

STUDENT / FAMILY HANDBOOK

September 2023



MERCY SCHOOL
FOR SPECIAL LEARNING

830 South Woodward Street
Allentown, PA 18103-3440

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learning@mercyschool.org

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This handbook has been compiled to meet the needs of the students who attend Mercy. It contains the essential information concerning matters of importance. As families you are an integral part of the education process. Working together will provide a prosperous and harmonious environment for every student.

ADMISSION POLICIES AND CRITERIA

(applies to students in our **SCHOOL AGE PROGRAM, 5 to 21 YEARS OF AGE**)

- A. Mercy School for Special Learning is a Roman Catholic facility of the Diocese of Allentown and open to all students regardless of race, creed and national origin.
- B. Student must be diagnosed as having an intellectual and/or a development disability and judged primarily as being able to benefit from our program.
- C. **Families are to attend two regularly scheduled conferences yearly. Involvement in your student's education is crucial to the success of your student.**
- D. Families pay a registration fee, activity fee, yearly tuition and participate in a set fundraising obligation.
- E. In addition to funding from the Because We are Catholic, each parish contributes for those Catholic students in their parishes. Pastors of non-Catholic parishes may be contacted to meet this expense at the request of the non-catholic family.
- F. Tuition fees for the next school year are presented to families each year in spring. Please consult that sheet for annual updates.
- G. Scholarships are available to help families in need of financial assistance. **PLEASE NOTE: Registration on STS is required.** This must be completed prior to **May 1st** for the following school year.
- H. **School age students are to wear regulation uniforms and school gym suits.**
- I. Families must be active members of the Mercy Alliance of Mercy School and involved in fundraising activities of the school.
- J. We would appreciate copies of your student's Baptismal Certificate and if your student has received any Sacraments; copies of the certificates for those Sacraments would be appreciated.

ADMITTANCE PROCEDURE

- A. Families are to complete an application and registration form. They agree to follow the policies set.
- B. A "Request for Information" form is signed so the prospective students' health and education records can be obtained from the previous educational setting.

- C. Request forms for the following are signed:
Transportation and Use of textbooks

- D. **While teachers are consulted, the principal assumes the final right and responsibility for acceptance and dismissal of a student to/from Mercy School for Special Learning.**

APPOINTMENTS

When possible; doctor, dental or other appointments should be scheduled for days or times when school is not in session. If this is not possible and the appointment must be made during school time, a note must be written in advance to the teacher and the student must be picked up and signed out/in at the school office.

If it is necessary to talk with a teacher; a note or email will accomplish this. Teachers are available from 8:15 to 8:30 a.m. and then from 3:00 to 3:30 p.m. Your cooperation in limiting your calls to these times would be greatly appreciated. Please do not call or text staff on their cell phones (however, the Remind App is an approved form of communication).

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

Doors open at 8:15am for school age and 8:30am for pre-school. Prayers begin at 8:45am daily. **NO SUPERVISION IS PROVIDED PRIOR TO 8:15 a.m.** Closing prayers are at 2:40 p.m. with dismissal immediately following. All students are expected to adhere to these times. ***If your student is unable to arrive at school prior to 11:00 a.m. then he or she should remain at home for the day.***

ATTENDANCE

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requires students to attend school regularly. We ask the families to cooperate in meeting this state regulation.

Illness

Any student that is running a fever or has more than one bout of vomiting or diarrhea will be sent home. The student is not to attend school the next day after being sent home. A student **MUST** be fever free for 24 hours before returning to school. This is in the best interest for our entire school population. Please be certain to keep your emergency contact information current so that we are able to reach you.

Excused Absence

Illness, quarantine, death in the family, exceptionally urgent reasons, impassable roads and inclement weather. The last two reasons for absence are determined by the operation of the school buses of the school district where you live.

Unexcused Absence

Truancy, family neglect, oversleeping, missing the bus etc.

Lateness or Early Pick Up

If for some reason your student missed the bus or you are bringing him/her late, **you and your student must report to the school office – your student will then be directed to his/her classroom.** Families must sign their students in / out before entering / leaving the building. If you are picking up your student early, please report to the office and the secretary will send for your student.

Notes

PA State Law mandates that a student returning to school from an absence must submit to the homeroom teacher a note from an adult family member stating the dates and the reason for absence. For any long-term absence (three days or more) resulting from illness, a note from the attending physician is required.

All excuses will be sent to the office.

