



# Family Handbook

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## Mission Statement

Our purpose is to nurture self-motivated students whose love of learning will carry through into a lifetime of responsible and constructive contributions to the well-being of their fellow humans and the Earth

## Philosophy

The Homestead School educates the body, mind, and spirit of children through experiential learning, while holding high standards in academics and character development. Homestead is an engaging and substantive academic environment, grounded in the Montessori approach and the belief that all children have the innate desire and ability to learn.

We foster academic excellence through the development of responsibility, self-esteem and self-reliance. Our students benefit from a personalized program, dedicated teachers, and a carefully-considered curriculum that inspires them to become creative and independent thinkers. Homestead students are supported by a deeply-rooted and diverse community of families and educators.

The culture of our school community is based on respect, inclusiveness and collaboration. Working in partnership with students and families, teachers build trusting and long lasting relationships. Mixed-age classes strengthen the experience. This approach enhances each student's sense of belonging and facilitates optimal learning. Our students learn to recognize their individual and collective potential, develop thoughtful approaches to learning and choose paths to responsible and fulfilling lives.

Students at Homestead School have a strong understanding of who they are and believe in their ability to contribute to the world in positive ways. Our graduates see life as filled with possibility and have a grounded perspective to find meaningful ways to grow and learn throughout their lifetimes.

### **The Goal of Our Program:**

- to create a safe, nurturing atmosphere that promotes self-respect, respect for others, and the valuing of differences.
- to create a challenging academic program at all levels and competencies that encourages students to be intellectually curious, to explore their creativity, and to get involved in the larger community in order to fulfill their potential.
- to inspire a love of learning.
- to help students acquire the tools necessary to learn independently.
- to instill in our students the belief that each and every one of them has something important to contribute to the world.

## Introduction

The purpose of the Family Handbook is to give Homestead students and their parents/guardians an understanding of the policies, procedures and regulations for attending and receiving an education at our school.

The Family Handbook cannot cover all issues or problems that may arise during the school year. In such instances, the administration shall take administrative action which they believe, in their sole discretion, to be in the best interests of the students and the school community.

Although some of the following items do not pertain to your child, we request that all families take the time to read through this guide.

## Admission

The School has a strong commitment to the principles and practices of diversity, including diversifying our student population geographically and socioeconomically. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, national and ethnic origin, or physical or mental disability status in the administration of our educational and admissions policies or other school-administered programs.

## Arrival and Dismissal

Please time your arrivals to program hours, since on-time arrivals and departures set the tone for the day. All drop off and pickup should happen in the School's main parking lot in, order to ensure student and staff safety. Need-based exceptions will be made. Contact Head of School to make arrangements if needed.

Arrival is between 8:10 and 8:40 AM. All students should arrive by 8:40.

Dismissal begins at 2:30 and ends at 3:00 PM. All students should be picked up by 3:00 PM.

\*Classes in Elementary and Middle School begin promptly at 8:40.

- A schedule of transportation arrangements should be provided to Administration.
- For occasional changes or pickups by someone else, please send written notification, or email or call the school office if it is a last minute change.
- Last minute arrangements are challenging for staff, so please keep these to a minimum.
- No child will be dismissed to someone other than a parent without parental permission.

## Attendance

Excessive absence have a significant impact on the child's social, emotional, and academic progress. Although regular attendance for all students is ideal, we understand that, in the case of children in Early Childhood (ages 3-6), special family events and vacations should come first.

Inconsistent attendance at the Elementary and Middle School level is difficult for both the child and the school. The school's policy is that students should attend school on all days unless they are ill or participating in a family event or appointment that cannot be scheduled at another time. If a student misses a significant period of school, it is important for parents to communicate with teachers well ahead of time to make arrangements.

In some cases, the Homestead School is open when the local Public Schools are closed. If your child rides the bus, and no transportation is provided due to a Public School closure, we will not count your child's absence for that day. However, on such days, parents need to consider planning for alternate transportation and/or carpools with other Homestead families from your area to ensure that your child misses the least amount of school possible. For our older students, regular attendance is a crucial component to academic success.

Students who arrive at school after 8:45 will be considered Tardy. A student who arrives late not only misses valuable classroom lesson time, but causes an interruption for the teachers and the class that is in session.

## Audio-Video Recording/Photographing

Students and visitors are not permitted to photograph, video tape, or audio tape any student or faculty member without administrative permission. Middle School families, please refer to the Middle School Handbook for exceptions.

## Birthdays

We work hard to create a comfortable community for children and adults. Birthday parties and similar special occasions require the utmost care and attention in a community as small as ours. It is crucial to be sensitive to who is included, and to take care not to leave out just a few children in any group.

