



ST PAUL'S

PRE & LOWER SCHOOL

LOWER SCHOOL STUDENT & FAMILY HANDBOOK

2026–2027

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WELCOME

Welcome to St. Paul's Lower School!

Welcome to the St. Paul's Lower School community! We are honored to partner with your family during these important years of your child's growth and development.

At St. Paul's, we believe childhood should be filled with joyful learning, authentic experiences, meaningful relationships, and a strong sense of belonging. Our goal is to create an environment where every child feels known, valued, challenged, and inspired to discover their unique strengths.

We believe children learn best when school and homework together as partners. Open communication, mutual trust, and a shared commitment to each child's success create the foundation for an exceptional educational experience. We are grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside your family throughout this journey.

Our Lower school is committed to nurturing not only strong academic growth but also character, curiosity, creativity, resilience, and compassion. Through engaging learning experiences, students are encouraged to grow as confident learners, thoughtful leaders, kind classmates, and responsible members of our community.

This handbook serves as a guide to our daily routines, expectations, and procedures. While it provides important information, it also reflects the values that guide our work each day: fostering joyful learning, building authentic relationships, maintaining high expectations, and creating a community where every child can thrive.

We look forward to partnering with you as we help your child learn with curiosity, lead with integrity, and grow with confidence.

Together, we will continue to Lead with Love. Act with Courage.

With Love,

Becca Brennan

Head of Lower School & Director of Curriculum and Instruction

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Lower school students are expected to uphold the mission and values of St. Paul's Lower school and foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. **They are expected to model the following Lower school Character Traits:**

- Be Kind
- Be Respectful
- Be Hardworking
- Be Inclusive
- Be Honest

Daily Procedures and Carpool

Our daily routines and procedures are designed to create a safe, welcoming, and predictable environment where students can thrive. Consistent procedures help children develop confidence, independence, and responsibility while ensuring that each school day begins and ends smoothly for every member of our community. We appreciate our families' partnership in following these procedures, as they play an important role in maintaining a safe and joyful experience for all students.

Morning drop-off for all students in grades pre-K through grade 4 begins at 7:30 a.m. and continues until 8:15 a.m. Before-school care ("Tabletop") is provided free of charge for any student who arrives before 8 a.m. Dismissal begins at 3:30 p.m. If a student needs to be picked up early, advance notice should be given to the homeroom teacher and Joni Gahm at jgahm@stpaulsmd.org, and the student must be picked up by 3:15 p.m.

Students are released only to an approved adult or upper school carpool driver. Carpool tags must be displayed when picking up a student. Middle school siblings are not permitted to pick up Lower school students. Any student not picked up will be enrolled in After School Adventures (ASA), our extended-day program. ASA offers care options until 4:30 or 5:30 p.m. Carpool procedures are the same for the 4:30 p.m. pick-up time. Families with students staying until 5:30 p.m. must walk into the building to pick up their child.

Pre-K Carpool Procedures

Parents should drop their children off in the designated pre-K carpool area in the Lower school parking lot (Lot F). Faculty and fourth-grade safety patrols will greet students and walk them to their classrooms. Afternoon pick-up at 3:30 p.m. will occur in the same location. Students will be escorted to their vehicles by faculty members. For safety reasons, families should remain in their cars until a faculty member brings their child to them. Families with a pre-K student should also drop older siblings off in the pre-K carpool line.

Grades K–4 Carpool Procedures

Parents should drop off their children in the carpool lane directly in front of the Lower school. Faculty members and the fourth-grade safety patrol will open car doors and greet students. Afternoon pick-up at 3:30 p.m. will occur in the same location. For safety reasons, families should remain in their cars, and students should not exit a vehicle until a faculty member is outside on duty. If a child needs help securing a car seat or seat belt, the driver should pull to the front of the line after the child is in the car so carpool can continue efficiently. Please do not park across from the Lower school and walk across the road to drop off or pick up a child.

