

LOWER SCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK

2026-2027



GARRISON FOREST SCHOOL

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SECTION 1: THE SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

For over 100 years, Garrison Forest has provided its students with an introduction to school that nurtures their innate curiosity and stimulates their social, emotional, and cognitive development. Our teachers share the important goal of instilling the joy of learning in each child. By integrating our curriculum and guiding our students through both planned and spontaneous adventures, we challenge them to achieve their fullest potential in mind, body, and spirit.

The primary goal of Garrison Forest's Lower School is to provide students with an outstanding academic program in an atmosphere of warmth and understanding. Central to this purpose are the beliefs that education should foster a child's growth as a total human being; that a caring, family atmosphere is crucial to the learning process; and that children learn best when they are actively involved. The program provides outstanding learning opportunities where children experience the success that nurtures self-motivation and responsibility. We strive to promote excellence in academics and to develop each child's sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

The belief that learning should be challenging and joyful is central to the school's mission. The Lower School teachers meet the needs of their students by providing a solid grounding in academic skills, a broad exposure to the creative arts, and a true community spirit based in kindness, respect, and honesty. Small classes, an intimate environment, and a genuine concern for others combine to create an enthusiasm for learning that carries forward into the future.

Garrison Forest School has prepared this handbook as a summary of important School policies and procedures. While no single document can anticipate every issue that may arise during a School year, this handbook should serve as a helpful guide. Should you have any questions about anything contained in this handbook, please contact the Division Head.

Nothing in this handbook is intended to create a contract or guarantee of any kind. The School reserves the right to change, delete, or add to any of the items contained in this handbook at any time with or without advance notice. Furthermore, as need arises, the School reserves the right to interpret or deviate from the provisions of this handbook in order to respond to situations in the manner it feels best serves the interests of the School.

GARRISON FOREST SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENT

A Garrison Forest School education empowers every girl to achieve academic excellence, cultivate her authentic self, foster a community of care and respect, and lead with purpose.

STATEMENT OF RESPECT

The Garrison Forest School community is deeply committed to equity, honesty, kindness, and respect as part of the educational experience. To this end, we:

- Strive to celebrate diversity both within our community and our curriculum;

- Are concerned for the well-being of all people;
- Seek to build the self-esteem of all people;
- Aspire to promote the understanding of all people.

Recognizing the dignity and worth of all individuals and to protect their rights, we confront bias, prejudice and discrimination. Garrison Forest School does not condone any behavior which is inconsistent with these tenets. We believe that spoken or written language or any behavior that is inconsistent with this philosophy and that demeans one's ethnic, religious, racial, physical, personal, and/or sexual characteristics is unacceptable. We expect individuals to take responsibility for their words and deeds and to respect all people.

GARRISON FOREST CORE VALUES

The GFS Core Values, created and adopted by the GFS community in 2015, guide how we teach and learn, connect and collaborate, serve and succeed. Underscoring our Mission and Statement of Respect, these five values are a road map for every member of our community, adult and child, to be our best selves.

Be Authentic.

- ☐ Take pride in your unique personality, spirit and character.
- ☐ Take responsibility for your words and actions.
- ☐ Be honest and fair with yourself and others.

Be Brave.

- ☐ Have the courage to think and act independently.
- ☐ Take risks and persevere when facing challenges.
- ☐ Advocate for yourself and others.

Be Compassionate.

- ☐ Understand others' circumstances and viewpoints.
- ☐ Accept others' differences and celebrate their contributions.
- ☐ Promote a peaceful, caring and safe community.

Be Curious.

- ☐ Get excited about new ideas, places and people.
- ☐ Create and innovate.
- ☐ Ask questions and participate fully in your education.

Be Spirited.

- ☐ Show passion and joy in school, play and all endeavors.
- ☐ Connect and collaborate.
- ☐ Congratulate and celebrate others' successes

GENERAL CIVILITY

GFS takes seriously its mission, philosophy and statement of respect as articulated at the beginning of this handbook. All students, parents, guardians and other student representatives are

expected to engage with GFS employees in a manner that conforms to the values of GFS. This includes interacting with all GFS employees in a respectful and civil manner during conferences, school events and in any other communications. Students, parents, guardians and other student representatives are prohibited from raising their voices, yelling, becoming aggressive verbally or physically, threatening, bullying, belittling, or engaging in any other similar behavior during interactions with GFS employees, on GFS property, or during GFS sponsored activities. Should any issues arise under this general civility policy, they will be addressed by the Division Head.

ALMA MATER

Hail, Gladdening Light.
Our lamp of wisdom, Hail!
Shine with a radiance
Which can never fail.
Illumined by thy rays
May thus our motto gleam
And show our desire
"To be and not to seem."

Polished and fitted true,
May each to each stand fast,
Firm as the stones
In temple corners cast.
Strong and enduring be
Our love and loyalty
For school and for comrades
And for victory.

SECTION 2: ACADEMIC INFORMATION

THE DAILY SCHEDULE

Early Birds begins	7:30 a.m.
Doors open to students	7:55 a.m.
Morning Carpool greeting	7:40 – 8:00 a.m.
Classes begin	8:00 a.m.
Carpool begins	3:25 p.m.
Carpool ends	3:45 p.m.

Morning Arrival

School begins promptly at 8:00 a.m. for all Lower School students (9:00 a.m. on Fridays). Students may arrive as early as 7:30 a.m. and will be supervised in the art room, library, or on the playground until 7:55 a.m. Morning carpool operates from 7:40–8:00 a.m., when faculty and staff greet students and assist them from their vehicles.

We ask that students arrive by 7:55 a.m. (8:55 a.m. on Fridays) so they have time to unpack, settle into their classrooms, and begin the day successfully.

Students arriving after the start of the school day should ring the bell and be accompanied into the building by an adult to sign in with the Lower School Division Assistant. Students arriving after 8:00 a.m. (9:00 a.m. on Fridays) will be recorded as late.

Many Lower School students are required to ride in an approved child safety seat or booster seat. Families are responsible for ensuring that children are transported in accordance with Maryland law. Clearly labeled car seats or booster seats may be left in the Lower School lobby if your child will be riding home with another approved adult.

Dismissal

Dismissal begins at 3:25 p.m. Students will be called and ready for your vehicle as you arrive in the carpool loop. For the safety of all students, please remain in your vehicle during dismissal and do not park in handicap spaces unless directed by a staff member.

If your child's dismissal plans change during the school day, please notify your child's teacher and the Lower School Division Assistant at missywells@gfs.org or 410-559-3251.

Students should be picked up by 3:45 p.m. unless they are participating in an afterschool club, lesson, or the Lower School After School Program.

AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

The Lower School offers a variety of afterschool clubs, enrichment opportunities, athletic activities, and private lessons that encourage students to explore new interests, build friendships, and develop new skills beyond the school day. Most afterschool clubs meet from 3:30–4:30 p.m., while lesson times vary. Families can find current offerings, schedules, and registration information on the Lower School Afterschool Activities page of the GFS website.

The Lower School After Care Program provides supervised care until 6:00 p.m. Families may register in advance for regularly scheduled care. If an unexpected situation arises and you are unable to pick up your child by 3:45 p.m., emergency drop-in care is available, as space permits, at a rate of \$25 per hour. Students remaining on campus after 3:45 p.m. without prior arrangements will be checked into the program and billed at the emergency drop-in rate.