To clarify, the school is not saying a birthday party needs to include the entire class; many times, smaller is better. That said, we feel strongly that groups within a classroom –boys/girls, certain ages, etc. – should all be included in an invitation.

Teachers are happy to distribute birthday party invitations if all members of the classroom are included. If not, we ask that you send invitations from home and not through the school mail system.

Birthdays can also be celebrated within the classroom. Since each classroom has a different procedure for celebrating birthdays, please check with your child's teacher prior to making arrangements. In general, birthday celebrations at school are for students only.

## **Busing and Carpools: Inclement Weather Procedures, Carpooling and Safety, and Busing Conduct, Regulations**

### **INCLEMENT WEATHER PROCEDURES**

***GENERAL GUIDELINES:** With any unusual weather forecast for the Homestead region--Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania, north to Livingston Manor, New York--it is a wise idea to check in with the school website or your radio station for a "Listing of Cancellations and Delays". A cold rain in Port Jervis, for example, could be a freezing rain at The Homestead. Also, please be aware that a delayed opening can evolve into a school cancellation should conditions warrant it.*

**A. SCHOOL CANCELLATIONS OR DELAYS:** In the event of extreme weather, we will activate our TADS Emergency Notification System which will send you messages via text and email. We will also have our own announcement on [www.homesteadschool.com](http://www.homesteadschool.com), Homestead School's Facebook Page, and on radio--Thunder 102, WSUL, and WJFF. Occasionally, technology fails us, and/or a station might misplace the message. So if you do not receive notification, hear our announcement on the radio, do not have computer access, or are in doubt, feel free to call The Homestead at 845-856-6359.

**BUS STUDENTS:** The Homestead is often open when local schools delay or cancel. If Homestead is open on time and your local school district cancels or has a delayed opening, then the bus running to Homestead from that district will also be cancelled or delayed. It is important on these days for families to assess whether or not they can get their children to school safely, as parents are thus responsible for transporting students to and from Homestead, if possible, or to use delayed busing. Absences on such days are recorded as excused absences. Parents are asked to get their children to school on such days, as often as is safely possible and are asked to have a backup/carpool plan for such days in place.

**B. EARLY DISMISSALS FOR HOMESTEAD SCHOOL** are a "difficult call" and probably as hectic and confusing for you as they are for us. Once again, our TADS Emergency Notification System will send you messages via text and email. With snow or ice in the forecast, please be aware and make every effort to keep an ear out for notification. Again, the local radio stations, [www.homesteadschool.com](http://www.homesteadschool.com) or our Facebook page will also reflect changes to our dismissal schedule. If you must call The Homestead, we will understand, but in any case, try to stay in touch with developments.

### BUS STUDENTS:

1. If your local district closes early and Homestead does not, then your child's bus will follow the dismissal time of your local district. For example, if your local district closes at 1 p.m., you can assume that your child will be home at his/her bus stop two hours early. If you need a more exact time, you may call Homestead to find out when the bus will pick up your child. You, of course, have the option of keeping your child at school until regular carpool dismissal.
2. If Homestead closes early, but your local district does not, all districts, except Eldred, will send a bus to Homestead early.
3. If your local district has an early dismissal time that is different from Homestead's, your child's bus will follow your local district's schedule.

**SUMMARY:** Winter can be a trying time when all of our schedules are subjected to disruption and inconvenience. The safety of our students, families, and staff is of paramount importance. Whether to close or dismiss early is not always an easy decision and we may make some "bad calls". Please know that we will not feel offended if you decide to keep your child home or to pick him or her up early from school because you are not comfortable with road conditions. That is your right and responsibility.

## **Carpooling Safety**

**Driving on the Local Roads:** We want all of you to arrive safe and sound at school each day. If you are running late, please do not speed to make our arrival and dismissal times.

In the past, we have received complaints about excessive speed by some of our Homestead parents on the town roads. The Homestead School has always had a cordial relationship with the Town and our neighbors—and we would like to maintain our reputation for cooperation and responsibility. Speeding cars and close calls on these curvy country roads can quickly destroy the good will that we have tried to establish over these many years of operation since 1978—and endanger our friends and neighbors.

So many thanks for your time and consideration—and expected assistance with this important matter.

**The Parking Lot:** When backing out of your space, please look over your shoulders in **both** directions—up the driveway and down. Proceed slowly. Fender benders are no fun!

**When walking in the parking lot,** always walk along the front end of the cars as opposed to walking along the rear end of the cars where drivers might not see you.

**Buses always have the Right of Way.** Please be aware and give them plenty of room.

## **Field Trip Safety**

For field trips, we rely on parent volunteers to transport students to and from field trip locations. We have a Safe Driving Pledge for drivers to sign before embarking upon the trip. Each classroom teacher will provide drivers with the pledge as field trips are planned.

