme weather conditions, communicable disease outbreaks, and local conditions as determined by the School District which, after taking into account the material circumstances, would render impracticable a student's attendance at school. (F.A.C. 6A-1.09513)
 7. Other absences with prior approval of the principal or designee
 8. Attendance at a center under the supervision of the Department of Children and Families
 9. Significant community events, with prior permission of the school administration
 10. Religious instruction or religious holiday
 11. Death of an immediate family member
 12. Appointments for a therapy service provided by a licensed health care practitioner or certified behavior analyst as pursuant to Florida law will be excused; such appointments include those intended for the treatment of autism spectrum disorder, applied behavioral analysis, speech therapy, and occupational therapy.

Note: Trips with parents are initially considered unexcused pending administrative review and subsequent approval of written requests submitted a minimum of 2 school days in advance.

Note: School-sponsored trips, extracurricular activities, assemblies, and internal suspensions are not considered absences.

Note: Absences not included in the list above shall be unexcused. This includes situations where a student is absent from school or class without the knowledge and permission of his/her parents or guardian or school authorities

- B. **Absence Due to Out-of-School Suspension** – Absence due to an out-of-school suspension will be recorded in a category separate from excused or unexcused.
- C. **Learnfare** – Families receiving state benefits may have their benefits suspended if their child, between the ages of 6 and 18 years, has 15 or more unexcused absences. The School District of DeSoto County, as required by law, sends this information to the State of Florida Department of Education on a regular basis.

Attendance and Driver's License Program

Florida Statute 1003.27(2)

Florida Statute requires each school district to submit a report to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV/DMV) the names of all minors between the ages of 14 and 18 who accumulate 15 unexcused absences in any 90-day period. Students whose names have been submitted will not be eligible for issuance of a driver's license or learner's permit. Likewise, any previously issued license or permit will be suspended.

Parents or guardians of students whose driver's licenses have been suspended, or who have been denied issuance of licensure due to excessive unexcused absences, may request administration to have recorded absences changed to the status of excused. However, in order for requests to be considered, each request must be accompanied by proper documentation as outlined above. In order for a driver's license to be reinstated, a student must be in attendance for at least 30 school days without any unexcused absences.

Out of School Suspensions/Driver's License Program

An out-of-school suspension is an administrative action that prohibits a student from attending school. To prevent the occurrence of a possible double penalty, absences due to out-of-school suspensions will not be reported to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV).

Attendance and Suspension

Students shall not be suspended for unexcused absences, unexcused tardiness, lateness, or truancy as stated in *School Board Policy 5200, 5500*.

However, please note that School Board Policy states that excessive tardiness, leaving school grounds without permission, and/or skipping class may be subject to disciplinary action.

Tardiness, Leaving School Grounds without Permission, Reassignment

- A. Tardy - The term "tardy" means being late to school with or without permission of parents/guardians. Students must be in their assigned classroom prior to 10:15.
- B. Students arriving at
- C. Leaving School Grounds Without Permission - Students are not permitted to leave school grounds without authorization. All related absences will be considered unexcused.

Note: Pursuant to Florida Statute 1003.26 & School Board Policy 5200; 5130; 5230, excessive tardiness, leaving school grounds without permission, and/or skipping class may be subject to disciplinary action. If you purchased a parking permit, we reserve the right to revoke that permit for the aforementioned offenses.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Students Entering Grade 9 in 2013-2014 up to current year:

- ELA: 4 credits,
 - Must Pass Grade 10 FSA English/Language Arts assessment or state approved assessment
- Math: 4 credits
 - Which includes Algebra I and Geometry I EOC (20% of final course grade) or state approved assessment
 - Industry certifications that lead to college credit may substitute for up to two mathematics credits (except for Algebra 1 and Geometry)
 - A student may earn two credits in mathematics by successfully completing Algebra I through two full-year courses
 - A certified school counselor or the principal's designee must advise that the admission to a state university may require the student to earn three additional mathematics credits that are at least as rigorous as Algebra I
 - An identified student science credit may be substituted for up to one mathematics credit (except for Algebra 1 and Geometry). Eligible courses are specified in the Florida Course Code Directory. A computer science credit may not be used to substitute for both a mathematics and science credit.
- Science: 3 credits
 - Which includes Biology I EOC (20% of final course grade)
 - 2 equally rigorous courses to biology
 - 2 of 3 must have lab component
 - Industry Certifications that lead to college credit may substitute for up to one science credit (except for Biology 1). An identified student science credit may be substituted for up to one science credit (except for Biology 1). Eligible courses are specified in the Florida Course Code Directory. A computer science credit may not be used to substitute for both a mathematics and science credit.
- Social Studies: 3 Credits to include:
 - World History,
 - US History EOC (20% of final course grade),
 - US Government (.5 credit),
 - Economics with Financial Literacy (.5 credit)
- Fine Arts: 1 credit in fine and performing arts, speech and debate, or practical arts
- Physical Education: 1 credit to include the integration of health
- On-line Course: One course within the 24 credits to be completed via online learning. Online learning may consist of:
 - Blended learning course
 - Completing a course in which the student earned a nationally recognized industry certification in information technology that is identified on the CAPE Industry Certification Funding List pursuant to F.S. 1008.44
 - Passing the information technology certification examination without enrolling in or completing the corresponding course or courses, as applicable.
- Electives: 8 credits including the online course (Note: Two credits of the same world language are not required for standard diploma, but required for admission into state universities.)
- GPA: Cumulative 2.0 on a 4.0 scale

Total Credits: 24

Please see the Student Progression Plan posted on the District website for information on the ACCEL (18-credit) Graduation Option.

PROMOTION

Please refer to the Student Progression Plan posted on the School District of DeSoto County website.

GRADING SYSTEM

GRADE	PERCENT	POINT VALUE	DEFINITION
A	90-100	4	Outstanding
B	80-89	3	Above Average
C	70-79	2	Average
D	60-69	1	Lowest Acceptable
F	0-59	0	Failure
I	-	0	Incomplete

BRIGHT FUTURES SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

This program establishes a lottery-funded scholarship to reward any Florida high school graduate who merits recognition for high academic achievement and who enrolls in an eligible Florida public or private postsecondary institution within three years of high school graduation. The awards are the following:

- Florida Academic Scholars Award;
- Florida Merit Scholar Award; and
- Gold Seal Scholars Award.

The eligibility requirements vary for each scholarship. Requirements include, but are not limited to, certain course requirements and minimum grade point average. Detailed information about these programs may be obtained in the guidance office or on the Bright Futures website: <http://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org>.

DUAL ENROLLMENT

The dual enrollment program is designed to expand the learning opportunities for qualified students. Qualified students who wish to enroll in college level courses and require credits to meet high school graduation requirements may enroll in approved postsecondary courses. These courses are taught as part of the high school curriculum and follow the curricular guidelines established by the high school in conjunction with South Florida State College. The number of credits a student may earn is determined by SFSC.

Students must meet enrollment criteria specific to each dual enrollment course, and upon successful completion of each course will receive both high school and post-secondary credit through South Florida State College. Students dually enrolled in the regular school year are exempt from tuition, fees, and textbook costs.

Criteria for Dual Enrollment at South Florida State College include the following:

- Student enrollment in DeSoto Secondary School with the exception of those in the Alternative to Expulsion Program housed at DSS;
- prior approval granted by school administration, parent/guardian (for students less than 18 years of age), and the Superintendent (or his designee);
- passing scores on all sections of the Grade 10 FSA ELA assessment or obtainment of a concordant score on the ACT or SAT;
- a 3.0 cumulative unweighted state grade point average;
- credits sought are to be applied to high school graduation requirements;
- prior completion of one or more of the following tests with a score appropriate for college level instruction to enroll in identified courses: American College Testing Program (ACT), Florida Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT), or Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT-I);

- Dual enrollment courses will be graded using the college standards for grading.
- The dual enrollment grade will be reported the same for high school report card and college transcript;
- All instructional materials are the property of the School District of DeSoto County. The student is responsible for returning the materials to the front office of the home school. Materials shall be returned in the same condition as when they were issued.
- If a student earns a grade of "D" or "F" in a dual enrollment course he/she will not be permitted to take any dual enrollment course(s) during the next semester.