Attendance

At St. Paul's Lower School, we believe that every school day matters. Consistent attendance allows children to build meaningful relationships, establish routines, engage in joyful learning, and participate in the authentic experiences that make our community special. While we recognize that illness, family emergencies, and other circumstances may occasionally require a student to be absent, we encourage families to prioritize regular attendance whenever possible. Together, we can help ensure that every child feels connected, supported, and fully engaged in both the academic and social life of our school.

Lower School Attendance Policy

Consistent and punctual attendance is essential for student success. The structure, continuity, and relationships built during the school day are foundational to each child's academic, social, and emotional growth. We recognize, however, that occasional absences may occur due to illness, family emergencies, or other extenuating circumstances. This policy outlines expectations regarding attendance, tardiness, and procedures for reporting absences.

Reporting Absences

Option 1: Submit an Attendance Notification Through [Veracross](#) (Preferred)

- Click Absence Notification under Quick Links.
- Select your student from the dropdown menu.
- Choose Attendance (one-day absence) or Multi-Day Absence.
- Select the appropriate date(s).
- Choose a reason for the absence.
- Indicate whether your child will be absent, arrive late, leave early, or leave early and return.
- Add any additional notes.
- Click the blue Mark Complete button to submit the notification.
- Please note that this process should be used for all absences, whether excused or unexcused.

Option 2: Email the Lower School Attendance Email (attendanceSPPL@stpaulsmd.org)

Families may email their division's attendance address and include:

- Student's full name, grade level, date(s) of absence or timing of tardy/early dismissal, reason for absence, and parent/guardian name and contact number
- This centralized system helps ensure timely processing and proper documentation of attendance-related communication.

Option 3: Call the Administrative Office

Families may continue to report attendance by calling Joni Gahm at 410-821-3029 and leaving a detailed voicemail.

Important Reminders

- Attendance notifications should be submitted by a parent/guardian listed in our system.
- Same-day absences should be reported by 9 a.m.

Excused Absences

- Illness
- Medical or dental appointments
- Family emergencies
- Religious observances

Teachers are not required to provide missing assignments. If a child is ill, the child should focus on resting and recuperating.

Unexcused Absences

- Family vacations
- Absences not reported by a parent or guardian

Tardiness

- Students arriving after 8:15 a.m. are considered tardy.
- Tardy students must be signed in electronically in the lobby by a parent or guardian.
- Frequent tardiness disrupts classroom routines and may affect student learning.
- Excessive tardiness—10 or more tardies in a semester—may prompt a conference with school administration so that appropriate support can be provided for the student's academic progress.

Early Dismissal

- Parents must notify the homeroom teacher and Ms. Gahm at jgahm@stpaulsmd.org in advance.
- All early dismissals must take place before 3:15 p.m. After that time, students should be picked up through the regular carpool line.
- Students will be dismissed from the lobby to ensure accurate attendance records.
- In the event of illness, students may be released from the Nurses' Suite.
- Families should avoid scheduling appointments during school hours whenever possible.

Extended Absences

- If an extended absence is anticipated, parents should contact the Head of Lower school to discuss the reason for the absence and any necessary academic planning.
- Teachers are not required to provide assignments for extended absences.

Excessive Absences

- Attendance is closely monitored.
- Excessive absences—10 or more in a semester—may prompt a conference with school administration so that appropriate support can be provided for the student's academic progress.

Illness, Injury, and Concussion Policy

To help keep our school community healthy, students may return to school only when the following criteria are met:

- **Fever:** The student must be fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- **Vomiting:** The student must be free from vomiting for 24 hours before returning.
- Additional Health Suite policies, including policies regarding lice, strep throat, influenza, and other communicable illnesses, are available here: [Health Suite Policies](#)

If you are ever unsure, please contact the school nurses at nurses@stpaulsmd.org for guidance before sending your child back to school.

Students who are unable to participate in recess or physical education must provide a written note from a parent, guardian, or physician. A family note may excuse a student for up to one day. Extended absences or ongoing medical concerns require a physician's note. Students excused from participation will still attend recess and PE and observe unless otherwise directed by the school.