Teachers work very hard to prepare students for field trips. When we are off campus, we are not only taking advantage of educational opportunities, but we are also Ambassadors for the Homestead School. As such, the expectation is that all students and chaperones maintain the high standards for behavior, dress, and language when off campus as a school group. Thank you in advance for your support in making field trips possible.

## **Busing: Conduct and Regulations**

Busing is currently provided for K-8 students living in the Sullivan West, Port Jervis, Monticello, and Eldred School Districts. Transportation requests are filled out during the enrollment process and returned to the Homestead. Your school district will contact you directly to advise of school bus pick up locations and timing. Please arrive five minutes before your child's pick up and drop off times. Students are expected to respect standards of acceptable behavior when riding on a school bus and all school rules apply.

**Busing Conduct and Regulations:** Each student transported on a school bus will follow the following standards of conduct:

- The student will at all times sit in the seat assigned by the school bus driver and shall not leave that seat while the bus is in motion.
- The student may not at any time use foul, loud or offensive language, nor be involved in rude or discourteous conduct.
- The student will promptly observe instructions given by the bus driver.
- The student will wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before approaching the bus and shall then proceed to his/her seat.
- The student may not project any part of his/her body out of the school bus window nor throw any object from the school bus.
- The student may not throw any object inside the school bus.
- The student may not bring articles aboard the school bus that pose a threat to the health, safety, or welfare of anyone on the bus.
- The student may not tamper with any equipment on the school bus, or destroy any property on the school bus.
- The student may not at any time fight, push or engage in any form of horseplay.
- Water guns, pistols and balloons are not permitted on the bus.

- Eating and Drinking are not permitted on the bus
- Students are expected to meet proper standards of behavior while at the bus stop. They are to wait in an orderly manner and refrain from running, or other such horseplay.
- All transportation discipline problems will be referred to the Head of School's office

### **School Bus Discipline Procedures**

- For minor infractions, the bus driver or bus aide will redirect the student to appropriate behavior.
- For major or repeated minor infractions, the bus driver will report the incident to the Homestead Head of School immediately.
- The administration will notify the parent/guardian and bus driver of the consequence upon any communication from the bus driver.
- In the event of inappropriate behavior, conduct, serious or repeated violations of bus regulations, a student's bus riding privilege may be suspended for a period of 1-10 days, or permanently.
- During any suspension of bus privileges, it will be the family's responsibility to transport the student to and from school.

## **Character Development, Behavior, Kindness**

Education at its center promotes the development of character. Our vision is that families and the school collaborate to support the growth of the children in our care. The Homestead School believes in the importance of respectful behavior from adult-to-adult, adult-to-child, child-to-adult, and child-to-child. Though there is a perceived informality about the school, we have a deep commitment to positive role modeling on the part of adults, as well as teaching thoughtfulness, good manners, conflict resolution and other pro-social skills. We ask for your assistance in setting and maintaining high standards for your child's behavior, both in words and actions toward others. In this modern era, your responsibility also extends to supervising and setting clear expectations for electronic communication.

Children are taught that good manners require calling an adult by the appropriate title, i.e. Mr./Mrs./Ms/Miss, unless invited by an adult to do otherwise. Since relationships between staff members and children at Homestead can be informal, some teachers invite children to call them by their first names.

Since children (and most human beings) are works in progress, inevitable mistakes will occur. Misbehavior is seen as an opportunity to learn and improve. Our approach, whether at two and a half or fourteen years, helps a child to accept responsibility for his/her actions and to change future behavior while also preserving his or her dignity.

Though the school, at times, relies on consequences as an outcome for misbehavior, our fundamental belief is that punishment and threats impede the development of the ethical sense and encourage the belief that power rather than reason prevails. It is important that we, the families and the school, unite to

provide nurture and guidance so that good values can flourish within each child. When misbehavior at school is reported to parents, the best course of action from the School's point of view would be a discussion about what happened, a clear parent-to-child message that such behavior is not acceptable, and a talk about what alternative actions could be taken in the future. The age of the student will dictate the particulars. Parents need not impose additional punishments and consequences. Homestead School teachers are happy to work with parents to refine home-school effectiveness in resolving these situations.

### **UNKINDNESS AND BULLYING**

All students have the right to feel psychologically and physically safe at Homestead School and we, as staff, are committed to achieving this. We believe that to learn optimally a child needs to have a sense of belonging in his or her community. To this end, we devote time daily to community building, problem solving and conflict resolution.

Any act of unkindness will be addressed by the school. Bullying goes beyond unkindness - it is defined as repeated, targeted aggression conducted by an individual or a group against other(s). It is purposeful oral, written, non-verbal, or physical behavior that has the potential to create an intimidating, hostile or offensive educational environment.