Dual Enrollment Vocational and Technical programs are also offered in cooperation with SFSC. Please see guidance or administration for more information or contact SFSC DeSoto Campus Director, Asena Mott, at 863.784.7040.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT

The Advanced Placement (AP) program is a unique learning experience in which students can potentially earn college credit. Qualified students engage in intense instruction requiring them to solve problems, work collaboratively, and enhance their skills in writing clearly, concisely, and persuasively. AP courses are part of the high/secondary school curriculum and follow the curricular guidelines established by the School District of DeSoto County. Students must make an appointment with administration to request enrollment in online AP courses offered by the APEX online platform at DeSoto Secondary School. Students successful in completing the course will be registered, free of charge, to take the AP exam. A passing score on the AP exam is required for obtainment of college credit. Report card grades and high school credits for AP courses are NOT dependent on the score achieved on the AP exam.

AWARDS

Students are recognized several times throughout the school year for academic achievement. Awards are also awarded for leadership, scholarship and citizenship. Other awards may be given at the discretion of instructional staff.

BICYCLES

Students who ride their bicycles to DeSoto Secondary School must use a bicycle lock to secure their bicycle. The school is not responsible for lost or stolen bikes.

As of January 1998, the State of Florida Statute 316.2065 mandates all students under the age of 16 wear a bicycle helmet. If a student is found in violation of this statute, he/she may be assessed a fine or issued a traffic citation. DeSoto Secondary School has the right to recommend permanent revocation of the student's privilege to ride a bike to school.

BOOK BAGS, BACKPACKS AND OVERSIZED PURSES

Because DeSoto Secondary School provides ALL necessary school supplies to each student, book bags, backpacks, and oversized purses are prohibited. All small bags will be placed in bus lockers until needed or dismissal.

BUSES / BUS RULES

Students who ride a bus are not permitted to get off at another school, another bus stop, and are not permitted to leave campus once they arrive. The bus driver is in complete charge. Riding the bus is a privilege and students are to be courteous and respectful at all times. Failure to obey the school bus rules can result in suspension or revocation of the bus riding privilege.

- 1) Follow guidelines given by the transportation department
- 2) No fighting or horseplay. Students must keep hands and feet to themselves at all times.
- 3) No abusive or profane language
- 4) No alcohol, tobacco products, drugs, knives, guns, weapons, or vandalism
- 5) No standing or moving while the bus is in motion
- 6) No throwing objects from bus window
- 7) No animals (dead or alive), glass, sharp objects, bats, batons, basketballs, balloons
- 8) No hands, arms or head outside the bus window
- 9) All talking should be kept at a low tone and NO TALKING at railroad crossings

10) Each student is required to stay seated and face the front of the bus

11) A new student or any student with a change in his/her bus schedule should notify office staff immediately.

Failure to comply with rules will result in disciplinary action as outlined in the DeSoto Code of Conduct Discipline Matrix.

Chromebook Usage

Students have the opportunity to use School District provided Chromebooks. Students and parents will be responsible for all damages to devices used that are not deemed normal wear and tear. Please refer to the Policy Manual located on the School District website.

FIRE SAFETY

When the fire alarm sounds, students should follow their teacher's instructions as to where to go. Students are expected to proceed with their teacher to the designated exit. Students out of class should exit the building and then rejoin their assigned teacher. Exit routes for fire drills are posted near the door of each classroom. **Any student pulling the fire alarm intentionally or as a prank will face expulsion.**

BOMB THREATS

When the alarm sounds, all students are to follow the teacher's instructions as to what to do. **PLEASE NOTE:** It is a felony and federal offense to make any type of false threat against a public institution; violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

SEVERE WEATHER WARNING

When the alarm sounds, all students are to follow the teacher's instructions as to what to do. Emergency procedures are posted near the door of each classroom.