After School Transitions

For the safety of our students, Lower School students may not travel to other areas of campus independently after dismissal. Students visiting the Bookstore after school must be accompanied by a parent or other authorized adult.

Students participating in after-school activities will be escorted by an adult or, when appropriate, transported by the riding bus. Some instrumental music teachers will pick students up directly from the Lower School for lessons. When possible, the School will help coordinate walking groups to lessons; if a walking group is not available, families will be asked to transport their daughter to her lesson.

Whenever there is a change in after school schedules, parents should notify the homeroom teacher, Missy Wells, and the after school instructor.

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE

Regular attendance and punctuality are essential to each child's academic, social, and emotional success. We ask families to make every effort to ensure students attend school each day, arrive on time, and remain for the full school day whenever possible.

If your child will be absent, please notify the Lower School Division Assistant as soon as possible and include the reason for the absence. This information helps us maintain accurate attendance records and communicate appropriately with families regarding contagious illnesses. Students must be fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) before returning to school.

Excused Absences

A student's absence will be considered excused for the following reasons:

- Illness
- The graduation, marriage, or death of an immediate family member
- Observance of a religious holiday or event

Absences for reasons other than those listed above are considered unexcused.

Planned Absences

We encourage families to schedule vacations during the school's designated breaks whenever possible. If a student will have a planned absence, parents or guardians should notify the Lower School in advance of the date(s) and reason for the absence. Teachers may not be able to provide assignments before the absence, and students will be responsible for completing missed work upon their return.

Medical Appointments and Early Dismissals

Whenever possible, please schedule medical and dental appointments outside of school hours. If a student must arrive late or leave early for an appointment or another necessary reason, parents should notify both the homeroom teacher and the Lower School Division Assistant in advance. Students leaving before dismissal must be signed out by an authorized adult.

Attendance and Punctuality

If a pattern of frequent tardiness, absences, or early dismissals develops, the Head of Lower School will reach out to partner with the family to better understand the circumstances and determine how we can best support the student's success.

Students who miss 20% or more of instructional time in any class, including Specials, may be at risk of not meeting course requirements. In consultation with the student's teachers and family, the Head of Lower School will determine an appropriate plan for completing missed work and whether the student's attendance should be noted on the report card.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

All students are expected to participate in physical education classes and join their peers in outdoor recess if they are in school. A doctor's note is required for a long-term absence and any time a doctor requires the school to excuse a child from Physical Education classes. A copy of the doctor's note must be submitted to the PE teacher and Lower School Office. The parents of any student who cannot participate fully in a Physical Education class must contact the Head of Lower School or the Division Assistant directly and in sufficient time to make any necessary adjustments. In most cases, a child will remain in the Lower School during PE class for the duration of the mandated medical leave. The child can resume normal PE activities once she is cleared by her doctor.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Garrison Forest, we believe every child can thrive with the right support, challenge, and encouragement. Supporting and challenging every learner is a shared commitment in the Lower School. Classroom teachers, specialist teachers, the Learning Specialist/Curriculum Coordinator, and the Boyce Center for Learning & Thriving partner closely with families to provide the support, challenge, and encouragement each child needs to thrive.

Support begins in the classroom through differentiated instruction, small-group learning, and regular communication between teachers and families. When additional support is needed, the Lower School Learning Specialist works collaboratively with teachers to develop strategies, monitor student progress, and provide targeted interventions. The Learning Specialist also oversees Learning Support Plans and classroom accommodations for students with documented learning differences and serves as the primary liaison between the Lower School and the Boyce Center.

The Boyce Center for Learning & Thriving is an integral partner in the academic program from Kindergarten through Grade 12. In addition to providing consultation and individualized support for students when appropriate, Boyce Center specialists collaborate with faculty across all divisions to strengthen curriculum, refine instructional practices, and ensure students benefit

from engaging, research-based learning experiences. Together, the Lower School team and the Boyce Center foster an environment where every student is supported, challenged, and empowered to grow as a confident, independent learner while also providing opportunities for enrichment and challenge.

REPORT CARDS AND CONFERENCES

We believe that regular communication about student growth is an important part of the partnership between home and school. Conference days are held twice during the academic year and coincide with our fall and spring midsemester progress checkpoints. At each midsemester checkpoint, teachers share students' progress through checklists of academic skills and work habits, which serve as the foundation for conference discussions.

At the end of each semester, report cards include written comments and updated academic skills and work habits checklists. In preparation for Middle School and to continue to support the girls' ownership of their learning, in Grades 4 and 5, report cards also include letter grades in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Word Studies. Families are notified through the Parent Portal when report cards are available.

HOMEWORK

Homework that is appropriate and thoughtful will be assigned throughout the year. It is designed to provide reinforcement and practice of academic skills and to encourage good study habits and time management. Parents are expected to ensure that their children have a quiet place to work, that television and phone use are limited, and that the assigned work is completed. They are not expected to help with the completion of homework assignments except as needed for special projects. Homework assignments are generally given Monday through Thursday nights but weekend homework may occasionally be given in the older grades at the teacher's discretion. If, on any night, a parent feels that a child cannot complete a homework assignment because of illness or unusual family commitments, the parent should send a note to the child's teacher.

The time it takes to complete homework assignments varies significantly by student and by circumstance. If a parent feels that a child is spending an inordinate amount of time on a particular assignment, the parent should stop the child and send a note to the child's teacher. As a general guideline, nightly homework should not exceed 30 minutes for students in Kindergarten through second grade, and 60 minutes for those in third through fifth grade.

Students in the Lower School are expected to make up all essential classroom work and homework missed due to absence from school. If a student is absent for one day only it may not be necessary to make up all of the work. She will complete the needed assignments when she returns the next day. For an absence of more than one day, parents should call the Lower School Division Assistant before noon to arrange for classroom make-up work to be prepared. These materials will be available for pick-up at the end of the school day at the front desk or may be sent home with another student.

Homework Policy for Religious Holidays and Long Breaks

Homework, assignments, and assessments cannot be scheduled or due on the first day back from a religious holiday that is observed by Garrison Forest School. Additionally, students may notify teachers with a note from their family if there is another religious holiday that they observe that would preclude them from completing their work accordingly. The same policy for no homework, assignments and assessments being scheduled or due apply to the first day back from the following breaks: Thanksgiving, Winter and Spring Break.

TUTORING

Occasionally, families ask about outside tutoring or academic support. Before seeking outside services, we encourage parents to partner with their child's classroom teacher to discuss any concerns. In many cases, additional support can be provided through classroom differentiation, small-group instruction, or other resources available within the Lower School.

If a student continues to experience persistent challenges despite these supports, outside tutoring may be appropriate. The Lower School Learning Specialist maintains a list of tutors who have previously worked with Garrison Forest students and is happy to share that list upon request. This list is provided as a resource only and does not constitute an endorsement of any individual. Families are responsible for selecting a tutor who is the best fit for their child.

To ensure a coordinated approach, we ask families to share the tutor's contact information with the Lower School Learning Specialist so that, when appropriate, communication can occur between the tutor and the classroom teacher to support the student's progress.

Any outside tutor working with a student on campus must complete the School's required background check and registration process through Human Resources. The Lower School Learning Specialist can assist families with these requirements.

LEVEL OF SUPPORT

At Garrison Forest School, we are deeply committed to knowing, supporting, and challenging each student so that she can learn, grow, and thrive. At times, despite thoughtful and intentional intervention, partnership with families, and the implementation of available supports and accommodations, a student's needs may extend beyond what the school is able to provide within its mission, program, and resources. When this occurs, the school may determine that it is not the appropriate educational setting for the student's continued growth and success.