Cyber-bullying is willful and repeated harassment and intimidation of a person through the use of digital electronics. It includes, but is not limited to: email, instant messaging, text messages and internet postings. Unwarranted contact may take place in, or occur on: social networks, chat rooms, blogs, cell phone text, or online games. Homestead has a zero-tolerance policy for bullying of any kind. If the school is made aware of an incidence of bullying on-campus or off-campus, immediate steps will be taken to address it. Issues of unkindness or bullying that are witnessed by a staff member or reported to one will be investigated and addressed in a timely manner. It often takes two days to review a situation and talk to the parties involved, but the school takes this responsibility seriously and will respond to all parties.

Often parents are unclear about whether to report instances of unkindness or even bullying to us, thinking it will make the situation worse. We strongly encourage you to communicate anything that causes your child repeated distress to his/her teacher or advisor. If you become aware of another child's mistreatment we would like you to tell us. Having this information prior to the situation becoming a crisis allows our staff to better supervise, guide, and support. The staff will keep the information confidential if you so choose.

### **ANTI-BULLYING POLICY:**

Homestead is committed to providing a caring, friendly, and safe environment for all students so they can learn at their best. School is a place where students learn norms and mores of social interactions. As part of this process, all students experiment with a range of aggressive behaviors as they learn about social power. On occasion students may push the limits of the range of aggression and engage in behaviors defined as bullying, defined as follows:

Bullying behavior abuses an imbalance of power to repeatedly and intentionally cause emotional or physical harm to another person or group of people. Isolated instances of hurtful behavior, teasing, or arguments between individuals would not be seen as bullying.

Bullying generally takes one of the following forms:

- Physical: pushing, kicking, hitting, punching, slapping or any form of violence
- Verbal: name-calling, harassing, threats, sarcasm
- Indirect: spreading rumors, excluding, tormenting (i.e. hiding books or bags), purposeful attempts to embarrass or humiliate
- Cyber-bullying: all areas of internet misuse, such as mean and/or threatening emails, misuse of blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or other social media, misuse of gaming websites, chat rooms, etc.
- Mobile phones: threats by text messaging or calls
- Misuse of other technology: i.e. photographing or videotaping used to harm

Examples (not exhaustive) of bullying behavior include:

- racial bullying
- homophobic bullying
- bullying based on disability, gender, appearance, or circumstance

Everyone has the right to be treated with respect. Students who are bullying need to learn different ways of behaving. The school has a responsibility to respond promptly and effectively. Administrators, teachers, students and parents should have a common understanding of what bullying is, the school's policy, and how to report or respond when they are concerned about a situation.

The following steps may be taken by the school when dealing with reports:

- If bullying is suspected or reported, the incident will be dealt with immediately by the member of the faculty or staff who has been approached.
- A precise account of the situation will be communicated to the Head of School.
- The Head of School investigates and makes a determination as to whether or not the offense constitutes bullying (as defined above).
- Teachers and advisors will be appraised as needed.
- Parents will be kept informed.
- Corrective measures will be taken as appropriate.

Students who have been bullied will be supported in the following ways: having the opportunity to talk about the situation, reassurance of support to restore self-esteem, and discussing strategies to deal with

future encounters with aggressive behavior. The school will follow up with the student and parent periodically.

Students who have bullied others will be helped by talking about the behavior and learning why he or she became involved, reflecting on the harmful behavior and learning alternative strategies for dealing with aggressive impulses, and keeping parents informed to help change the student's behavior and attitude.

## **Class Placements**

Placing children in particular classrooms is a process that the school staff takes seriously. Besides having a balance of age and gender, we try to create good peer groups and a blend of learning/working styles within each class. It's an art! As a family-centered school, parent input, especially about peer relationships outside of school, or other issues of which we might be unaware, is welcome. Ultimately, it is the school that makes placement decisions, keeping in mind the best interests of the children involved. Input about a class placement should be expressed directly to the Head of School prior to placement decisions, which are made in the spring. Current classroom head teachers are always involved in placement decisions, but their role needs to be that of the child's advocate, rather than a conduit for parental requests. Just as the Homestead staff is discrete and respectful in discussing your child, we ask that conversations among parents regarding teachers (such as often occur during the placement process) be respectful and preserving of dignity.

Families are notified of class placements on or around the first day of June. Students have ample time to visit their new classrooms in the spring.

## **Clothing/Personal Property**

All outerwear, backpacks and lunch boxes should be marked with your child's name. Please dress young children in comfortable, layered clothes that do not restrict movement. Upper Elementary School and Middle School students are expected to take responsibility for their own neat and clean appearance at school. Sturdy, close-toed shoes are a must, as flip-flops and sandals will restrict their ability to play safely. Students of all ages need to be dressed appropriately for rigorous outdoor play.