RULES FOR SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

1. The school has authority over all persons attending school activities.
2. Students will conduct themselves in an orderly fashion at all activities.
3. Students will not be permitted to attend an activity if they have been drinking or begin to do so.
4. All chaperones are responsible for the behavior of those attending the activity under their supervision. Therefore, all students are expected to respect their authority. Chaperones are authorized to reprimand as they see fit and necessary. Chaperones are expected to closely follow the rules established by DeSoto Secondary School and or other partner District Schools, the School District of DeSoto County, the FHSAA, and rules posted on each school bus.
5. Students must be in attendance for the entire school day in order to participate in any school-related activity on that date or the day prior to the activity if the activity falls on the weekend or a non-school day.
6. All school dances are open only to DeSoto County School students unless permission to bring a guest is secured through the office of the principal. Guests must be under 21 to attend a school dance. No middle school students (or younger) are permitted to attend and DHS events. Dances are closed activities. Any student leaving a dance will not be allowed to re-enter. DeSoto Secondary School high school students are both welcome and encouraged to attend with the exception of those enrolled in the Alternative to Expulsion Program at DSS.
7. All club activities will be adequately supervised.
8. In order to leave campus, a signed parent permission form must be on file for each student.
9. All students must be passing four of seven classes to participate in field trips.

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

The following attendance requirements are to be followed for students participating in school events:

1. A student who is absent from class(es) on the day of an event will not be allowed to participate in any event on that day unless they have prior permission from administration.
2. A student who is assigned a detention on the day of an event will not be allowed to participate until after the detention is served.
3. Students on Out of School Suspension cannot attend or participate in any school function.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

For the safety of your child, it is very important that you notify the guidance department if you change your address or telephone number.

COMPULSORY IMMUNIZATION

Pertinent information of *Florida Statutes 232.032* reads as follows: "This bill relates to immunizations and requires that all students in kindergarten through grade twelve (both public and non-public schools) **MUST** have a certification of immunizations or exemption in order to be admitted or to attend school."

Immunizations shall be required for Polio, Diphtheria, Rubella, Pertussis and Tetanus. All students entering the seventh grade effective with the 1997/98 school year are required to complete the following immunizations: Tetanus-Diphtheria booster, Hepatitis B vaccine series (3), and second dose of measles vaccine.

COMPUTER / TECHNOLOGY USE

Student use of technology is a privilege. Students are expected to adhere to all expectations in the district technology use agreement published policies. Students who abuse, damage, or break technology equipment shall pay for any repairs necessary. Student use of technology may be disrupted due to repeated abuse of school equipment or failure to pay for repairs. Students observed cheating, or utilizing others log in information to do as such will receive consequences.

DEPARTURE AFTER SCHOOL

If you ride a bus or parent pick up, you are to exit the building and go directly to the loading zone designated. Loading zones are identified and procedures for parent pick up or buses must be followed. Walkers and bike riders are to leave the building immediately and go directly home. Students are not permitted to socialize with bus riders or other students. Students are not to take shortcuts through private property.

No loitering on school grounds will be permitted. Students are not to visit another school's campus.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline is essential to the success of any organization and education is no exception. Students are expected to follow the school rules and cooperate with all school personnel. Failure to do so will result in disciplinary action. An attempt will be made to contact the parents or guardians of students every time disciplinary action has to be taken. The disciplinary action taken by an administrator will be determined by the severity of the infraction. Disciplinary actions may include: campus clean up, lunch detention, after school detention, Intervention Room, and Out-of-School Suspension. Please see the DeSoto County Code of Conduct for an explanation of consequences to rule infractions. If a student transfers throughout the school year, previous discipline offenses will be considered when consequences are presented.

SAFETY

The safety of students on school grounds is regarded with upmost importance in Desoto County. In accordance with §790.001, F.S.; § 790.115, F.S.; §1006.07, F.S.; §1006.09, F.S.; and §1006.13 F.S. students entering Desoto Secondary School at any time will be electronically screened by school personnel using a hand-held metal detector to maintain a safe learning environment for all students.