Student Records

Requests to view or release records must be directed to Susan Faint, assistant head of lower school & director of student support, at sfaint@stpaulsmd.org.

Transcript requests are managed by Susan Faint, who confirms permissions, prepares records, checks financial status, and coordinates the release of documents.

Homework Guidelines

Homework should reinforce meaningful learning while preserving time for family connection, reading, play, extracurricular activities, and rest. Time guidelines are as follows:

- **Pre-K:** Students should read with their parents nightly.
- **Kindergarten:** Students should read with their parents nightly. Additional work may be assigned occasionally by the homeroom teacher.
- **First grade:** At most 10 minutes
- **Second grade:** At most 20 minutes
- **Third grade:** At most 30 minutes
- **Fourth grade:** At most 40 minutes

Assignments are not given over long weekends, religious holidays, or school breaks. Homework is not provided for absences. If homework takes longer than the suggested time, please stop and write a note to your child's teacher at the top of the page.

Parent-Teacher Communication and Conferences

Family partnership is a vital part of a child's success in school. We believe the strongest educational outcomes occur when families and educators work together with trust, curiosity, and open communication. We ask all members of our community to assume positive intent and partner respectfully when questions or concerns arise.

Curriculum and procedures will be outlined during Parents' Back-to-School Night on Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2026. The time will be announced. This group setting allows parents to meet one another and their child's teacher.

Two progress reports will be issued annually, on Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2027, and Tuesday, June 8, 2027. Required student-led parent-teacher conferences will be held on Friday, Nov. 13, 2026, and Friday, April 9, 2027; students will not have classes on those dates. Required parent-teacher conferences connected to the first progress report will be held on Friday, Feb. 5, 2027; students will not have classes that day. Additional conferences may be requested by a parent or teacher as needed.

Teachers are expected to reply to emails and phone calls within one business day.

Attending scheduled conferences is one meaningful way for families to stay connected to their child's academic, social, and emotional growth. These meetings provide opportunities to celebrate progress, address concerns, and strengthen the home-school connection. All families are expected to attend required conferences. If a family has difficulty attending at the scheduled time, the family should contact the teacher promptly to discuss an alternative arrangement.

General Communication

Families should expect the following communication from the school:

- A weekly lower School newsletter on Thursdays during the school year for families in pre-K through grade 4
- Tadpoles as the primary classroom communication tool for Pre-K families
- Daily pictures
- Email as needed
- Weekly newsletters with upcoming events, curriculum updates, and other pertinent information
- Seesaw as the primary classroom communication tool in kindergarten through fourth grade
- Monthly newsletters with upcoming events, curriculum updates, and other pertinent information
- Two posts per class each week
- Posts organized in class folders

Calendar

The lower school calendar is available on the school website: stpaulsmd.org/calendar.

Calendar updates are also provided in the weekly newsletter sent to families on Thursdays and posted at stpaulsmd.org/newsletter

Key Dates for 2026–27

Monday, Aug. 3, 2026:	Class lists sent to families
Friday, Aug. 28, 2026:	Required Treats with Teachers/Hopes & Dreams; 8 a.m.–4 p.m. appointments
Monday, Aug. 31, 2026:	Classes begin
Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2026:	Parents' Back-to-School Night; time to be announced
Thursday, Oct. 29, 2026:	Late start: carpool begins at 8:45 a.m.; school begins at 9 a.m.; no before-care for families; dismissal at 3:30 p.m.
Friday, Nov. 13, 2026:	Required student-led, parent-teacher conferences; no classes
Thursday, Jan. 21, 2027:	Late start: carpool begins at 8:45 a.m.; school begins at 9 a.m.; no before-care for families; dismissal at 3:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2027:	First progress report
Friday, Feb. 5, 2027:	Required parent-teacher conferences; no classes
Thursday, March 4, 2027:	STEM Fair in the evening; time to be announced
Friday, March 12, 2027:	Grandparents & Special Friends Day; 11:30 a.m. early dismissal
Thursday, April 1, 2027:	Late start: carpool begins at 8:45 a.m.; school begins at 9 a.m.; no before-care for families; dismissal at 3:30 p.m.
Friday, April 9, 2027:	Required student-led parent-teacher conferences; no classes
Thursday, May 13, 2027:	Late start: carpool begins at 8:45 a.m.; school begins at 9 a.m.; no before-care for families; dismissal at 3:30 p.m.
Friday, May 28, 2027:	Field Day; 11:30 a.m. early dismissal
Tuesday, June 8, 2027:	Second progress report