This decision is made with care and is based on one or more of the following factors:

- The student is not meeting grade-level expectations despite consistent implementation of available supports and accommodations
- The level, intensity, or type of support required exceeds what the school can provide on a sustained basis
- The student's academic, social-emotional, and/or learning needs would be better met in a different educational environment
- The school's current mission, personnel, and program structure do not align with the student's needs

In such cases, the school is committed to partnering with families to support a thoughtful and respectful transition to a setting better suited to the student's needs.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Garrison Forest School provides academic, physical and other accommodations that are reasonable and do not create an undue burden on our facilities and staffing. The academic accommodations must also be consistent with our program and educational mission and must not fundamentally alter the nature of the educational program.

Parents or guardians of students with disabilities, including diagnosed learning differences, should consult with the Lower School Learning Specialist about the documentation needed for the particular disability. In general, the documentation required must:

- be current;
- include the results of relevant evaluations;
- present a diagnosis by a qualified professional;
- describe the rationale for the recommended accommodations.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Standardized tests are administered twice annually to Lower School students for the purpose of gaining additional insight and knowledge into the ability and performance levels of students. This information contributes to the effective guidance of students' learning. We use the STAR Test for reading comprehension and math. Results are shared with families following the fall and spring tests.

STUDENT RECORDS

Records are maintained for each student beginning with admission to Garrison Forest School. The following records may be included in a student's file where applicable:

- Personal and family data
- Test data: achievement and ability test records (excluding Admission testing)
- Other records which may contribute to understanding the educational progress of the student.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is an integral part of the GFS program. All Lower School teachers are encouraged to use the best available tools to create a learning environment that will stimulate the interests of their students and provide them with a broad understanding of the topics in the curriculum. Classrooms are equipped with wireless projectors and/or interactive whiteboards and teachers are provided with laptops that can bring the outside world into the classroom. Beginning in Kindergarten, the students begin to work on iPads or laptops and in Fourth and Fifth Grades, we start our 1:1 Chromebook program, providing a valuable resource for research, writing, math, and long-term projects that bring together various areas of the curriculum.

Responsible Use

Beginning with Kindergarten, students and parents are expected to read, sign, and return the Garrison Forest Responsible Use Policy (RUP). The RUP clearly defines the expectations associated with the use of computers and other technology at schools (found in the appendix). All Lower School students participate in a Digital Citizenship curriculum that includes topics such as understanding privacy, cyberbullying, ethical use of technology, and developing a positive digital footprint.

Technology at Home

Parents who make technological tools available in their homes must take responsibility for helping their children be responsible digital citizens. It is vital for parents to role-model appropriate use, set clear expectations, maintain open communication with your children and the School with respect to responsible use, and most importantly, supervise your children to ensure compliance with the rules of your household. To accomplish this, parents must establish and maintain clear rules that address:

- ensuring that all technology available to children and connected to the Internet is in a public place in the home that can be supervised
- using family e-mail accounts or knowing your child's passwords, so all e-mail and online activity by your child can be monitored
- knowing the identity of all your child's online contacts
- uniformly enforcing the GFS Responsible Use Policy and your home policies

LOWER SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY RESPONSIBLE USE POLICY

At Garrison Forest School we practice five core values. We aspire for students to **be authentic, brave, compassionate, curious, and spirited**. When students practice these values they help to make their community, school, and the Internet a safe and happy place to learn, work and play.

Please take a moment to read and discuss the following rules for the Responsible Use of Technology with your daughter.

As a Garrison girl,

I will always **be authentic** when I use digital tools to learn, work, and play on the Internet. Our school motto, *Esse Quam Videri*—To Be Rather Than To Seem, reminds me to always represent my true self and never pretend to be someone I am not.

I will always **be brave** when I use technology. I know that there is no device too difficult or app too hard for me to learn when I put my mind to it.

I know that I can **be curious** and search for answers on the Internet. I will practice safe and effective search strategies. I will strive to become an “expert information finder!”

I will always **be compassionate** on the Internet. I do not send emails or any type of message that might make others feel sad, embarrassed, or uncomfortable. I will be an upstander if I see someone being bullied or disrespected online. I know that I can always count on my teachers and parents if I need help with anything inappropriate on the Internet or social media.

I know that I can **be spirited** and use technology and digital tools to connect with others and demonstrate what I have learned in creative and appropriate ways.

FIELD TRIPS

Field trips are an important part of the Lower School experience. They extend classroom learning, provide meaningful real-world connections, and enrich the educational program. Beginning in Kindergarten, students participate in several field trips each year. Parents will receive advance notice of upcoming trips, and all students are expected to participate if they are in school that day.

The need for parent chaperones varies by trip. When tickets or space are limited, we make every effort to include interested parents and guardians, though volunteer opportunities may rotate to ensure all families have a chance to participate.

Parent chaperones play an important role in supporting teachers and helping ensure the safety and well-being of all students. Teachers will provide specific expectations and responsibilities before each trip. Chaperones are expected to:

- Follow the teacher's directions and remain with their assigned group at all times.
- Limit cell phone use to emergencies or essential communication.
- Help ensure a positive and inclusive experience for all students.
- Refrain from purchasing food, drinks, or souvenirs for individual students or groups.
- Attend without siblings or additional guests unless specifically invited by the school.

SNOW DAYS

In the event of inclement weather, families who opt into our text-messaging system will receive notification by text about delays or cancellations. This information will also be posted on our website, school social media sites, and traditional media outlets such as WBAL TV. If the school is delayed, we will open 2 hours late, or not at all. A delayed start means that the school will open at 10:00 a.m. If no announcement is made, school will open on time. The message will be delivered at or around 6:00 a.m. or as soon as the decision is made.

SECTION 3: CO-CURRICULAR LIFE

GRIZZLY GATHERING

Grizzly Gathering is our weekly Lower School community gathering, bringing students and faculty together to celebrate learning, share ideas and talents, make announcements, recognize accomplishments, and strengthen our sense of community. Throughout the year, students, teachers, and special guests from across the Garrison Forest community present on a variety of academic and character-building topics, including leadership, citizenship, digital responsibility, service, and global awareness.

Families may occasionally be invited to attend Grizzly Gatherings when students are presenting or for other special celebrations. Additional information will be shared in advance whenever parent attendance is planned.

LIGHT AND DARK BLUE TEAMS

The School colors are light blue and dark blue. Consequently, every student in the Garrison Forest Lower School is a member of either the Light Blue or Dark Blue team. The purpose of these teams is to unite the school through friendly competition in all aspects of school life. If a new student has a relative who attended Garrison Forest, this student automatically will be a member of her relative's team.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Through planned activities, each child learns the values and pleasures of giving to others. Projects and activities are designed to include the children in an age appropriate way and may include outreach within or outside of the immediate school community. In the Lower School, each class takes on individual projects and often requests the help and involvement of the rest of the Division or School. Many programs are school-wide efforts and bring the talents and efforts of the entire community together for a common cause. Additional age appropriate endeavors are often incorporated into daily activities, discussions, Grizzly Gathering, classroom projects, and literature.

SECTION 4: SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

BOOKS AND SUPPLIES

The Lower School provides textbooks, workbooks, desk supplies, and most art or project supplies as part of the Lower School tuition. Occasionally, teachers may ask students to bring in special supplies for a project. In addition, most field trips and transportation costs are covered by tuition. Please do not purchase school supplies until you receive a summer letter from your child's teacher.