DeSoto Secondary School Expectations

1. Respect the personal space of others and do not touch or speak to others in a way that may be considered offensive. KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF.
2. Respect the need for our school to be a safe and inviting place to learn.
3. Respect other students' right to learn.
4. Respect the teacher's responsibility to teach.
5. Respect my duty to be prepared, on time, and in the right place.
6. Should a major disciplinary issue occur, the parent or guardian will be contacted to immediately pick-up their student from school. The student will not be able to return to school until a meeting is held with the school administration, parent/ guardian, AND student.

DRESS CODE

Florida Statute 1001.43, 1006.07, School Board Policy 5511

Effective July 1, 2011, Florida Statute prohibits a student, while on the grounds of a public school during the regular school day, from wearing clothing that exposes underwear or body parts in an indecent or vulgar manner or that disrupts the orderly learning environment.

Any student who violates the dress policy is subject to specified disciplinary actions prescribed by Florida law. Please review the *Discipline Matrix* for additional details.

Responsibility for the dress and appearance of students enrolled in any school within the School District of DeSoto County primarily rests with parents and the students themselves. Some student apparel may not be appropriate to wear to school even though that same apparel may be appropriate in other settings. Therefore, Desoto Secondary has adopted a strict dress code that is required of all Desoto Secondary students daily. The following attire will be worn by all students attending DSS:

- **Black or Heather DSS logo polo(provided)**
- **Black, Khaki pants that fit at natural waistline.**
- **Belts Must always be worn with pants with loops.**
- **No holes, rips, fray on pants**
- **Shirts MUST be tucked at all times, and LOGO shown at all times.**

The DeSoto County School Board believes that there is a relationship between student attire and classroom behavior, attitude, and achievement. The objectives of this serious and conservative dress code are to bring more dignity to the classroom, to have fewer classroom distractions, to help achieve stronger discipline, and to help provide guidelines for appropriate attire as students transition from the classroom environment to the world of work or postsecondary settings.

To assist parents and students in making appropriate fashion and grooming decisions for school, the School Board has established the following guidelines for appearance and dress.

Desoto Secondary has elected to participate in a uniform dress code that follows school board guidelines while simultaneously receiving school board approval. Desoto Secondary School dress code has been approved for school, students must follow the school's adopted code or face consequences as outlined in the *Code of Student Conduct* and the *Discipline Matrix*.

It is expected that students will wear the following:

- Clothing and hairstyles which are not harmful, disruptive, or hazardous to health or safety
- Appropriate undergarments at all times. Undergarments are to remain unexposed
- Footwear that is closed toe which is appropriate to activities and conditions

- Any clothing deemed appropriate by the individual school's dress code policy

It is also expected that students will not wear the following:

The wearing on campus of hats, caps, headgear (including hoodies or any clothing covering the head) or sunglasses except at authorized athletic practices or activities is prohibited. There may be certain exceptions for medical conditions and physical education classes held outside. The principal will determine these exceptions. (F.S. 1001.43(1)(b))

- Apparel, emblems, insignias, badges, or symbols that display obscenities, are sexually suggestive, or which promote or advertise the use of tobacco products, alcohol, drugs, violence or other illegal activities.
- Apparel or symbols which are offensive to any specific group, or which are identified with gang, secret society, or cult involvement.
- Any articles of clothing or jewelry that could likely cause injury or disruption, such as but not limited to, inappropriate tattoos, a spiked bracelet that could be used as a weapon, decorative chains and/or piercings which are designed or worn in a fashion that could easily cause injury.
- Halters, backless or sleeveless dresses or tops, spaghetti straps, tube tops, tank tops, muscle shirts, tops with low or revealing necklines, or any other clothing which may be distracting unless covered by an appropriate outer garment which remains as part of the outfit. In addition, the midriff shall not be exposed.
- Formfitting, body-hugging clothes
- Clothing must be intact with no holes, cuts, fray, or slits.
- Hairstyles, hair colors, and excessive make-up that distract or cause commotion.
- Bedroom slippers

Note: **School administration has the final authority in interpreting whether a student's apparel conforms to the dress code.** When it is determined that a student's clothing does not adhere with the dress code, or is deemed disruptive or inappropriate, a parent/guardian may be asked to bring an appropriate change of clothes to school, or a student may be sent home to change clothes.