School Dress Code

At St. Paul's, the school uniform helps create a sense of community, minimizes distractions, and allows students to focus on learning. Students in grades K–4 are expected to wear the approved uniform each day and follow guidelines for neatness and appropriate fit. Families are important partners in helping students arrive each day dressed in accordance with the dress code. For safety reasons, students who are not wearing appropriate athletic shoes will be unable to participate in physical education classes and will observe instead. Jewelry, accessories, and nail styles should be age-appropriate, safe, and non-disruptive.

- School uniform and dress code guidelines are available here: [2026–2027 Lower School Uniform Code](#)
- **Pre-K students do not wear uniforms.** The pre-K dress code emphasizes comfort and safe play; sneakers are required.

Field Trips and Parent Volunteering Opportunities

Field trips are an important extension of the lower school educational experience. As part of the enrollment contract, families grant permission for their child to participate in all school-sponsored field trips. Field trips are supervised by faculty members and, when needed, parent chaperones. Parent volunteers will be coordinated through appropriate school channels and selected based on the needs of the trip. To ensure the safety and supervision of all students, siblings may not attend field trips. Parents who have not been designated as chaperones should not attend, as doing so can create challenges with student supervision and group management.

Equipment from Home

Students may bring sports equipment from home for use during recess with teacher permission. The school is not responsible for lost, damaged, or stolen items. Any equipment that creates safety concerns, causes disruptions, or becomes a source of conflict may be temporarily or permanently removed from recess use by school personnel.

Dress-Down Days

Families will be notified of dress-down days through regular school communication channels. Attire should remain neat, appropriate, and suitable for the school environment. Clothing with spaghetti straps, inappropriate language, or inappropriate graphics is not permitted. Students should wear safe, closed-toe shoes appropriate for recess, Physical Education, and other school activities.

Fidget Guidelines

Students with specific recommendations from a formal psychoeducational evaluation or a note from an outside provider may bring fidgets from home. All personal fidgets must be small enough to fit in a pocket, silent, and non-distracting to both the student and peers. Many classrooms also have appropriate fidgets available for students to use as needed. Faculty members reserve the right to remove fidgets if they become distracting.

Food

Families should provide a morning snack for their child, with an additional afternoon snack provided when directed by the homeroom teacher. Families may pack lunch or pre-order from Brock Dining Services at the Ward Center. Lunch is eaten in the classroom in pre-K and kindergarten and in the Multi-Purpose Room (MPR) in grades one through four. If a student forgets lunch, faculty will make every reasonable effort to contact a parent before lunchtime or provide a lunch if the missing lunch is discovered at lunchtime. Extra lunches may not always be available, and a parent may need to bring one. Students may not have food delivered to campus through services such as DoorDash or Grubhub. Lower school students should not bring soda, energy drinks, Gatorade, or Starbucks beverages to school.

Allergen Policy

Information regarding the St. Paul's Lower School Allergen Policy is available on the school website: stpaulsmd.org/resources

Families are welcome to meet with the school nurse at the beginning of the year regarding allergies. Students with allergies should keep an approved birthday snack on hand in case a class treat is shared.

Birthday Parties and Treats

To ensure a safe and inclusive school environment, birthday parties are not held during the school day. Students may share a small class treat with their homeroom class if desired. Families should notify teachers in advance before sending in any birthday treats. Pizza parties and other large lunch celebrations are not permitted. To help prevent hurt feelings, birthday party invitations may not be distributed at school unless the entire class is included.