SCHOOL STORE

The Garrison Forest School Store, located in Searle Athletic Center, offers a full line of GFS items such as shorts, tote bags, hats, mugs, school supplies, and sweatshirts. Students in Grades Four and Five may go to the school store during recess, but they must have a signed note from

home indicating what particular item(s) will be purchased. Students will be assigned a partner and must ask permission to go.

MEALS AND SNACKS

Students may either bring lunch from home or purchase lunch through our Dining Hall.

Lunches from Home

If your child brings lunch from home, please pack it in an insulated lunch box with an ice pack to help keep food at a safe temperature. Since microwaves and toasters are not available for Lower School students, please send foods that are ready to eat.

Dining Hall Purchases

Garrison Forest uses LunchTab for all student purchases made in the Dining Hall and School Store. LunchTab accounts must be pre-funded and operate on a declining balance system throughout the school year.

Snacks

Students should bring one to two snacks each day to enjoy during morning and afternoon snack times. Please choose snacks that are easy for your child to manage independently. As a reminder, the Lower School is nut-free. Families wishing to provide a snack for the class should coordinate with their child's teacher in advance. **Gum is prohibited at school.**

Breakfast

Students should eat breakfast before arriving at school whenever possible. If breakfast is brought to school before 8:00 a.m., it must be eaten in the Lower School lobby before the start of the school day. Water is the only beverage permitted in the Lower School building.

Food Delivery Services

Our Lower School prohibits students from utilizing food delivery services during the school day and during after school activities.

BUS SERVICE

Garrison Forest School offers bus service for students in Kindergarten through 12th grade to several areas in Baltimore County, Howard County and Baltimore City. Routes are offered for an additional fee. Please visit the website at <http://www.gfs.org/admission/transportation> for schedules and fees. Contact Trisha Patel in the Business Office at 410-559-3112 with any questions.

HEALTH SERVICES

The goal of the Garrison Forest School Health Services is to maximize the potential of all students to learn and grow by promoting and protecting their health at school. Everyone in a school setting is working in close contact with others, so we work actively to protect students and others in the school community from disease and infection. The spread of many common contagious conditions can be prevented or ameliorated by teaching and encouraging good

hygiene including using proper hand washing techniques, covering skin trauma, avoiding shared personal items and maintaining a clean environment. Our housekeeping standards remain exceptional and are based on Health Department recommendations for schools. We are vigilant about monitoring our community and require that students and teachers be cleared by a health care professional to return to school after contracting certain contagious infections. Our team of registered nurses provides coverage whenever school is open and a school physician is always on call.

When a parent brings a student to school, they are certifying to us that she is healthy and able to participate in all school activities. Garrison Forest reserves the right to exclude a student from school if she becomes ill and may require you to come and pick up your student when she exhibits certain medical symptoms. A student with a communicable disease may be excluded from school and all related activities for a period of time as determined by the school, in its discretion. A student may be required to present a note from a licensed physician or health officer confirming that her return to school does not pose any risk to the student or to others. In the event of an outbreak of a communicable disease for which immunization is available, the school reserves the right to exclude any non-vaccinated student from school and all related activities at its discretion. The school reserves the right to make any decision necessary to enforce this policy and to take all necessary actions to control the spread of communicable diseases within the school.

Health Records

The GFS health staff is responsible for the information contained in this section of the Handbook. The health staff must have complete and accurate health and emergency information for each student to comply with Maryland State law and provide optimal school health care. Check the list below to determine which forms are required:

- New students must provide a Health Care Power of Attorney signed by either parents or guardians and by two witnesses. This form is valid for as long as the child is a student at Garrison Forest School.
- All students must provide a current Health History and Physical Exam Form each year.
- The Maryland Immunization Certificate must be updated as new immunizations are received prior to the start of the new school year.
- All students must have current family data, including names; addresses; and home, cell and work phone numbers of parents or guardians entered into the Parent Portal, that will then be uploaded into our online medical database, Magnus. It is essential to keep this information up-to-date, so families must update the Parent Portal and Magnus of any changes, including new doctors. If parents are traveling out of town and the student is left in the care of someone other than the listed emergency contact person, the Division Head must be notified in writing.
- All students requiring medication at school, including self-administered inhalers and EPIPENS, must provide a Medication Authorization Form (See the Medication Policy below for details.) and upload this onto Magnus.

Immunizations

Please check the State of Maryland requirements to be sure your child is in compliance before the beginning of the school year. The immunization record must show the day, month and year of each vaccination and must be signed by a physician or health department official. No child will be admitted to school without providing proof of current required immunizations unless officially exempted for medical and religious reasons that satisfy Maryland law. Consult with the

school nurse, the Health Department or your physician about the requirements and proper documentation for any exemptions.

Medication Policies

We discourage the administration of any medication in school. However, if a physician decides that it is necessary for a student to receive prescription or over-the-counter medication at school for long or short-term administration, specific requirements must be met:

- Written orders from the physician, nurse practitioner or dentist must accompany all medications to be administered. A new order must be obtained at the beginning of each school year. This includes inhalers and EPIPENS.
- The written order must be dated and identify the medication, dosage, route, time or specific circumstances under which it should be given. Possible side effects should also be noted.
- The parent or guardian must provide written permission for the medication to be given.
- Any change in the medication, dose or time the medication is to be given must be accompanied by a new written order and parents' permission.
- The medication must be brought to school by the parent or other responsible person in an original pharmacy container labeled with the name of the student, the name of the medication, the name of the prescribing practitioner and the appropriate directions for school administration. This container will remain at school for the duration of the time the medication is to be given.
- All medications, with the exception of certain asthma and allergy drugs, must be kept in the Health Center or the school office. A student may carry an inhaler or an EPIPEN only with the written permission of his/her parent and the prescribing practitioner.
- Medications used in the treatment of attention deficit disorders must be given under the direct supervision of the school nurse or another officially designated School employee.
- Students must not carry prescribed or over-the-counter drugs in school for self-administration except under the guidance of the school nurse. If a student is found to possess medication not authorized by the nursing staff, the medication will be held for the student in the Health Center. The prescribing practitioner's order and parents' permission may be provided on the Medication Authorization Form available on Magnus.

If parents/guardians provide annual permission on Magnus in the Medicine Center, nurses may give students acetaminophen (like Tylenol), ibuprofen (like Motrin), antacid (like Tums), or throat lozenges for symptomatic relief and apply hydrocortisone cream or antibiotic ointment. No allergy shots or other medications will be given in the Health Center, except emergency medications.

Medical Notifications

The decision to notify parents or other members of the school community about a medical condition is based on the likelihood of another student contracting the condition. When a contagious condition is reported, the school nurse will consult with the school physician, and they will determine, based on their medical judgment, whether some or all students, parents and staff should be notified. If notified, parents should consult with their health care providers for further information. In general, students are in close contact and should be aware of the need for good hygiene. Particularly in the younger grades, we will continue to reinforce this in school and assist the children as they practice hand washing and other preventive measures.