Note: Administration may modify the dress code for extra-curricular school functions.

Responsibility for the dress and appearance of students enrolled in any school within the School District of DeSoto County primarily rests with parents and the students themselves.

Note: The principal or the principal's designee has the final authority for interpreting whether a student's apparel conforms to the dress code. When it is determined that a student's clothing does not comply with the dress code, or is disruptive or inappropriate, a parent/guardian may be asked to bring an appropriate change of clothes to school, or a student may be sent home to change clothes.

Note: The principal may modify the dress code for extra-curricular school functions.
Florida Statute 1001.43, 1006.07

For additional information please refer to the Student Code of Conduct published on the District Website.

EXTRA HELP

Students are encouraged to ask their teachers for extra help if they (a) do not understand an assignment, (b) consider the work too difficult, or (c) have been absent resulting in missed class instruction or discussions. Arrange a conference with your teacher before or after school or at a time convenient to both of you during the day. BECOME A SELF ADVOCATE in your educational experience.

Teachers may request students to come to school early or stay after school dismissal if it is apparent that he/she is having difficulty successfully completing assignments. This is not to be thought of as a punishment but rather as

the desire and dedication of the teacher to help each individual student succeed to their fullest potential.

GUIDANCE

Guidance is available to help students make difficult decisions both academic and personal in nature. Appropriate school staff will work with each individual student to plan their most appropriate educational program. They will also work with students to help them develop self-discipline and a positive self-concept.

ILLNESS/MEDICATION

Students becoming ill during the school day should report to the front office. If there is a necessity to go home, the office staff will make every attempt to contact the parent by using the Emergency Health Card and the student will then be released from school to the parent or parent-designee. Students with no fever or signs of visible illness or injury will be sent back to class. **It is extremely important that Emergency Health cards be returned to the school with current information and signed by the parent.**

No medicine should be brought to school other than that prescribed by a physician or delivered by a parent (no medications are allowed on the bus). Prescription medication must be in its original container and will be controlled and distributed by school staff once authorization has been completed and filed. All medicine must be left in the front office area in a locked medical cabinet. It is the responsibility of the parent/legal guardian to notify a school official of any medication changes. Parents are cautioned to send only the amount of medication needed for any given time period.

PARENT PORTAL

The Parent Portal will give you quick, convenient access to many of the websites and services that you use related to the district. Sign in *one time*, and from there access all the other services is provided.

Each parent or guardian requesting access to the portal will need to bring a completed form and photo ID to the student's school. You will receive an email with directions on how to access the parent portal. Your username and password will be included in that email.

The parent portal will allow you to access information such as:

- classroom grades and attendance
- test scores and other assessment data from current and previous years
- school and district websites

PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parents must schedule an initial appointment with administration for students that will attend DeSoto Secondary School to discuss, review and support the rules and regulations of the Code of Conduct, Student Electronic Agreement and School Rules. Parents who wish to discuss their child's behavior or progress with team teachers can schedule an appointment. These procedures avoid conflicts with previously planned duties. Parents may contact individual teachers before and after school as needed via phone or by email.

RESTROOM USAGE

Students should make every effort to use the restroom before class and during breakfast and lunch times. Once in class, students are expected to ask the teacher in an appropriate manner to use the restroom. Excessive use of the restroom will be monitored by bathroom sign out/sign in logs. Students are expected to take care of the restrooms. **KEEP THEM CLEAN**, and do not abuse them. Abusing the restrooms will lead to disciplinary action.

STUDENT INSURANCE

Although many families have adequate insurance coverage without student insurance, it is available to all students.