Experience has taught us that keeping track of personal items at school can be difficult. Putting your name on things helps. Valuables should not be brought to school except when absolutely necessary for academic work. Toys can be distracting as well as easily lost, and should also not be brought to school. The School does not take responsibility for replacing lost items.

The Middle School dress code can be found in the Middle School Handbook.

## Community Service

Homestead community service activities are an important aspect of our school program and classrooms at all levels participate in varying degrees. Sometimes service is offered to others within the school community while at other times, classrooms reach out to the community at large. In addition to contributing to our overall school community, these projects give students the opportunity to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real life situations. Community Service Projects are coordinated by teachers at each level and families are invited to participate with each project via newsletter.

## Conferences and Reports

Conferences discussing your child's progress are scheduled in November. These conferences offer parents an opportunity to develop and maintain a strong parent-school partnership. We encourage both parents to attend when possible. Spring Conferences will be held as needed, before and after school for one week, as posted on our school calendar.

## Disciplinary Procedures:

In our school community, most behavioral concerns are addressed successfully when parents and staff work together in close communication, in a timely manner and are consistent in the direction communicated to the students involved. Students who have violated the community standards and/or rules will move through the following general course of disciplinary action. The application of the steps below is at the discretion of the Head Teacher and Head of School.

1. Teacher meets with student privately to address issue.
2. If multiple infractions occur, the student's parents will be notified.
3. After multiple infractions or a severe violation, a meeting with student, parent, teacher, and Head of School will be called. Official consequences will depend on the particular situation, and may include: an official warning to cease the behavior, reparation with sincere apology and changed behavior, loss of privileges, detention, in-school or out of school suspension, or community service.
  - a. In-school suspensions will last from a partial day up to five days.
  - b. In the rare event that an out of school suspension is needed, it will almost always be preceded by an in-school suspension, during which parents and students will be consulted regarding the incident(s) in question.
4. If issues are not resolved through the above, a meeting with the Head of School will be called and the student will be put on probation. In this meeting, a discussion with parents may be had about whether or not Homestead is the right fit for the child. The family may also be referred to other medical professionals to seek support.
5. Student expulsion is not taken lightly or decided upon abruptly. Rather, it is a final measure, after repeated disciplinary attempts have been made to correct the behavior in question.

## Food and Nutrition

We emphasize the importance of a nutritionally balanced diet as part of our curriculum and strongly encourage you to partner with us to establish healthy food habits in your children. It is an important gift that will last a lifetime.

All students bring their own lunches and beverages each day. Candy, gum, and soda are not allowed in school. Mid-morning snack at all levels are provided jointly by parents and the School.

## Fundraising

Unlike most Institutions, Homestead School seldom participates in Fundraising to meet its annual costs. Rather, Homestead raises funds for other organizations through the Holiday Giving Program and the Rainforest Project. It is embedded in Homestead culture to take a close look as well as a broad look, and to give to a worthy cause to better our world.

The Friends of the Homestead School (FOHS) has been established to maintain and increase diversity in the Homestead Student population, and to established the sustainability of Homestead School and it's practices of environmental and humanitarian education and stewardship. If you'd like to support the Mission and Sustainability of the Homestead School, please visit the Friends of the Homestead School Facebook page and/or website [www.fohomestead.org](http://www.fohomestead.org) to see how you can participate financially or through volunteerism.

## Health

We urge sound parental judgment in determining whether your child is healthy enough for school attendance. This is essential for minimizing exposure to contagious diseases. A child who is not feeling well has difficulty dealing with the demands of the school day. Children should be healthy enough to participate in normal activities, including going outside during recess time. If a child has had a fever, we ask that he or she remain at home until fever free for 24 hours before returning to school. A child that is unwell should not be treated with medication at home and then sent to school. Children with fever, vomiting or diarrhea will be sent home.

All prescription medications to be administered in school must be brought or sent to school by a parent or responsible adult and delivered to the student's teacher with a written note. Only medication in the original pharmacy container, will be accepted.

If head lice is detected, the parent will be informed and the child will be sent home. Children must be nit-free before returning to school. If lice is detected at home, parents are asked to advise the school.

In the event of an illness or accident at school, parents will be notified as soon as possible. The name of an emergency contact should be on file in our office in case a parent cannot be reached. Written permission from parents is required at the beginning of the school year so the school may seek emergency treatment if necessary (Completed at Enrollment).

Your child's teachers would like to be informed of any occurrence at home that may cause your child to be emotionally upset so they can be supportive in the classroom.

## **High School Placement**

Homestead School provides guidance for students and their families regarding secondary school placement. The process is coordinated by the Middle School liaison in Administration and begins with a meeting during the spring of seventh grade and continues until decisions have been made the following spring.