Immunizations and Medications

Any medications to be given out during school time must be accompanied by a prescription with the container properly labeled with medication and dosage. This must be done at the start of every school year for our school-age students. If we do not have a script from the doctor, we CANNOT and ARE NOT PERMITTED BY STATE LAW to give out medication to your student.

The authorization form for medication is available by calling the school office (610-797-8242) and requesting that the form be sent home. The form is also available to download off of our website at www.mercyschool.com. The medication and dosage information must be filled out and signed by both the physician and the family. Incomplete or inaccurate forms will be returned so that the proper information can be entered. A list of side effects of any medication your student is taking here or at home should also be sent to school. This information is available through your pharmacist.

We are not permitted to dispense non-prescription (over-the-counter) drugs during the school day. These precautions are being taken for the physical well-being of your student.

HEALTH IMMUNIZATIONS

The five-day rule/exclusions

The current provisional waiver of eight months for school students to be fully immunized has been reduced to five school days. The student must obtain the next or final dose within that five-day window **or risk being excluded from school.** However, the student may attend school provisionally beyond the five days if he or she submits a medical certificate from a health care provider outlining the dates for additional vaccination. A health care provider includes a physician, certified nurse practitioner or a physician assistant.

If the student has not received all doses for a multiple dose vaccine series on the student's first day of attendance for that school year, the school administrator or a designee may not provisionally admit him or her unless the five-day rule can be met or a medical certificate is provided. Students that have not received a single dose vaccine on their first day of attendance for that school year may not be admitted to school.

Other changes -- Students must now have one additional dose of meningococcal vaccine before the age of 18 years.

The proposal changes the time for school administrators or designees to review medical certificates for student compliance from every 60 days to every 30 days. It also extends the deadline for schools to report immunization data to DOH from Oct. 15 to Dec. 31.

BUSING

Busing may be provided by the individual district following completion of the ACT 372 Request for Transportation form which is part of Mercy's registration packet. Mercy School For Special Learning does not provide transportation, but does facilitate the process for the school districts that transport students to Mercy. Individual districts offer transportation based on their determination of eligibility.

Please be advised that per State Bill 1077 effective August 22, 2016 – this serves as notice regarding Video Audio recording on the school bus. Districts no longer send this notice, it is posted here for your information. Please see Transportation for additional information.

CANCELLATIONS / DELAYS

Mercy follows the Allentown School District for weather related delays and closings.

Please note the following

We will use our One Call Notification System, Facebook, and a posting on WFMZ to notify you of a delay, closing, or early dismissal

- If Allentown School District is closed due to weather, Mercy will be closed. As our school resides in the Allentown School District, as a private school, Mercy will follow their guidance.
- If Mercy is on a two-hour delay, and your home district is operating on a regular schedule, we will not accept students before 10:15AM. You will need to provide your own transportation to school in the morning. Afternoon transportation will be as normal. If you choose not to transport you child to school, it will be considered an excused absence due to lack of transportation.
- If Mercy is on a two-hour delay and your home district is transporting at regular time, you will need to provide your own transportation to school in the morning.
- If Mercy closes early due to weather, we will contact our school districts to inform them of our early dismissal. The districts will let us know when they will be picking up their district students. If a school district is dismissing early and Mercy is not, the school district will pickup their students at the districts early dismissal designated time to transport them home.
- Mercy early dismissal information will be announced through our One- Call System, and Facebook
- We will post individual district pick up times on our Mercy Facebook page only.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

In the event that there is a change in your address, home phone number, cell phone number or emergency number, **THE SCHOOL SHOULD BE NOTIFIED IMMEDIATELY IN WRITING.**

COMMUNICATION

Communication between school and home is of utmost importance. To ensure that information reaches home through your student, a communication envelope will be provided for your student and will typically be sent home on Wednesdays. **Please empty the envelope immediately, read the information being sent home and then return the envelope, as well as any necessary completed forms, to school the following day.**

EMERGENCIES

An emergency sheet is sent home for completion at the beginning of each school year.

This sheet must be completed for each student in the school.

It is important that this information be accurate, kept up to date & returned to Mercy promptly.

PLEASE NOTIFY THE SCHOOL IMMEDIATELY OF ANY CHANGES!

CONFERENCES

For the mutual benefit of student, family and school; Team conferences are held twice yearly.

September: Student Input Form

October: Instructional Plan TEAM Conference

January: IP will be updated

May: Instructional Plan TEAM Conference

We expect that all families will be active participants in these meetings. Consideration in adhering to the scheduled times will help all involved.

DANCE POLICY

Students, former students and graduates of Mercy are eligible to attend dances hosted by our school. Dances are announced during the school year for those students ages 12 and older.