TELEPHONE USAGE

The office telephone is for school business and may be used by students **ONLY** in cases of emergency. **Students will not be allowed to receive incoming calls. Students entering the Desoto Secondary School building will corral their electronic devices in the locked phone case and/or bus lockers, every day until the end of the school day,**

VISITORS

All visitors to the school must show their photo ID at the camera located outside the office door. Once the visitor enters, he/she will be required to present either their driver's license or state issued identification card. The visitor's identification will be scanned into Raptor, and they must be cleared before they can enter the school. The only people permitted on campus are:

1. Students and employees
2. Visitors with permits
3. Vendors and volunteers

No student visitors will be allowed on campus during the day.

VOLUNTEERS

A volunteer is a non-paid person functioning under the sponsorship of the school board and at the direction of the responsible administrator. School volunteers may include, but are not limited to, parents, senior citizens, students, and other adults who assist the teacher or other members of the school staff. Volunteers may fill out a volunteer application either online at www.desotoschools.com or by obtaining one from the front office. **Once the application is approved, the district's Human Resource Department will contact the applicant for an appointment to be fingerprinted, if necessary. It may not be necessary for all applicants to be fingerprinted.** Fingerprints are of no charge to the volunteer. Once the applicant is approved by the Superintendent, their name will be placed on the cleared volunteer list. At that time the applicant may begin volunteering.

Volunteers will work under the direction and supervision of teachers or members of the school staff and may perform any task assigned by their supervisor and approved by the responsible administrator. These tasks are to exclude access to student cumulative records, grading subjective tests, or supervising a class in the teacher's absence.

Volunteers will sign in and out on the volunteer log and receive a pass at the front office.

All field trip chaperones must have a completed and approved volunteer application. Please remember that it may take up to 30 days to process a volunteer application, so plan accordingly. Certain circumstances may require fingerprinting, for more information contact DeSoto Secondary School or the School District of DeSoto County at 863.494.4222.

WITHDRAWALS

Students withdrawing from school must check out with the records clerk. All books and other materials must be returned, and all other obligations cleared before any records will be mailed out.

“People grow through experience if they meet life honestly and courageously.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

2025-2026 DeSoto Secondary School Calendar

August 11	Students' First Day
September 1	Labor Day (No School)
September 17	No School Professional Workday
October 14	End 1 st Quarter Grading Period
October 15	Records Day (No School)
November 21	Early Release for Students
November 22-30	Fall Break (No School) *24-25 Severe Weather Makeup Days if needed
December 19	Last Day of 2 nd Quarter Early Release
December 20-31	Christmas Break (No School)
January 1-4	Winter Break (No School)
January 5	Records Day (No School)
January 19	Martin Luther King Jr. Day (No School)
February 13	Teacher Workday Early Release
February 16	Presidents' Day (No School)/ 25 Severe Weather Makeup Day (if needed)
March 7-15	Spring Break (No School)
March 20	Last Day of Quarter 3, Professional Learning & Records Day
April 3	Good Friday (No School)
May 25	Memorial Day (No School)
May 28	Last Day of School
May 29	Graduation/Records Day

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, ‘I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.’

YOU MUST DO THE THING YOU THINK YOU CANNOT DO.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

Unlawful Discrimination Prohibited

The School District of DeSoto County strives to provide a website that is accessible to all visitors. This website endeavors to comply with best practices and standards defined by Section 508 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act. DeSoto County does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, disability, marital status or genetic information in its educational programs, services or activities, or in its hiring or employment practices. The district also provides equal access to its facilities to the Boy Scouts and other patriotic youth groups, as required by the Boys Scout of America Equal Access Act. Questions, complaints, or requests for additional information regarding discrimination or harassment may be sent to the designated Equity Coordinator (34 C.F.R. 104.4): Dr. Gina Stafford (Equity Coordinator - Student/ Parents) (gina.stafford@desotoschools.com) and Cleve Hendrix - (Equity Coordinator-Employees) (cleve.hendrix@desotoschools.com).