Spiritual Life

Students participate in Spiritual Life through the Godly Play program with Kathy Smith once a week. Students in grades K–4 attend an age-appropriate Chapel service on Tuesday mornings. After spring break, pre-K students begin attending Lower school Chapel services.

Lower School Conduct and Discipline Policy

In the Lower school, we view discipline as an important part of teaching and learning rather than punishment. Our approach helps students understand expectations, develop self-regulation, and make responsible choices. Discipline is rooted in relationships, restoration, growth, and teaching children the skills needed for lifelong success. Children learn best in a safe, supportive, and structured environment where clear boundaries are consistently reinforced with care and respect. When behavioral concerns arise, faculty partner with families to guide students toward positive decision-making, repair harm when needed, and build skills for long-term success.

The full policy is available here: [Lower School Conduct and Discipline Policy](#)

Lower School Cell Phone and Smartwatch Policy

To support a focused and respectful learning environment, the use of cell phones, smartwatches, and other wearable communication devices is prohibited during the school day for all students. These devices must remain at home or be powered off and stored in backpacks from arrival until dismissal, unless explicitly authorized by the school for medical purposes. Unauthorized use during school hours, including in restrooms, hallways, or during recess, may result in confiscation and disciplinary action. The school is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged devices. Parents who need to reach their child during the school day should contact the lower school office.

2026–27 Lower School Faculty and Staff

Pre-K

- Lucy DeBaugh / Rebecca Kenton | Room 002
- Jean Figlewski / Lauren Allen | Room 003
- Franni Kaplan / Kari Voneiff | Room 004

Pre-K Afternoon Assistants

- Kate Barry
- Brianna Arthur-Merow
- To be hired

Kindergarten

- Rachel Manley | Room 19
- Jacquie Brannan | Room 16
- Lisa Baldwin | Room 25
- Heather Binnix | Room 18

First Grade

- Kim Heidelberg | Room 24
- Karrie Cook | Room 26
- Julia Hooper | Room 27

Second Grade

- Lauren DeVries | Room 145
- Lucy Lynch | Room 142
- Stacey Goldaris | Room 130
- Grace Hazelton | Room 146

Third Grade

- Stacy Simons | Room 138
- Fannon Curtis | Room 141
- Maggie Burke | Room 139
- Cristin Talley | Room 137

Fourth Grade

- Bekky Levesque | Room 110
- Mairead McAllister | Room 111
- Diana Koska | Room 129
- Specialists

STEM

- James Wallace | STEM Cottage
- Nancy Dimitriades | Lower School Lab

Reading Specialists

- Rachel Draper | Room 140
- Hillary Vachino | Library Office

Math Specialist

- Madeline Goins | Library Office

Art

- Camille Gammon-Hittelman (Grades K–4) | Art Studio

Library

- Marty Rogers | Library

Administration and Support Staff

- Becca Brennan, Head of Lower School & Director of Curriculum and Instruction | Room 115
- Susan Faint, Assistant Head of Lower School & Director of Student Support | Room 113
- Joni Gahm, Assistant to the Head of Lower School | Main Lower School Office
- Courtney Wertheimer, RN, School Nurse | Rooms 031/033
- Eliza Settembrino, RN, School Nurse | Rooms 031/033
- Neil Keenan, Director of Student Life | Room 116
- Deb Heacock, Lower School Counselor | Room 114
- Margaret Schlossberg, Consulting School Psychologist
- Erin Cooke, Director of Pre and Lower School Admissions | Gatehouse
- Brooke Kurrle, Admissions Database Manager | Gatehouse

Modern Languages

- Sara Porter (Spanish) | Room 147
- Kaoru Kimura-Beavers (Japanese) | Room 134

Spiritual Life

- Kathy Smith | Cottage

Music

- Caroline Haar (Grades K–4) | Cottage

Physical Education

- Jaime Jergensen | PE Loft
- Rick Faint | PE Loft
- Jack Keenan | PE Loft

After School Adventures (ASA)

- Susan Aiken