Past Homestead School graduates have attended a wide variety of independent private and public schools. Our relationships with nearby independent private and public schools are good and we are pleased with the reports we receive on the performance of our alumni.

## **Inclusion Policy, Effective Communication, and Conflict Resolution Protocol**

The Homestead School is an inclusive community in which students and families of all cultural backgrounds and orientations can freely express who they are, fully participate in all school activities, and feel safe from abuse, harassment, or unfair criticism. It is a community that believes respect and responsibility are essential to an environment conducive to learning and growth. Parents, teachers, and students are part of this community where recognition of the individual, acceptance of differences, and compassion for others are the basis for our relationships.

We believe in the importance of respectful behavior, particularly in conflict resolution, from adult-to-adult, adult-to-child, child-to-adult, and child-to-child. If you have a concern you'd like to discuss with a teacher or administration, the expectation is that all involved parties conduct themselves professionally and with general respect. We have a deep commitment to positive role modeling on the part of adults, as well as teaching thoughtfulness, good manners, conflict resolution and other pro-social skills. We ask for your assistance in setting and maintaining these high standards both in words and actions toward others.

## Lost and Found

The lost and found area is located in the Upper Barn. If something is missing, please check there or call the school and ask someone to check for you. Many items remain unclaimed each year.

## Media Influence and Technology

Over the forty years that Homestead has educated students, we have become increasingly aware of the strong influence that the world at large can have on our children. While some knowledge creates better understanding and preparedness for an increasingly global society, we are concerned about the negative effects of information that is inappropriate to the age and developmental level of the child. This usually comes from exposure to television, movies, and the internet. Generally, we see this at school in the form of unacceptable language (both words and concepts) and occasionally, in a child's behavior.

It is not feasible for a school to dictate what the proper level of exposure to these outside influences will be, but we feel it necessary to express our collective concern. We encourage you to think deeply about the kinds of experiences your children are taking in. Bear in mind that, when you allow your child this kind of exposure, you are also bringing these influences to your child's class (and beyond) here at school.

### Technology at the older levels:

In Middle School, laptops may only be used for school assignments. Students who bring their own laptops must take responsibility for their whereabouts and care. We ask that they be kept in personal cubbies unless they are being used for a class assignment. There are also school laptops and desktops available for use at school only.

Guidance on technology monitoring at home for teens can be found in the Middle School Handbook.

### Technology School-Wide

Students will no longer be allowed to bring smartphones, tablets, and gaming devices to school. It has always been our policy that these items remain in backpacks during the school day, but they will now need to be left at home. If a child is found to have a smartphone, tablet or gaming device, the teacher will ask for the item, notify the child's parents and then return the item to the child at the end of the day. If a child repeatedly brings in a smartphone, tablet or gaming device, then, on the third violation, the item will be returned directly to the parents.

Students who listen to music on the way to school will be asked to put away their ear-buds and headphones when they enter the building.

## Mail

Messages to and from school may be delivered via lunch boxes, classroom communication folder (if applicable), email, or phone. If parents send an email regarding end of day dismissal arrangements which is not confirmed with our reply, please follow up with a phone call to ensure that your message was received. We will also be using TADS for classroom announcements, newsletters and for uploading documents. Please check TADS daily.

Family information contained in the directory may not be used for mailing lists for non-school events or endeavors. Public information may be put on the Facebook group titled “Homestead Parents and Friends” or can be distributed via school newsletter subject to the discretion of the Head of School.

## Parent Education/Enrichment

Parents Night, hosted by school in September, is an opportunity to learn about your child’s program as well as how the Montessori philosophy is implemented at Homestead. Additional parent education programs may be scheduled throughout the year.

## Phone Calls

Ideally, all necessary arrangements between parents and children should take place outside of school hours. Calls to the school to arrange a play date or social arrangement should be made before the school day or after dismissal time. If it is necessary for a parent to talk to a child during the school day, it is best to call mid-day. Messages can be taken by the office staff and relayed to children or teachers at other times. The less this happens, the smoother the day will be for children and staff.

Any changes to transportation arrangements should be made before school starts. Any changes must be reported to the office, preferably by 1:00 p.m. Messages will be relayed to students as to changes.

## Parent Observation/Volunteer

Parents are invited to observe in the classrooms. Observations generally begin in November, with the best time to observe in the morning from arrival to lunch-time. Parent observers are encouraged to take a seat or stand in a location which is out of the way of classroom traffic and try to dis-engage from interactions with the students and adults. Children will forget a parent is even there, which offers a look into what the children’s school day is like. Conferencing briefly with teachers after the observation is a great way to gain insight and share your findings.

We encourage parents to get involved in our programs. Attending classroom presentations, providing transportation and accompanying us on field trips, planning and cooking snack, offering ideas or resources toward supporting the program are all examples of how parents can get involved. Please

contact your child's head teacher if you'd like to participate in an activity. Classroom observation is encouraged before volunteering.