Annual Letter to Parents

General Authority 230.22 FS, 228.2001 FS, DOE Rules 6A-19.01, 6A-19.10

State Board of Education Rule 6A-1.995, Student Records, requires that a student education record be maintained for each pupil enrolled in school. This student record shall be under the control of the principal and shall be kept current. No record may be destroyed or disposed of by any agency unless approval of the Division of Archives, History and Records Management is first obtained. The Division adopts reasonable rules and regulations, which are binding on all agencies relating to the destruction and disposal of records. The cumulative record shall be open to inspection only by the School Board, Superintendent, the professional staff of the school, the parent or guardian of the pupil, a court of competent jurisdiction and to such other persons as the parent, guardian, or principal may authorize in writing.

- These records contain identifying data (student and parent name, address, birth date, sex, race), academic records, standardized test results, attendance records and health data. The record may also contain family background information, verified reports of serious or recurrent behavior patterns, record of extra-curricular and special programs participation, psychological reports and anecdotal records by professional staff. The principal may maintain a separate disciplinary file for students involved in misconduct to include, but not be limited to, description of misconduct, suspension notice(s), record of disciplinary action(s) taken, etc.
- Parents of students and parents of former students of any state or local educational agency or institution, preschool through higher education, have the right to "inspect and review" all educational records directly related to their children under 18 years of age. In case of legal separation or divorce, either parent may have access to a child's educational record unless an appropriate court order to the contrary has been filed with the school.
- If any material or document in the educational record of a student includes information on more than one student, the parent or adult student seeking access will have the right to inspect and review only those parts that relate to said student or to be informed of the specific information contained in such material.
- Compliance with a request to inspect and review a student's education record should be done as quickly as administratively feasible; under no circumstances should the time element exceed thirty (30) calendar days after the request has been made.
- A waiver may be made with respect to specified classes of persons or institutions. Waivers may be revoked, but a revocation must be in writing. If a parent of a student executes a waiver, the student may revoke that waiver any time after he or she becomes an adult student.
- Access to any student education record or the release of any personally identifiable information without written consent of the parent or adult student is prohibited. The consent must contain the reason for the release; the specific records to be released; and to whom the records are being released. The signed and dated approval must be maintained in the student's cumulative record. The following categories are exempt from the above prohibition. The DeSoto County Public Schools reserve the right to release the following "directory information" without prior permission of the parent:
 - Student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, participation in school sponsored activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, date of graduation and awards received.

- The parent may request the designation of any or all of the above categories as directory information by notifying the principal in writing within ten (10) days of the date of annual notice.
- Each school must maintain a record indication of all parties other than school officials who have requested or obtained access to a student's educational record and to indicate specifically the legitimate interest that each party has in obtaining the information.
- School authorities shall provide parents an opportunity for a hearing to challenge the content of their child's educational records to ensure that the records are not inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise inappropriate data contained therein.
- When a student transfers from DeSoto District Schools to another within the state or out of state, the principal shall send the educational records to the school after a written request has been received from the principal or designated agent of the receiving school. A reasonable effort shall be made to obtain parental permission for the release of the records, except for transfers within the district.
- Upon the request for transfer of a student's educational records by educational institutions, the student's parents shall be notified of the transfer, are entitled to review the records, are entitled to a copy of the records if desired and are entitled to a hearing to challenge the content of the records.
- If a copy of the records is desired, a fee may be charged based upon the cost of the reproduction. The notification may be in the form of a letter to the last address of the parents.
- This notice has been prepared in accordance with the Family Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and the Final Rules on Educational Records of 1976. Further information is available at the School Board office.

**DeSoto Secondary School
Parent/Student Handbook**

I have read the DeSoto Secondary School Parent / Student Handbook and understand the rules and regulations as stated.

Parent Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____

Please detach and return this page to your child's homeroom teacher.

Yo he leído el manual de Padres/Estudiantes de la escuela DeSoto Secondary y entiendo las reglas y reglamentos establecidos.

Firma del Padre: _____

Firma de Estudiante: _____

Por favor de vuelva esta pagina a la maestro/a de su hijo.