Use of the Health Center

The nursing staff of the Health Center provides assessments, minor treatments and/or referrals for injuries, acute illnesses and chronic health conditions for the students of Garrison Forest School. Treatment of other individuals on the school grounds is limited to emergency first aid only. For the sake of their own health and the health of others, children may not be sent to school if they have been ill during the night or early in the morning. Children should be fever-free for twenty-four hours without fever-reducing medication before returning to school. Incidents of vomiting or diarrhea should be treated the same way. Please treat children at home for injuries received at home. The Health Center is available for use by students during school hours. Students who become ill or injured during the school day will be assessed by a teacher and taken to the Health Center if warranted. The nurse on duty in the Health Center will assess the student and determine if he or she should return to class, go home or receive medical treatment. A student who is unable to attend classes because of illness or injury must be picked up from school within a reasonable period of time. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to arrange for the transportation of the ill or injured student from the school. If the attention of a physician is judged to be necessary, the parent or guardian will be notified. In the case of a potentially life-threatening emergency, the parents will be called and the student will be taken to the school physician, the family physician or a hospital emergency room. Financial responsibility for any medical care rests with the parent.

A good night's rest, a balanced diet, regular exercise and good personal hygiene all help maintain a healthy body and allow each student to maximize the enjoyment and success of the School experience.

FUND-RAISING POLICY

Garrison Forest School does not endorse fund-raising efforts that do not directly benefit the school or an approved charity working through one of our Community Service projects. All fund-raising events/projects meant to benefit one club, class, or division must be approved.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

One of Garrison Forest's greatest strengths is the degree to which parents are involved in the school. There are numerous opportunities for parents to become involved both in the Lower School and in the community as a whole. A form is sent home by the Parents' Association to poll parents about becoming involved. We value our volunteers, but may not always be able to use each person who signs the form. Class parents and teachers are in touch with parents about classroom needs throughout the year. If you are interested in volunteering in a special way, please speak to a Lower School Parent Association Representative, an administrator, your class parent, or a teacher.

THE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

The Garrison Forest Parent Association exists to support the educational choice parents have made for their children. The role of the Parent Association is to strengthen the triangle that students, faculty, and parents share. It is committed to supporting the Development Program (annual, capital, and planned giving) created by the Board of Trustees. Garrison Forest relies on the financial support of its parents, as well as alumnae, grandparents, faculty, staff, and friends through annual, capital, and planned giving. Each year GFS parents play a major role in helping to meet the goals of the Annual Fund, which contributes almost 8% to the current operating

budget. The Parent Association also supports Parent Education initiatives. Meetings are held monthly for Parent Association Representatives from all areas of the school, including each division. Notices of open meetings are sent periodically via email.

The Parent Association sponsors fund-raising activities such as Grizzly Gear (the sale of used uniforms and other items) to support its own operating budget. Any additional Parent Association fund-raising projects or promotions must receive prior approval by the Development Committee of the Board of Trustees and the Head of School.

Parent Association Representatives

Lower School Representatives to the Parent Association Board act as liaisons between the Parent Association Board and the Lower School. The representatives work closely with the Lower School Head and serve as the coordinators of Class Parents. Two Lower School Reps serve on the Parent Association Executive Board and attend general Board meetings.

Class Parents are liaisons between the classroom teachers and the parents. They work closely with the teachers planning field trips, helping with holidays and special events, and encouraging parent participation in various School events. Class Parents attend monthly meetings with the Head of Lower School. A list of our Lower School Representatives will be distributed at the start of the school year. Please contact the Head of Lower School directly if you are interested in volunteering and helping with this important work for the school.

PARENT VISITATION

We welcome parent participation in many aspects of the School. The safety and security of the children as a whole, however, have to be preserved by the following guidelines:

- Parents of our kindergarten students may walk their daughters into school for the first week of school. Please do not park in any of our admission/visitor parking spots.
- Parents of our First through Fifth grade students should be dropped off in our Lower School circle. Students will be on hand to walk them to their classrooms if necessary.
- All visitors and parents must check in at the Division Assistant's desk. Visitors and parents should not go directly to any classroom.

There is time for parents to get to know each other and communicate with their child's teacher at traditional events, such as orientation, Parents' Night, and Parent Socials. Parents are also encouraged to attend a number of on-campus events such as the Halloween Parade, concerts and programs, class plays, and grade level presentations. We appreciate the support and volunteer time of our parents.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE MARYLAND STATE REPORTING POLICY

Some student/faculty communications are subject to state laws regarding confidentiality. According to Section 5-704 of the Family Law volume of the Annotated Code of the State of Maryland, any teacher or other professional employee of the School who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect must immediately inform the Head of School who will report to the appropriate authority. In complying with the mandate to report, the reporter is given immunity from criminal or civil penalties or liability when that person, in good faith, makes such a report. Such reports are confidential.

SECTION 5: SCHOOL LIFE REGULATIONS AND STUDENT CONDUCT

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND DISCIPLINE

In keeping with the mission and goals of Garrison Forest School, our discipline policies guide children in the development of values and developmentally appropriate social skills. We want each student to grow in kindness, honesty, respect, and consideration for others. Teachers carefully plan the classroom environment to encourage and foster cooperation and collaboration. The day is carefully orchestrated to provide the routines and consistency children need.

Teaching Strategies and Curriculum

Lower School students are learning problem-solving skills to express their feelings in appropriate ways. We look at each student as an individual through a developmentally appropriate lens. Supported by the Lower School counselor, we aim to foster social-emotional wellness through a proactive and skill-based approach. In addition, we recognize that some students may benefit from targeted support, and in some cases, a student may require intensive support. These skills are reinforced by teachers using the Responsive Classroom approach, which fosters community building and models sharing, talking about feelings, respect for others, and problem solving.

Responding to Conflict

Our Lower School uses a restorative approach to guide students through moments of conflict or behavioral challenges. When an issue arises, students are first supported in gathering and understanding information to clarify what has taken place. They then engage in individual and, when appropriate, collective reflection to consider the impact of their actions. Together, we work to repair relationships, restore trust, and establish action steps moving forward.

Disciplinary responses are determined with careful consideration of the student's age and the context of the situation. Incidents of significant misconduct, including physical harm to another student or behavior deemed detrimental to the well-being of the school community, may result in suspension or expulsion.

Parental Involvement

Open and transparent communication with families is essential to the success of our approach to students' personal growth and responsibility. We view families as partners and maintain regular, thoughtful communication. When concerns arise, the school and families work collaboratively to address the issue, support the student's development, and plan appropriate next steps. A strong partnership between faculty, parents, and administrators is key to creating a supportive and effective learning environment for all students.

Student/Adult Interaction and Communication

Our students and adults (teachers, administrators, staff members, parents, and visitors) are expected to interact with each other in a professional and respectful manner based on mutual respect and trust with an understanding of appropriate boundaries between adults and students. Although our adults can and should be friendly with the students, becoming too friendly with each other sometimes results in confusion and anxiety. If a student or the student's parents become aware of any adult's communications or actions toward one or more students that seems

unusual, overly friendly, or otherwise inappropriate, such information should immediately be reported to the Head of School.

UNIFORMS AND THE DRESS CODE

The Garrison Forest uniform tradition is intended to enhance school spirit and pride and allow students to focus on learning. The spirit in which a uniform is worn reflects the standards of the community. Students who are required to be in uniform (Kindergarten-5th grade) are expected to wear clothes that are clean, neat and in good repair. Students may not wear sweatshirts, including the GFS sweatshirt, or other clothing that has been cut or ripped. Students are not permitted to color, deface, or alter any part of the uniform.

Daily Uniform

- K-4th Grade: GFS tartan jumper, white shirt or polo shirt with sleeves and a collar; solid white long sleeved turtlenecks may be worn in cold weather.
- 5th Grade: GFS tartan kilt, white shirt or polo shirt with sleeves and a collar; solid white long sleeved turtlenecks may be worn in cold weather.

All K-5th Grade Student Uniform Requirements

- Girls should dress for the weather, including raincoats and sufficient outerwear for a trip across campus.
- Visible insignias and labels are not permitted.
- GFS gym shorts (available in School Store or Grizzly Gear) or navy or black shorts are worn under the skirt or jumper but may not be visible.
- Students must wear sneakers every day (no high tops or slip-ons) with solid white socks or solid navy or black tights or leggings. Sneakers must be primarily white, black, dark blue, or light blue.
- White socks (ankle or crew) must be visible above the shoe line. No other color socks are permitted.
- Students may wear solid navy blue cardigans, navy pullover sweaters (plain or cable knit) or any GFS sweatshirt, sweater or fleece that is sold in the School Store.
- Students may wear navy chino, poplin, twill or corduroy full-length pants (no leggings in other colors, long underwear, sweatpants, flared pants or wind pants may be worn).
- Outerwear may not be worn indoors.

Physical Education uniform

GFS gym shorts, or black or navy shorts, a white shirt (no insignia), sneakers and white socks. They must also bring a mouth guard and case to class for specific sports seasons.

Riding Uniform

Children participating in the riding program will be instructed as to proper apparel. On their scheduled riding day, students should wear their riding pants, a uniform shirt and sneakers to school on their scheduled riding day. They will change into boots before riding. Younger students must have pull-on or zipper riding boots, not boots that tie. All riders must be able to dress themselves quickly and independently.

Jewelry and Other Accessories

Parents are kindly requested to consider the appropriateness of allowing their children to wear jewelry and other accessories while at school. It is acceptable for students to wear small,

uncomplicated jewelry pieces or nail polish. However, parents should keep in mind that items can be easily misplaced or lost, especially during a busy and active school day. Wearing dangling earrings, long necklaces, or other accessories like long, artificial nails that may cause distractions or is a potential risk of injury is not allowed in the school environment.

CELL PHONES AND OTHER PERSONAL ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT

Cell phones and wearable devices (e.g. Apple Watch) are not to be used in school during the school day. If a student brings a cell phone to school, she must turn it into the device storage locker at the front desk by 7:55 a.m. Students found having or using these devices as a first offense will be asked to keep the device with the Head of Lower School. Any subsequent offenses will result in the loss of the privilege to bring the device to school for a period of time. There are ample telephones available for student use throughout the campus.

Cell phones and other mobile devices will not be allowed on any field trips, including our overnight trips. The goals and aims of each field trip are for students to be fully present and involved with their trip rather than becoming too preoccupied with using their phones. In case of emergencies, parents should call the school or an administrator/faculty member on the trip. Every faculty member on the trip will have a cell phone to call parents as well.

BIRTHDAYS

We are happy to celebrate birthdays at school! Classroom teachers welcome a small snack or treat sent from home. Please make arrangements with your child's teacher in advance and be mindful of any classroom allergy or dietary considerations.

To help ensure all students feel included, classroom teachers are not able to distribute party invitations at school. We also ask that students not wear birthday-themed or commemorative clothing or bring party favors (such as T-shirts, headbands, or other themed items) to school. We appreciate your partnership in helping us create a welcoming and inclusive environment for every child.

LOST AND FOUND

Students are responsible for their possessions. Borrowing of textbooks and gym clothes is strongly discouraged. **Students must clearly write their names in all their books, jackets, uniforms, and sporting equipment.** Found items may be retrieved from the Lost and Found box in the Lower School at any time. Students may not open or remove another student's belongings. Lost and Found boxes are located in the Lower School Lobby, the athletic department office, and the stable.

EMERGENCY DRILLS

In accordance with Maryland State Law, fire and evacuation drills are held throughout the year at different times of the day. Early in the school year all students are instructed in proper procedures and a scheduled fire drill is held. Unannounced drills are held monthly from that

point on throughout the year. In addition, emergency school-wide evacuation and lock-down drills are also held periodically.

GATE CLOSURES

The Reisterstown Road gates will be open 7:30-8:30 AM and 2:30-3:30 PM. They will remain closed at all other times. These are the main gates at the traffic light on Reisterstown Road. If you are on campus during the day, you may still exit campus using the Reisterstown Road gates. Simply pull up to the white line at the closed gate, and the gate will automatically open to allow you to exit.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Child Abuse Reporting: Teachers and other personnel are mandatory reporters under the Maryland child abuse reporting laws. Please understand that we must take our obligations seriously and if we assess that a situation requires it, we will make a report to child abuse authorities of situations that we reasonably suspect constitute abuse (including sexual abuse) or neglect. Depending on the circumstances, we may not be able to communicate with parents about the report until authorized by child abuse authorities to do so. We ask for your understanding as we do our best to protect the children under our care.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Garrison Forest School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, certain traits associated with race, including hair texture and certain hairstyles, genetic information, or any other legally protected characteristics in its programs and activities.

Prohibited Conduct

It is a violation of this policy for any student, employee, or third party to engage in acts of discrimination, including harassment, on school property, at school-related activities, or at school-sponsored activities. This policy also pertains to the usage of electronic devices and electronic communication that occurs in the aforementioned spaces.

Discrimination or harassment can result from a broad range of actions which might include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Verbal conduct, such as insulting comments, slurs, or other statements which are based on gender, race, age, religion, national origin, disability, or any legally protected classification. This includes unwanted sexual advances, invitations or comments;
- Visual conduct, such as derogatory posters, cartoons, drawings, leering or gestures; and
- Physical conduct such as hitting, pushing, touching or other unwanted physical conduct or threat to take such action.

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination prohibited by this policy. Sexual harassment consists of unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submission to such conduct is made a term or condition of participation in an educational program or activity;
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for educational decisions affecting the individual; or

- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's participating in educational programs or activities by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

The following are a few examples of behavior that could constitute sexual harassment. Even behavior less severe than these examples, however, may constitute sexual harassment in violation of this policy.

- Unwanted sexual advances, such as making a 'pass' at another person, or any actual, attempted, or threatened sexual act or sexual contact with another person without that person's consent;
- Offering education benefits, or implying that things will go smoothly in exchange for sexual favors;
- Making or threatening reprisals after a negative response to sexual advances;
- Non-verbal conduct, such as leering, making sexual gestures, displaying of sexually suggestive objects or pictures, e-mails, cartoons or posters;
- Verbal conduct, such as making or using derogatory comments, epithets, slurs, sexually explicit jokes or comments about an employee's body or dress;
- Remarks of a sexual nature, graphic verbal commentary about an individual's body, sexual or degrading words to describe an individual or aggressive or obscene letters, notes, messages or invitations; or
- Physical conduct, such as touching, assaulting or impeding or blocking movement.

It is a violation of this policy for any student, employee, or third party to engage in retaliation against any person who in good faith reports or complains about discrimination or harassment or who testifies in, assists with, or participates in any investigation.

Filing a Complaint

Discrimination complaints can be filed by those who believe they are being subjected to discrimination and by those who believe they are a witness to discrimination against others. Individuals who witness discrimination against another are strongly encouraged to report such behavior. Faculty or staff who witness or become aware of discrimination against a student are required to report the conduct.

A complaint may be filed in writing with the Division Head.

GFS will commence an investigation of the allegations of discrimination within a reasonable period of time depending on the circumstances. Complaints will be investigated in a sensitive manner that is carefully designed to protect the complainant from harm or blame.

SECTION 6: CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

August 2026

August 27	Thursday	Lower School Parent Social at Lochinvar, 5:30-7:00
August 31	Monday	Orientation for K – 12

September 2026

September 1	Tuesday	Classes begin K – 12
September 7	Monday	No classes: Labor Day
September 10	Thursday	Back to School Night, 5:30-7:00
September 21	Monday	No classes: Yom Kippur

October 2026

October 16-17	Fri-Sat	Garrison Forest Family Weekend
October 30	Friday	Fall Break begins at the end of the academic day.

November 2026

November 2	Monday	Fall Break – School Closed
November 3	Tuesday	No Classes: Faculty/Staff Professional Development
November 12	Thursday	No classes: Lower School Conference Day
November 24	Tuesday	Grandfriends Day/Thanksgiving Break begins at noon; dismissal at noon (1/2 day)

December 2026

December 1	Tuesday	Classes resume
December 18	Friday	No Late Start; 12:00 Dismissal; Winter Break Begins

January 2027

January 4	Monday	Classes resume
January 18	Monday	No classes: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

February 2027

February 12	Friday	No classes: Faculty/Staff Professional Development
February 15	Monday	No classes: Presidents' Day

March 2027

March 12	Friday	Spring Break: dismissal at the end of the academic day
March 23	Tuesday	Classes resume
March 26	Friday	No classes: Good Friday

April 2027

April 16	Friday	No classes: All School Conference Day
April 23	Friday	No Late Start; 12:00 p.m. Dismissal; Faculty/Staff Professional Development

May 2027

May 31	Monday	No classes: Memorial Day
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June 2027

June 1	Tuesday	Last day of classes for Lower School
June 2	Wednesday	Closing Exercises for Grade 5 at 8:30 AM

The 2026–27 calendar includes 170 instructional days. If inclement weather results in more than one school closure, March 26 may be used as an asynchronous learning day.

SECTION 7: ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY, AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Ann Teaff
Interim Head of School

Kait Gentry
Head of Lower School

Stacy Mohn
Associate Head of School for Finance and Operations

Lauren Anderson
Head of Middle School

Sandi Uehlinger
Director of Early Childhood Education

Lauren Bussey
Head of Upper School

Head of Lower School
Lower Division Admissions
Counselor
Learning Specialist and Curriculum Coordinator
Special Education
Kindergarten
First Grade
Second Grade
Second Grade
Third Grade
Fourth Grade
Fourth Grade
Fifth Grade
Fifth Grade
Art
Digital Learning Specialist
Spanish
Music

Kait Gentry, M.Ed.
Kate Mumaw, B.A.
Shondra Cowling, L.C.S.W.
Courtenay Shure, M.A.T.
& Learning Disabilities
Erin Brockmeyer, M.S.
Amanda Stone, M.S., Education
Rachel Kelly, M.Ed.
Megan D'Andrea, M.ed
Avrielle Jones B.S.
Kaila Carter, M.Ed.
Tracey Stout, M.A.T.
Maheen Nasir, M.Ed.
Meredith Fields, M.S., Curriculum and Instruction
Korey Rosenbaum, M.A.T. Art Education
Amber Budosh, M.A., Instructional Technology
Liz Stroud, M.A., Ed.
Sienna Grinwald, B.M. Music Education, Voice

Physical Education

Science and Outdoor Education
Lower School Divisional Assistant

Laura Cline, M.S.
Leigh MacDonald-Hall, B.S.
Tracey Brocato, B.S.
Missy Wells, B.A.

Contact Information

Garrison Forest Switchboard	410-363-1500
Kait Gentry Head of Lower School	410-559-3230
Sandi Uehlinger, Director of Early Childhood Education	410-559-3220
Missy Wells, Lower School Division Assistant	410-559-3251
Christine Shriver, Preschool Administrative Assistant	410-559-3221
Health Center	410-559-3200
Garrison Forest Website and Parent Login	www.gfs.org

SECTION 8: THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MARYLAND & DC SCHOOLS

Garrison Forest School is a member of the Association of Independent Maryland Schools (AIMS), an association of more than 100 independent, college preparatory schools in Maryland and the District of Columbia, representing more than 40,000 students and more than 5,000 teachers, administrators, and staff. It was organized in 1967. AIMS works in cooperation with the Maryland State Department of Education and is a member of the Maryland chapter of the Council for American Private Education and the National Association of Independent Schools. As a member of AIMS, GFS adheres to the principles outlined in the AIMS Statements on Parents, and on Diversity, provided below.

AIMS STATEMENT: PARENTS AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Working together, parents and school professionals exert a strong influence on children to become better educated; they also help them to mature by modeling adult working relationships based upon civility, honesty, and respect. In practice, the greatest impediment to effective teamwork between independent schools and parents grows out of misunderstandings about school decision-making processes: Who makes decisions in independent schools? How are those decisions made? Independent schools must communicate their procedures to parents, who, in turn, share the important responsibility to become informed members of the school community.

Parents and the Board of Trustees

In most independent schools, decision-making authority at the highest level resides in a volunteer Board of Trustees whose membership often includes current parents. The Board of Trustees does not intervene in the daily affairs of the school, such as curriculum development and hiring, evaluating, or firing of faculty and staff. Instead, the Board focuses on three areas critical to the success of any independent school: it selects, evaluates, and supports the Head of School, to whom it delegates authority to manage the school; it develops broad institutional policies that guide the Head in running the school; and it is accountable for the financial well-being of the school.

In the conduct of its official business, the Board acts only as a whole; individual Trustees, including the Board Chair, have no authority to act unless specifically authorized to do so by the Board acting as a whole.

- AIMS encourages parents who are interested in high-level decision making to stay informed about the work of the Board of Trustees by reading school publications, talking to the Head of School, and attending appropriate meetings.
- Parents with concerns about the school or with decisions made by the administration or faculty are encouraged to inquire about and follow the school's review process, but they should not expect the

Board of Trustees to act as an appeals board. In a day school, trustees often interact with others within the school community and hear concerns about the daily operation of the school. As a matter of good practice, the trustee reports those concerns to the Head of School.

Parents and Independent Schools

To be successful, every independent school needs and expects the cooperation of its parents, who must understand and embrace the school's mission, share its core values, and fully support its curriculum, faculty, and staff. When joined by a common set of beliefs and purposes, the independent school and its parents form a powerful team with far-reaching positive effects on children and the entire school community.

Parents and the Faculty and Administration

Parents play an essential and positive role in the life of an independent school. Not only are parents advocates for their children, they also support the faculty and administration through extensive volunteer activities and events. The relationship between parents and the faculty and administration is formally governed by the school's written enrollment contract and handbook, in which its procedures are spelled out. When parents choose to enroll their child in an independent school, they agree to subscribe to its mission, follow its rules, and abide by its decisions. However, most teachers and administrators would agree that trust and mutual respect are the most essential underpinnings of effective working relationships with parents.

- AIMS encourages parents to work productively with teachers and administrators by staying informed about their child and important events in the life of the school. Thoughtful questions and suggestions should be welcomed by the school. It is incumbent upon the school to provide parents with timely and pertinent information.
- Parents best support a school climate of trust and respect by communicating concerns openly and constructively to the teacher or administrator closest to the problem. Efforts by parents to lobby other parents will be viewed by the school as counterproductive.
- While parents may not agree with every decision by the school, in most cases, the parent and school will find enough common ground to continue a mutually respectful relationship. In the extreme case, however, an impasse may be so severe that the parent cannot remain a constructive member of the community. In such cases, both the parent and the school should consider whether another school would be a better match for the family.