In the event of an emergency, visitors are asked to follow standard evacuation procedures until you have been notified what to do by the classroom teachers.

## Safety and Emergency Planning

The safety of our children is our utmost priority. Many of the rules and procedures we have established have safety as their motive. The Homestead School has also created an Emergency Safety Plan in the event of an emergency. This plan is sent home annually to families.

Should there be a school-wide emergency, our Safety Plan will be followed. We will use our TADS emergency notification system to contact you via text alert, email and telephone in order to provide you with necessary information.

It is imperative for parents to take responsibility to see that no student brings any dangerous instruments, including pocket knives, to school, on the bus, or on any school related trip or activity. Should this occur, the student will be asked to leave school immediately. Disciplinary measures would follow.

## Sexual Harassment Policy

It is the policy of the Homestead School to prohibit sexual harassment and student gender discrimination in the school and at school activities.

### Definitions

Sexual Harassment is defined as discrimination against a person of a different or the same sex because of their sex, which creates a sexually hostile learning or school environment.

Sexual harassment that creates a hostile learning or school environment is either pervasive and/or severe conduct that involves unwelcome: sexual advances; sexual conduct that constitutes a crime; sexual touching; indecent exposure of a sexual nature; pervasive sexual remarks, comments, displayed materials, printed materials, electronic media or jokes. The determination of a hostile learning or school environment shall be objective, based upon the viewpoint of a reasonable person and subjectively perceived to be so by the complainant.

Gender discrimination is defined as pervasive and/or severe conduct intended to intimidate or demean a person or persons of the other gender or that which treats a person of the other gender differently in the work place because of his or her gender.

### Procedure

Any student who believes that he or she has been subjected to sexual harassment or gender discrimination by an employee, student or school guest is encouraged to address the matter with the Head of School, who shall promptly conduct an interview and explain the following options for resolution:

1. Registering a complaint verbally or in writing;

2. Engaging in mediation to arrive at a resolution of the matter; or
3. Placing the school on notice of the objectionable conduct without seeking a resolution through the above mentioned complaint process or mediation.

The complaining student shall not be subject to retaliation or retribution by reason of making the complaint and confidentiality shall be maintained throughout the process, except as necessary to assure fair and due process.

### **Complaints**

All complaints shall be received in writing or reduced to writing by the Head of School who will conduct a full and fair investigation of the complaint, make written findings of fact and, where warranted, recommend a resolution. The Head of School shall take such further action necessary to reasonably deter any further act prohibited by this policy. The Head of School shall advise the complainant and the subject of the complaint of the disposition of the complaint, which may include:

1. A finding that this policy has not been violated; or
2. A finding that this policy has been violated and a letter has been issued with a requirement of corrective training for the subject of the complaint if an employee; or
3. That disciplinary action is under review or has been taken if a student.

### **Confidentiality**

The Head of School shall, to the maximum extent possible, maintain as confidential the transaction(s) underlying the proceedings or complaint, the outcome of a mediated agreement and action taken, other than formal discipline. The subject of the proceedings or complaint, however, shall be informed of the identity of the person who commenced the proceedings or complaint in order to provide fair and due process. Both the complainant and the subject of the complaint shall be given a copy of the findings in the matter of a formal complaint.

### **Consequences**

Any officer, supervisor, or employee who violates this policy shall be subject to corrective action up to and including termination of office or employment, with due process provided as necessary. Students who violate this policy shall be subject to disciplinary action.

Any complaint that is determined to have been processed maliciously or in bad faith shall be deemed to be in violation of this policy and may give rise to disciplinary consequences against the complainant.

## **Special Education**

The Homestead School has procedures in place for identifying a student in need of special services. If a need is identified, parents, along with classroom teachers, can begin the process of assessment at any point during the school year via our Special Education Coordinator. The child may participate in our Academic Support Program or if identified as necessary, through the Eldred Central School District, Special Education Department. This is an involved process. Services are provided on campus for NY residents. PA and NJ residents will be assisted in finding support in their own state.

We will make reasonable modifications to our policies, practices and procedures when such modifications are necessary to afford individuals with physical and mental disabilities, including mental

health disabilities, equal access to our educational programs and services, unless making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of those programs and services. Upon request for an accommodation by an applicant or student with a disability (or his/her parent), we will make an individualized assessment and case-by-case determination as to whether and what modification(s) can be made to allow the disabled applicant or student to participate in our educational programs and services. If you have any questions about these policies please contact the Head of School.

## TADS

Tuition Aid Data Service (TADS) is an online platform we use for processing admissions, enrollment, tuition management, household and student data. Parents are asked to create login credentials, which are used throughout their time at Homestead. Parents can access student, classroom and school information through TADS Educate. **The Upper Elementary and Middle School** will be using TADS Educate for tracking assignments and grading.