DISCIPLINE

Behavior Modification and Positive Behavior Plans are used beginning in the elementary rooms and continuing through the secondary classes. In class, the teachers and students jointly draw up the rules and consequences where this is possible. The purpose of all rules and regulations is to develop within the student a sense of "self-discipline", responsibility for his/her own actions, and a loving concern for others. Teachers will encourage appropriate conduct through a firm yet kind approach. Discipline is fundamental to the learning process. The observance of rules ensures that each person's freedom and rights are protected. This will guarantee the safety, welfare and Christian development of each student. Families are asked to support the school's discipline efforts.

The goals of discipline at Mercy School for Special Learning are:

- To assist students in developing self-control
- To teach students to be respectful of self, others and property
- To help students understand to the best of their ability the cause and effect relationship of their actions

In order to motivate students toward self-discipline, it is the goal of the school to instill in them the value of their own self-worth and the knowledge of how loved they are by God, their family and the staff of the school.

As a general rule, the classroom teacher manages the discipline problems of his/her class and enlists the guidance of the principal in cases involving serious or repeated misbehavior.

In situations where the principal considers the behavior of a student to be of a very serious nature, there will be an immediate suspension from school, followed by a meeting with the family, the student (if appropriate) and the principal prior to returning to school. With all serious behavioral infractions, the possibility of expulsion from school exists. An example of such a behavior may be:

Improper behavior that may cause injury or harm to him/herself or others or threaten injury or harm to others. This can include both physical and/or emotional distress.

Depending on the seriousness of the incident suspension may be one (1) to five (5) days at the discretion of the principal. The incident may be reported to police if warranted.

Please note:

It is the expectation that the behavior of the student will improve after the period of suspension. If inappropriate behaviors continue the student is subject to expulsion.

The participation of the student in class trips and special activities following a suspension may be limited or withheld at the discretion of the principal.

In situations of a very serious nature, the principal may deny continued enrollment until an evaluation has been done to determine if the student is a threat to themselves or others

Student Dress Code

In an effort to develop and maintain a strong sense of self-esteem in our students, we encourage each one to be neat, clean, and well groomed. This includes:

- Clean hair
- Brushed teeth
- Regular bathing

Girls may wear light colored or clear nail polish. No dark/bright/fluorescent polish is permitted. Boys are not permitted to wear nail polish.

This is important for all students and most especially for those representing Mercy in the community. Families are responsible for providing the required attire for the student. If the student is not in appropriate uniform, you will be notified. Young men (18 years and older) may have clean, neat, appropriate facial hair. The principal to determine appropriateness.

Regulation School Uniform

Girls Uniform

Top: Burgundy Knit Pullover, Short Sleeve, with Mercy Logo (Order through the school office.)

Burgundy Knit Pullover, Long Sleeve, with Mercy Logo) Order through Flynn and O'Hara)
Bottom: Burgundy or Khaki Wrap-Around Kilt or Skort for all girls can be purchased at Flynn & O'Hara. Khaki pants (Not legging type material) Bottoms can also be purchased at other stores if they are of the same variety.
White or Burgundy socks or tights.
Black or Brown Dress Shoes
Black or White Sneakers. No boots. During winter students will be allowed to change into school shoes if needed.

Boys Uniforms

Top: Burgundy Knit Pullover, Short Sleeve, with Mercy Logo (Order through the school office.
Burgundy Knit Pullover, Long Sleeve, with Mercy Logo) Order through Flynn and O'Hara)
Bottoms: Khaki pants. (Order through Flynn & O'Hara) Bottoms can also be purchased at other stores if they are of the same variety.
White or Black Socks
Black or Brown Dress Shoes
Black or White Sneakers
No boots. During winter students will be allowed to change into school shoes if needed.
Girls and Boys Uniforms
Burgundy sweaters are optional and may be purchased at Flynn & O'Hara.
Jewelry:
Boys: No earrings
Girls: Posts, studs, or small earrings only! No other body piercing permitted.
Students are permitted to wear one religious medal of a small size on a gold or silver chain. Other small necklaces are permitted at the discretion of the principal. Students may wear one ring on either hand.
Exceptions will be made for Mercy class rings.
Nail Polish: Girls may polish their nails with clear or a very light color only. Final discretion is with the principal.

Gym Uniform

Students are to wear their gym uniforms on their assigned gym day and when requested for events or activities.
Monday, August 28th, 2023 - Friday, October 13th, 2023: Summer Gym Uniform
Monday, October 16th, 2023 – Friday, April 12th, 2024: Regulation Gym Uniform
Monday, April 15, 2024 – Friday, June 7, 2024: Summer Gym Uniform
Summer Uniform Dress Code
The Warm Weather Regulation uniform includes Khaki Bermuda shorts (Order through Flynn & O'Hara) or purchased at other stores if they are of the same variety. Black or white sneakers with white socks.
Summer Gym Uniform
Burgundy Mercy T-Shirt, sweatshirt, or Mercy spirit wear t-shirt and black shorts of appropriate length (fingertip length). Short shorts or "baggy" shorts are not permitted.
This OPTIONAL dress code is in effect from the opening of school until Friday, October 13th, 2023, and then again beginning on Monday, April 15th.
The faculty is expected to enforce the dress code daily.

Please be sure that all clothing items: school uniforms, hats, coats, gloves, gym clothes, spare clothing are Clearly Labeled. If they are not labeled, we have no way to discern what belongs to whom. Please assist us by labeling everything. Thank you.

We do have a very limited selection of gently used uniforms. Please contact the office for details

GUM

Gum chewing is not permitted at Mercy School For Special Learning.

SCHOOL BAGS

It is requested that school bags/back packs be used to provide proper care of materials / books and to encourage each student to be responsible for his/her materials. **PLEASE label your student's bag.**

HOMEWORK

The goal of homework is to foster independent skills and confidence. Individual classroom teachers may assign homework in various areas of instruction. This will differ from level to level according to the ability of the student. Families are asked to assist their student by seeing that the assignments are completed. Please allow your child to complete their homework as independently as possible.

FUND RAISING

The Mercy Alliance is responsible for the majority of the fundraising activities at Mercy. Each family is obligated to raise \$525. This amount will reflect percentages of a fundraiser rather than a flat amount. *For example: Gift Cards all have individual percentage rates, if you purchase a monthly lottery calendar for \$10 you receive \$6.50 credit toward your fundraising obligation.* A list of participating fundraisers will be provided at the beginning of the school year. **All unfulfilled obligations will be billed directly to families on a monthly basis. If you haven't earned any credit, it is recommended that you pay the first month directly so that you remain current. We do not want you to reach the end of the year and be faced with the entire balance remaining.** A copy of the form that you will be receiving monthly can be found at the end of your Student/Family Handbook. The last day to earn fundraising credit will be **Friday, May 31**. Any outstanding balance is due in full no later than **Thursday, June 6th**.

Families have the option of paying a "buyout" to be exempt from having to participate in the fundraising. The buyout for the 2022-2023 school year will be \$525. This buyout may be paid in monthly installments. We highly recommend that if you are not fundraising, or you have fallen behind in your fundraising that you refer to the recommended payment due shown on your monthly Mercy Alliance Fundraising Report that arrives home in the weekly communication envelope. **Should families fail to meet your student's complete fundraising obligation, it may adversely affect your student's enrollment and/or scholarship opportunity at Mercy and may be billed to your account as unpaid tuition at the end of the school year.**

Mercy imposes a \$30 charge for any checks returned for insufficient funds. We truly hope that we will not be forced to impose this fee and should a problem arise in meeting your payments in a timely manner, **PLEASE CALL THE OFFICE PROMPTLY.** We will work with you in any way possible.

The fundraising obligation for families in our Pre-School Program is determined by the number of days your student attends. Complete information can be found in the registration packet.

So, you have a great fundraising idea ~

What should you do? Please call Miss Beth in the office. We are happy to look at new and fresh fundraising ideas.

MERCY ALLIANCE OF MERCY SCHOOL FOR SPECIAL LEARNING

The Mercy Alliance membership fee is paid as part of your registration fee. The Mercy Alliance is obligated to fund transportation expenses and other special activities for the students. Families are fully expected to meet the established fundraising amount set for the school year and are requested to sign the Mercy Fundraising Responsibility Form (also part of the registration packet) as confirmation of their commitment. **These funds directly support your child for specific activities throughout the school year.**

GRADUATION

A modest graduation fee \$50 is charged to cover specifics related to this special event. If your student turns 21 after the first day of school, the student may finish the remainder of that school year. If further explanation is needed, please contact the principal.

LUNCH PROGRAM

Lunches are \$4.00 daily, including beverage. Lunch tickets may be purchased through the office. Student's name, and the amount of payment should be clearly stated on the envelope that contains the completed lunch ticket order form with payment enclosed. Lunch credits will be issued for any student that is absent on a day that lunch was ordered.

Beverage may be purchased separately at a cost of \$.50 cents per day if you are not purchasing the school lunch.

Please be sure to label student's name on lunch bag or box for those students bringing lunch from home.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

FAMILY AS PARENT/GUARDIAN

Send your student to school physically ready to learn. He/she should be alert after a good night's rest (no late television), dressed properly in complete school uniform and have had a nourishing breakfast. Help to give your student a positive image of self, home, school and others.

FAMILY AS EDUCATOR

You are the primary teacher and religious educator for your student. Have a set time and place for home study. Carefully examine all types of progress reports. Actively participate in programs for your own improvement, which might be offered by the school or other outside sources.

FAMILY AS SUPPORTER

Actively support school activities by attending Family TEAM Conferences, supporting fund-raisers and participating in school meetings as well as other functions such as Liturgical Celebrations and special Seasonal Events.

SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS

Preparation for the sacraments is carried out in small group or individual instruction. Church attendance, age and readiness are the major criteria for preparation and reception of the sacraments. The following age criterion is followed in most instances:

Confirmation – at least twelve years of age

First Eucharist – at least eight years of age

First Reconciliation – at least eight years of age

SIGN IN / OUT POLICY

Families & visitors may only enter the building through the main entrance. Be advised that you must stop at the main office to sign in through our Raptor Security System. A driver's license is required. Before leaving the building, you must again stop in the office to sign out. We thank you for your cooperation in maintaining the safety of our school and most especially, your student.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation to and from school, by law, is provided for any student of school age whose outer boundary of the school district in which he/she resides is within a 10-mile radius of Mercy School for Special Learning. The school district is provided with a listing of students eligible for transportation.

It is the family's responsibility to notify the bus company if their student will not be going to or from school on a particular day.

Families should be aware that students might lose their busing privilege if their behavior results in any discipline infractions while riding the bus.

Please see busing for additional information.

VISITORS

All visitors must report to the school office at which time they will sign in using our Raptor System and state the purpose of the visit. **VISITORS MAY NOT GO TO THE CLASSROOM(S) WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE AND AGREEMENT OF THE PRINCIPAL.**

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers play an important role here at Mercy School For Special Learning. The success of our program is greatly enhanced by volunteers who strongly believe in the mission of our program. There are many volunteer opportunities to choose from at Mercy. Please consider offering some of your time if at all possible. Please note that school policy is such that family members are not permitted to volunteer in their student's classroom.

As per Diocesan policy, all volunteers are required to have specific background checks and child abuse clearances completed and attend the Diocesan Protecting God's Children Workshop. Miss Denise in the office can assist you with your clearances.

Mercy Job Works

Presently Mercy employs two Job Coaches that take older students to work at various Job Sites in the community. In-school jobs are also coached on a one-to-one basis. Consideration is given to the level of ability and behaviors of the student.

STAFF

TEACHERS

Mrs. Gretchen Siemon, Room 2
Mrs. Leanne Stanley, Room 3
Mrs. Kim Rompilla, Room 4
Mrs. Germaine Jordan, Room 5
Mrs. Diane Schultz, Room 6
Mrs. Vickie McHale, Room 7
Mrs. Nancy Peluso, Room 9
Mrs. Elizabeth Williams, Speech Therapist
Mrs. Sue Kaczmarek, Religion Coordinator
Mrs. Michelle Shellock – Adaptive Physical Education

TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Mrs. Kara Schwab, Room 2
Miss Britteny Csazer, Room 2
Mrs. Doreen Reilly, Room 3
Ms. Corrine Klein, Room 3
Mrs. Cynthia Morton, Room 3

Mrs. Donna Malone, Room 4
Mrs. Julia Keller, Room 4
Mrs. Frances Barrett, Room 5
Ms. Lynn Ambrosoli, Room 5/9
Mrs. Eileen Fasolka, Room 5
Ms Andrea Paul Room 6
Mrs. Judi Crouse, Room, All Rooms
Mrs. Rhonda Michener, Room 7
Mrs. Mary Fiske, Room 9
Mrs. Doreen Reilly, All Rooms

THERAPIST

Kiersten Niece, Occupational Therapy
Jackie Wertman, "Honorary Volunteer OT"
Jess Stewart, Physical Therapy

ADMINISTRATION

Mrs. Beth Grys, Principal
Mrs. Cheryl Hosfeld
Mrs. Denise Robinson, Bookkeeper
Mr. Mark Napierkowski, Director of Development
Mrs. Al Mallon, Assistant Director of Advancement