The Parents' Association and the School

The Parents' Association in an independent school provides a vital and much-appreciated service to school leadership and the entire school community. Because the Parents' Association is so important, and its volunteer activities potentially so wide-ranging, AIMS recommends the following steps to structure and clarify the Association's role.

- The Board of Trustees, in consultation with the administration, should develop a set of written by-laws for the Association that make clear its procedures and role as a service organization.
- The by-laws should clearly state the Association's mission to support the decisions and policies of the Board and administration. The Parents' Association neither participates in policy-making by the school, nor functions as a lobbying group.
- The finances of the Parents' Association should be supervised and regularly monitored by the school and should be part of the school's annual audit process.
- The Head of School should be closely involved in the Association nominating process. Cooperation and teamwork between the Head of School and the officers of the Parents' Association are crucial to the health of the school community.
- It is appropriate that the Parents' Association advertise its activities and events. However, the Association is not a public relations arm of the school and should play no role in the school's efforts to communicate about itself.

¹ See the excellent *Trustee Handbook* by Mary Hundley DeKuyper, published by the National Association of Independent Schools.

AIMS STATEMENT: DIVERSITY AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

To maintain educational excellence, to prepare students for a changing world, and to further the aims of a nation dedicated to great ideals of social justice and equity, AIMS urges school leaders to galvanize their communities to be more inclusive in seeking talented students, teachers, and administrators; to forge multicultural curricula; and to create and sustain cultures that better reflect the enormous variety among people. The ability of AIMS schools to thrive in the future will depend in part upon their ability to make good on the promise of diversity ideals by implementing concrete and far-reaching changes.¹ Support for diversity in its many forms will encourage students to challenge their assumptions, take intellectual risks, and learn to work collaboratively with different kinds of people. Moreover, the acquisition of multicultural competencies is now critically important for every student.²

Research shows that diversity in schools supports educational excellence; that demographic and economic changes are accelerating; and that in other sectors of society, notably in business and higher education, diversity has become essential to institutional success:

- Because human variety plays an important role in the intellectual, social, and emotional development of children, diversity is closely related to educational excellence. Students "learn more and think in deeper, more complex ways in a diverse educational environment...and they are better prepared to become active participants in our pluralistic, democratic society."³ Diversity also brings texture and richness into students' lives and challenges them to grow intellectually and emotionally through a process of understanding and synthesizing differing points of view.
- In 1995, the United States population was estimated to be 74% non-Hispanic White. By 2050, the non-Hispanic White population will have decreased to just over one-half of the total population. After 2020, the Hispanic population is projected to add more people to the United States every year than will all other groups combined.⁴

Diversity and Independent Schools

Powerful 21st Century realities now call schools in the Association of Independent Maryland Schools (AIMS) to make a greater institutional commitment to diversity. In this context, diversity refers not only to legally protected groups, or to the "big eight" categories, but to the entire range of human variability. Broadly understood, diversity requires an ongoing process by which a school lives and breathes its commitment to include different peoples and perspectives into its community, curriculum, and culture.

- Major corporations understand the importance of diversity to institutional excellence, effectiveness, and success. Recruiting and retaining talented employees from diverse populations and reaching diverse consumers are important elements of successful business strategies.⁵

Diversity and School Leaders

Only through a compelling vision and sustained dedicated leadership will a school's commitment to diversity change from passive to active – from expressions of heartfelt intentions to concrete steps towards institutional transformation. Diversity training is recommended for all school constituencies. As with other areas critical to a school's success - pedagogy and curriculum development, for example - diversity practice must be supported by a solid understanding of the most recent research, theory, and thinking.

The Board of Trustees

- Working with the Head of School, the Board develops and approves a formal diversity statement, either within the mission statement or separately, which both defines diversity in relation to the school's mission and articulates a clear rationale for its importance to the school.
- The statement is widely distributed, including to parents and alumni. School leaders at all levels are consistent and clear about the school's commitment to diversity.
- The composition of the Board reflects its commitment to diversity and is a model to the entire school community.

- Trustees receive diversity training. Although Trustees play no role in the daily management of the school, their understanding of diversity issues is crucial to their ability to make wise decisions about whom to hire as Head of School, school policy, funding priorities, and strategic planning.
- The Board ensures that diversity is an important part of the Head of School's responsibilities and provides the resources necessary, including financial.
- The Board's agenda reflects the importance of diversity by dedicating the time necessary at regular meetings for trustees to stay informed about diversity good practice and to make wise diversity policy decisions for the school community.

The Head of School

- The Head of School dedicates sufficient time and focus to diversity. Without the Head's direct, intensive involvement, diversity may not be viewed as important as other school priorities.
- Moreover, the Head's vision and determination are often essential in helping others in the community to understand the importance of diversity to the school's mission and to its students. Only the Head can ensure that diversity is a priority for all constituencies.
- The Head ensures that all members of the school community receive diversity training, including the administrative team, faculty, staff, students, and parents.
- The Head of School places a high priority on attracting and retaining a diverse administration and faculty, not only because students need and deserve such role models and resources, but also because diversity among the adult professionals brings energy and insight to the school's efforts to diversify its curriculum and culture. To reach out to diverse candidates, the Head goes beyond traditional employment resources and establishes direct contacts with colleges, universities, and other community resources that serve historically underrepresented people.
- The Head of School assures that the school's curriculum, pedagogy, and culture reflect the school's commitment to diversity and the need to teach multicultural competencies in order to prepare students for an increasingly diverse world.

AIMS calls on its schools to focus their considerable resources of energy, talent, and money in this critical area, as they have in so many others in the past. On behalf of this generation and all future generations of students, it is now time for AIMS schools to have the courage, the determination, and the vision to take whatever steps necessary to greatly strengthen diversity practice and to ensure thereby not only institutional success, but more importantly, a better world.

- By communicating a school's more recent history and vision, the Head of School makes every effort to overcome feelings of mistrust among people for whom historic patterns of exclusion endure as painful memories.
- The Head of School institutionalizes both formal and informal conversations with underrepresented school constituencies in order to better understand how they experience the school's culture.
- The effectiveness of a school's diversity efforts is regularly evaluated.

Diversity and Parents

- The school regularly communicates to parents its commitment to diversity, beginning in the admission process.
- Parents understand and support the school's commitment to diversity.
- The leadership of the Parent Association reflects the diversity of the parent body, and Parents' Association events are welcoming to parents of all backgrounds.
- Parent leaders receive diversity training, which is also made available to the entire parent body.

¹ See *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Scott E. Page (Princeton University Press 2007).

² "...education for the twenty-first century must not only help students to become literate and reflective citizens who can participate productively in the workforce but it must also teach them to care about other people in their communities and to take personal, social, and civic action to create a more

humane and just society." *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, James A. Banks (Allyn and Bacon 2002).

³ Expert Report of Patricia Gurin. *Gratz vs. Bollinger, et al.*, No. 97-75321 (E.D. Michigan).

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Report. Local demographics often mirror these national trends. In Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, the non-White population will grow by 56% between 2010 and 2030. Maryland State Data Center.

⁵ *Diversity as Business Strategy*, David A. Thomas, Harvard Business Review (September 2004).