### Personalized Dashboard

Once you've completed your login information and have successfully entered the TADS site, you will be automatically brought to your "Parent Dashboard". This is your home page, and you can move the sections around however you prefer, making the top headers to reflect what is most important to your family. Simply click and drag the sections to the preferred location and they will automatically save.

### Announcements

We will post weekly announcements in the "Announcements Section". This will include reminders, lost and found items, illness alerts and upcoming events information, etc. Your child(ren)'s teacher may also post announcements, links to Google photos, and documents to your dashboard. Announcements from teachers will populate in the same section as school announcements.

**Please Note: Official letters will be sent directly to your personal email and will come from [educate@tads.com](mailto:educate@tads.com). School closings and delays will be sent via text and email along with website and Facebook postings. Because they will not appear to be sent directly from the school, please be sure to not disregard these emails or dismiss text alerts.**

### Documents

Administration and Teachers will also be using the Documents Section, whereby newsletters, field trip permission slips and classwork documents can be uploaded. Simply select the document and view. You will have the option to print the document and return it to school if needed.

### Report Cards

Pre-K through Grade 3 classrooms will not be utilizing the online grade book, and therefore do not be alarmed when you do not see your child(ren)'s grades posted and/or details pertaining to their academics.

### Annual School Calendar

The school calendar will also be available to view on your Dashboard which outlines all holidays and important dates. Please note, field trips and events related to your child's personal classroom will not be posted on the school calendar but rather under the "Announcement" heading.

### **Directory**

Parents can access the school directory by selecting School>Directory. You may even search by classroom for a student's name, email fellow parents directly from the directory and reach the school via email as well.

### **FOR UPPER ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS ONLY:**

You will be able to view all of your child(ren)'s schedule, assignments and grades. You can print progress reports and view their report card online.

### **Classroom Schedule**

Your child(ren)'s weekly schedule will be posted on the dashboard. This is a permanent schedule for the school year. Changes to the weekly schedule will be posted in Announcements if necessary to communicate.

### **Assignments/Grades**

All **upcoming** assignments will be posted as they are assigned and will be located on the Dashboard. However, for a more detailed look at your child(ren)'s academics you will need to go directly to that child's personal page by selecting **School > then student and select your child's name**. There, you will see a comprehensive record of your child's assignments (completed or past due) and any grades they have received.

We ask that parents with students in the Upper Elementary and Middle School classrooms check in at least (3-5) times per week to view their child(ren)'s activity. Take notice of upcoming assignments and due dates, grades and classroom messages. This tool is intended for parents to support their children with completing any necessary assignments at home and offering time management assistance where needed. We are hopeful that the features that TADS offers will help us to efficiently communicate your child(ren)'s progress week-to-week and alert you, when necessary, of any missed assignments or decline in grades.

### **Report Cards**

Once a paper copy of your child(ren)'s report card has been sent home, an electronic copy can be found on your parent dashboard and can be downloaded and printed at home.

## **Transcripts and Records**

When a student leaves the Homestead and registers at a new school, the parents sign a Release of Records with the new school. The new school then sends the request to us. Additional requests for Homestead School Records must be made to the Head of School. Teachers recommendations requests should also be made through the Head of School.

## Homestead School Administration

Peter Comstock, Head of School

[pcomstock@homesteadschool.com](mailto:pcomstock@homesteadschool.com)

Marsha Comstock, School Director

845-856-6359

Jack Comstock, Assistant Head of School/Middle School Director

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Nisha Gupta, Head of Academic & Financial Affairs /Middle School Teacher

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Natalie Rasjz-Steimle, Administrative Assistant/EC Teacher

[natalie@homesteadeducation.org](mailto:natalie@homesteadeducation.org)

# Acknowledgement and Agreement

I, the undersigned, acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Parent Handbook for the Homestead School which outlines the school’s policies and procedures. While I understand that the Parent Handbook is neither a contract nor a legal document, I have read and understand the policies, provisions, and procedures contained in the Parent Handbook. In addition, I agree to abide by the outlined rules, regulations, procedures, and code of conduct outlined in the Handbook. I understand that the contents of the Parent Handbook are subject to change annually.

I recognize that it is my responsibility to contact the Homestead School Administration for any questions I might have about the contents of the Parent Handbook now and in the future. I also understand that sending my child or children to Homestead is a choice and that it requires adherence to school policies and procedures. Failure to abide by this agreement may result in a meeting with Administration to discuss whether or not the Homestead is the right fit for my child/family.

Name of Student(s)

Teacher’s Name/Class

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Signature of Parent

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN THIS PAGE TO YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER**