Parent Handbook

MECHANICSVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Revised July 2026

Mission Statement

The mission of MES is to challenge, nurture, and inspire the whole child and build positive relationships with our community to inspire active and engaged citizenship.

This handbook is a supplement to the St. Mary's County Public School Student Handbook and Code of Conduct and is meant to explain MES practices and procedures. Parents are encouraged to review the SMCPS Handbook for information regarding school system practices that MES and all SMCPS schools follow.

STUDENT HOURS

Arrival Bell: 9:00 AM
Tardy Bell: 9:05 AM
Dismissal Bell: 3:40 PM

SCHOOL PHONE NUMBER: 301-472-4800

POINTS OF CONTACT

Attendance/Records Secretary: **Erin Miller**

- Reporting student absence(s)
- Changes to daily transportation (notify before 3:00 PM)
- PST, 504, IEP Meetings

Secretary to the Principal: **Robin Post**

- Building use request(s)
- Calendar of events
- Bus route(s)
- Appointments with the Principal

Cafeteria Manager: **Jennifer Reeder**

- Student lunch accounts
- Meal questions

Nurse: **Dana Gregory**

- Medication (delivery to school, administration)
- Immunizations (requirements, documentation)
- Medical restrictions for routine activities (PE, outdoor recess)
- Student health concerns, including illness and chronic health issues

School Counselor: **Stephanie Hall**

- School related student emotional/social needs
- Bullying reporting forms, Title IX
- Character education
- Home-hospital teaching

Instructional Resource Teacher, Rebecca Plotner: **Rebecca Plotner**

- Curriculum and Assessment
- Testing coordination, preparation, and reporting (MCAP)
- Curriculum resources
- Early entrance assessment

Special Education Teacher: **Nicole Shotwell**

- Special education questions and concerns

Principal: **Joshua Lynch**

- School practices and school improvement
- Instructional decision-making and reporting
- Pupil Services Team (PST), 504, and IEP Chair
- Student discipline

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Communication

Website

MES maintains an up to date website with a variety of pertinent information. It is recommended that parents frequently visit the site as many questions can be answered using it.

Newsletter

The Mustang Message School Newsletter is sent at least once per month, on the first school day of the month. Additional newsletters may be sent as often as once per week if new and important information is available. These newsletters are posted in Schoology, sent by mass email, and linked on the school website.

Text Messaging

MES also uses text messaging to send important reminders and emergency information. Be sure that you are signed up to receive these messages (see image right).

Opt-In from your mobile phone now!

Just send "Y" or "Yes" to 67587

Questions or Concerns About Progress, Incidents at School, etc?

Your child's classroom teacher is your first and best point of contact for information about your child's instruction, progress, and for general questions and concerns about your child's day. They often have the most direct knowledge in order to answer these questions. You can find their emails on our staff page.

Efforts are made to respond to parents in a timely manner. Teachers have limited planning time during the school day and are expected to be actively engaged with students during classroom hours. As such, they may need up to 48 business hours to respond to an email or a ClassDojo message. Teachers are not required to respond to messages outside of their work hours (weekends, evenings, school breaks, etc).

If a situation is an emergency or otherwise requires more immediate attention, then parents should call the school's phone number 301-472-4800 and provide a detailed explanation to a school secretary.

Appointments with teachers, administration, counselors, and staff

All staff have full schedules of working with students, meetings, and duties throughout the day. In order to provide the most substantial and effective instruction and attention to the students, staff are not available for pop-in meetings. Secretaries will take messages and share them with staff. Secretaries have access to the Principal's calendar and can schedule an appointment with the Principal as necessary. Detailed information about the reason for the appointment request with a staff member should be shared at the time, so proper preparation can occur before the meeting. This might include actions like reviewing records, student progress, interviewing students and/or staff, identifying the right staff member to respond (teacher, nurse, counselor, principal), etc.

Parent Participation

MES is committed to joining with parents in educating their children.

- Parents are appreciated as **volunteers** at school and home. The Volunteer Application must be completed first.
- Parents are invited to contact staff from time to time to talk about students' progress and arrange conferences (face to face or by phone).
- Parents are invited to join the **MES P.T.O.** which supports our educational program and coordinates fundraising and special programs. For more information visit the PTO portion of the school website or email the PTO at mes.pto@gmail.com.
- Substitutes are always needed and many parents choose to support the school in this way. For more visit the SMCPS website.
- Asking specific questions at home can help build conversation with your child about school. Consider questions like:
    - Who did you play with at recess?
    - Who did you sit by at lunch?
    - Did you have science or social studies today? What did you learn?
    - What did you read about today?
    - What did you learn in math?
    - What special did you have today? What did you learn?

Contact Information

It is critical that parents' contact information, emergency contacts, and adults allowed for regular pickup are up to date. Any time there is a change contact the school as soon as possible to provide the updated information.

If there are ever individuals who may not have contact with your child be sure to inform the office as soon as possible and provide the appropriate documentation.

If a custody agreement is in place be sure to provide the documentation to the school.

Safety And Security

The Safety and Security of each child is the highest priority at Mechanicsville Elementary School. Our Crisis Team meets frequently, coordinates drills, and responds to student, staff, and building needs. If you have questions about the number and types of drills that we conduct, contact the Principal.

Our Crisis Response protocol sometimes requires that we secure the building. In a real emergency requiring lockdown, a procedure is in place for retrieving children with proper identification. The school makes every effort to protect the children's safety as well as respect the rights of the parents. If you approach the building during a drill of this sort there may be a short wait. We will unlock the building as soon as possible to respond to your needs.

Our concern for student safety also includes protection from threats, bullying, harassment, and intimidation. Reporting forms are available on the SMCPS website. If you have a concern in this regard, we want to respond as quickly as possible. Contact the School Counselor or Principal to have your concerns addressed.

School Environment

- Building access is by the front door only.
- All persons visiting the school must sign in at the office.
- Anyone participating during the school day must display an official SMCPS identification badge or receive a visitor's badge in the office and wear it so that it is visible at all times.
- No visitors should walk between parked buses or attempt to board school buses.
- No visitor should enter campus without properly signing in. This includes the playground and outdoor areas.
- Schools are drug free zones and smoke free zones and any person who "manufactures, disperses, distributes or possesses with intent to distribute certain controlled dangerous substances" within 1,000 feet of school property will be guilty of a felony offense. This includes school vehicles.

Visitors and Lunchroom Capacity

Our lunch tables are at or very near capacity during lunches and so we do not have additional space for visitors. If parents wish to have lunch with their child during the school day, a parent may sign their child out for lunch and return them to school afterward.

Instructional Practices

Report Cards/HAC

Progress reports are issued four times per year. Special area reports are provided two times per year; second and fourth marking periods. A standards-based report card has been adopted for students currently in Grades PreK – 5. Questions regarding the reporting system should be directed to your child's teacher.

MES Report Cards are printed and sent home and posted in the Home Access Center (HAC). If you have questions about grades or score reports, contact your child's teacher.

Parent Conferences

Conferencing between teachers and parents is highly encouraged. To this end, the SMCPS calendar designates a 2-hour early dismissal day in October for parent conferences. This is not enough time for our teachers to host individual conferences with every family. Teachers will reach out to families to schedule a conference if student progress suggests a conference should occur.

If you would like a conference, but have not been contacted, reach out to your child's teacher with the request and be sure to share specific concerns you have so the teacher can properly prepare with items such as related student work samples, data, and other information about student progress.

Our classroom teachers make efforts to offer a conference time that is mutually convenient to share important information with parents. Additionally, parents are encouraged to make appointments for conferences with teachers throughout the year.

Homework

MES recognizes that families have varied schedules and routines in the evening, and students have varied stamina for additional practice after a 7.5 hour school day.

Homework is to be considered extra practice and is not used to determine a student's progress marks. **It is recommended that all students read each night for a minimum of 20-30 minutes.**

Beyond reading, a copy of each grade level's homework practices will be provided to parents and students at the beginning of each school year, and as often as necessary, thereafter. Teachers will address the frequency, amount, type of homework you can expect, and the expected method for feedback to students. Your questions about homework should be addressed to your child's classroom teacher.

Classroom Placement

MES makes efforts to provide positive learning environments for all students. The school administrative team carefully reviews students' progress in all areas such as attendance, social/emotional skills, academic progress, etc. Using this information, students are placed in heterogeneous classes. It is not possible to create equitable classes while also accepting teacher specific requests from parents. If you have a concern about your child's classroom placement and would like to share details about the needed environment, you should provide information to the Principal in writing before the close of the prior school year. Examples of requests may include placement of twin siblings, ongoing peer conflicts, or specific student needs whether social, academic, or behavioral. The Principal is solely responsible for scheduling. No other staff member is able to act on such a request.

Homeroom assignments are made available approximately one week before the start of the school year using the HAC. Parents will be notified when schedules will be released each year.

Schedules

Lunch, Recess, and Specials schedules for the year are posted to our school website and your child's homeroom teacher will share the schedule with you as well.

Attendance

Regular school attendance is vital to student success. Efforts should be made for students to attend school at least 90% of the time. Sometimes chronic health issues make regular school attendance difficult. In such cases, parents should proactively contact the Counselor and Nurse to discuss options the school has for supporting students.

It is recommended that reporting an absence is done on our school's website using the Report a Student Absence link. The office will be notified immediately. Teachers will have access to the absence information that is entered by the office and will hold work until a student returns. Parents and guardians may request work from the teacher, and work might be available online via Schoology or can be left in the office for pickup. Teachers may not be able to provide work in advance if they have not yet copied or planned for the date of the absence.

Reasons for **lawful absences** are explained in the SMCPS Student Handbook. If a student is absent twenty-five (25) or more days, the student will be referred to the Pupil Services Team (PST) for consideration of retention for the following year. This includes lawful and unlawful absences.

The following reasons are deemed lawful absences:

- death in the immediate family;
- student illness, for which the principal may require a physician's certificate;
- court summons;
- hazardous weather conditions;
- work, if approved or sponsored by the school;

- observance of a religious holiday;
- state of emergency;
- medical/dental appointment
- pregnant and parenting students (refer to SMCPS Board Regulations JED-R, JHCG-R)
- suspension;
- lack of authorized transportation; and
- other circumstances which, in the judgment of the principal or designee, constitute a good and sufficient cause for absence from school.

Parents should write to the Principal to request approval for absences such as family travel or other circumstances beyond those listed in the SMCPS Student Handbook. For such requests, a review of student attendance records may be conducted to determine if the absence(s) will be marked as lawful.

Student Behavior/Discipline

Positive student conduct is essential to the total school program. Without it, students cannot realize opportunities for growth and the school cannot discharge its responsibilities. Students are responsible for following school rules and maintaining appropriate conduct.

MES students are expected to Keep it Respectful, Keep it Responsible, and Keep it Safe.

As a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) School, MES teaches and reinforces the expected behaviors in all settings. While most behaviors are handled in the classroom by teachers, very unsafe and persistently disruptive behaviors, will be referred to the Principal. The Principal or designee will investigate the incident, contact parents, and apply school discipline based on the SMCPS Student Code of Conduct. If such disciplinary action is deemed appropriate, a referral and consequences will be documented in the student's school record. The behaviors noted in the chart are appropriate to refer to the Principal.

- ➔ Behaviors that are causing harm to the student and/or others
- ➔ Disruption that is intentional, persistent, serious
- ➔ Behaviors that are significantly interfering with the learning of others (intentional, persistent, serious, and/or unsafe)
    - Fights/Attacks on Students (large, dangerous, pre-planned, extended, repeated, and/or resulting in injuries, students development and age should be considered)
    - Attacks on Staff
    - Weapons
    - Serious Threats
    - Harassment
    - Sexual Harassment or Inappropriate Physical Touching
    - Drugs/Alcohol
    - Theft (repeated or significant cost)
    - Serious Property Destruction
    - Bullying
    - Leaving Class (not knowing a student's location)

Dress Code

Students must follow the SMCPS Dress Code at school including during after-hours school events.

Cell Phones/Smart Watches

MES students are not permitted to use cell phones or smart watches during the school day. Such items should be stowed in backpacks with notifications silenced. If it is determined a student needs to contact a parent, the office phone may be used.

Meals

Breakfast And Lunch

All students attending the full school day have access to breakfast and lunch at school. Menus are accessible on the Mechanicsville Elementary Website. Be sure to check out the new menu features which include pictures of the entrée options and nutrition information.

Teachers and other staff are not authorized to deny a student food from the cafeteria. Parents will need to discuss with their child the expectations for purchasing school breakfast, lunch, and snacks. Parents can use My School Bucks to view purchases and make online payments to lunch accounts.

Money that is sent directly to our school cafeteria for a child's account should be put in a sealed envelope and properly labeled. Please include the child's first and last name and 6-digit ID number.

Teachers will make efforts to ensure that students remember to bring their packed lunches to the cafeteria. Students are not permitted to return to classrooms without adults. In the instance that a student forgets to bring their lunch to the cafeteria they will be required to purchase a school lunch.

Free Breakfast and Lunch Require an Application

Online applications are encouraged as they are processed more quickly. Easily fill out your new meal benefit form by visiting https://www.myschoolapps.com/Application on the www.smcps.org website. Families can request more information by contacting SMCPS' Food and Nutrition Services Office at 301.475.4256, Option 5, or via email at foodservice@smcps.org. In addition to meal benefits, perks include waivers on college applications, dual-enrollment courses with the College of Southern Maryland, and discounted fees to participate in St. Mary's County Parks and Rec programs.

Screencasts to assist you can be found at the following links.
Quick Start Guide to Meal Benefit Forms and (ii) Detailed Instructions on Filling Out Meal Benefit Forms.

Transportation: Arrival, Dismissal, Signing Students Out

Buses

When possible, riding school buses is encouraged. It assists with a smooth dismissal and is convenient for parents. Be sure you know your child's bus number and share that information with your child's teacher at the beginning of the school year. Riding the school bus is a privilege. Students are expected to follow expected bus behaviors. Failure to do so can result in the loss of bus riding privileges.

Students are expected to stay seated in their assigned bus seats, use a normal talking voice, listen to the driver's directions at all times, and follow all relevant school rules. Parents can help by discussing bus expectations with children and showing them the bus safety video on the SMCPS Transportation Website.

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students will get off the bus first and will be met at the door by a responsible person at least 13 years old. Buses will not wait at the bus stop if there is not a responsible person at the bus door to take custody of the Pre-Kindergarten and/or Kindergarten student. In this instance, the student will be returned to the school. Failure to follow this policy may result in a loss of bus riding privileges as explained in the SMCPS Handbook.

Bus Passes

St. Mary's County Public Schools will transport only those students assigned to a bus unless an emergency exists. Temporary passes are only approved for emergency purposes and all requests will be reviewed by the Principal or designee for approval.

Arrival

Students will be welcomed into the building beginning at 9:00 AM. No student can be left unattended prior to this time. Students who arrive after 9:05 must be signed in by an adult.

Dismissal

Student dismissal begins at 3:40.

Early departures during the school day require that a parent enter the school vestibule, sign the child out, and wait while the child is called to the office. A picture ID will be required.

We need parents' help with a smooth dismissal. It is not ideal to stop in the office to check your child out between the time of 3:00-3:45 PM. Between 3:00 and 3:45 PM, MES is handling the dismissal of 300+ students, and this requires the focus of the office staff, teachers, and support staff in order to be done safely. Any parent arriving after 3:30 pm for sign-out will be directed to join the car rider line with the required ID to pick up the child.

Other options include:

- Picking students up from the car rider line that begins at 3:40 PM. (contact the office in advance if your child is not a daily car rider)
- Checking your child out before 3:00 PM.

Signing Students Out

Individuals picking up students must be on the emergency contact list, or the office must be contacted by a guardian in advance. All individuals must show ID when signing out students.

Waiting in the office exposes students to sick students, places them around confidential conversations for extended periods of time, removes them from instruction, and keeps office staff from completing necessary tasks. Students will be called to the office once adults arrive. Plan your arrival accordingly.

Daily Pick-Up

Students that are going to be picked up on a **regular** basis must have this form on file in the office. The pick-up area is by the side of the gym. Students will be released for parent pick-up starting at 3:40 pm. **Placards must be displayed** in order to pick up a student in the daily pick-up line. If you do not have the placard, you must come into the office with a valid ID to sign out the student.

Pick-up/Drop-off Ride Line Procedures

- Pull as far forward as possible for loading/unloading.
- Keep goodbyes brief. If you need extra time, park in a designated space.
- Students will be directed to load/unload from the passenger side.
- Remain in the driver's seat.
- Do not pass other cars that are unloading.
- Do not park in the carpool lane and never leave the car unattended.
- Exit the carpool lane promptly after students have been secured.
- Vehicles enter from Old Village Road and exit on Three Notch Road (Rt. 5), taking a right turn to keep traffic flowing. No vehicle should turn around to exit on Old Village Road.

Students must be picked up by 4:00 PM, which marks the end of the staff duty day. If you have a family emergency that will prevent you from arriving on time, please contact the front office before 4:00 PM.

To ensure all students are safely dismissed, the car rider line concludes at 3:55 PM. Any student not picked up by that time will be taken to the front office. The following practice will be followed for families who are repeatedly late.

First Incident:

- The parent or legal guardian will be contacted and reminded of the school's expectations for on-time pickup.

Second Incident:

- A formal letter will be sent home to the parent or legal guardian, outlining the importance of timely pickup and noting that a third incident may result in a change in transportation.

Third Incident:

- **In district students:**
    - The student's car rider privileges will be suspended, and the family will be required to utilize their assigned bus transportation for one school week.
    - A formal letter will be sent home to the parent or legal guardian, outlining the importance of timely pickup.
- **Students on an approved student transfer request:**
    - The transfer agreement includes an expectation that students arrive and leave within normal school hours and that the principal retains the authority to recommend that the Director of Student Services/Director of Special Education revoke your son's/daughter's permission, and your son/daughter may be transferred back to his/her home school district.
    - A formal letter will be sent home to the parent or legal guardian, outlining the importance of timely pickup, and the Director of Student Services/Special Education will be copied.

Fourth Incident

- **In district students:**
    - The student's car rider privileges will be revoked, and the family will be required to utilize their assigned bus transportation for the remainder of the school year.
    - A formal letter will be sent home to the parent or legal guardian, outlining the importance of timely pickup.
- **Students on an approved student transfer request:**
    - The Principal will contact the Director of Student Services/Director of Special Education to request that the student transfer to their home school.

Health, Medicine, & Our School Nurse

For health-related information including when a child may attend school or should be kept home, immunizations, medication, or other forms visit the MES School Nurse webpage or contact our school nurse by phone or email drgregory@smcps.org.

Medicine

If medicine is required during the day, a medical form must be on file in the office. Medicine must be brought to school by an adult. Contact the School Nurse to make arrangements.

School Practices

Birthday Treats for Students

MES staff recognize that celebrating children on their birthday helps to provide a sense of belonging. In order to properly prepare for requests from families, parents should communicate to the teacher a minimum of 2 days in advance of providing birthday treats.

- Treats need to be dropped off at least **one hour prior** to lunchtime.
- The nurse needs to check for student allergies prior to food items being delivered to the classroom or cafeteria.
- Treats need to be labeled with the **student's name AND the teacher's name** by a parent or guardian.
- **Alternative items** such as stickers, pencils, fun erasers, or inexpensive toys such as stretchy frogs or plastic tops for the class can also be considered. Be sure to label them with the **student's name AND the teacher's name.**

Recess

Recognizing that outdoor activities are important to a child's development, MES makes every effort to continue with outdoor recess unless conditions are determined to be potentially unhealthy or unsafe. Indoor recess should be considered when the heat index rises above **105 degrees**, when temperatures drop below **32 degrees** and are potentially further lowered by wind chill, or when outside temperatures and conditions are deemed to be at unhealthy or unsafe levels.

Be sure that your child is dressed appropriately to participate based on weather conditions and is prepared with hats, gloves, and coats for colder temperatures.

Students must have safe behavior at recess in order to participate. Roughhousing and contact sports are not expected play at school recess as it is a behavior that frequently leads to larger conflicts and injuries. While these behaviors may be allowed in other settings they are not school appropriate. If these behaviors are noticed students will receive consequences such as a timeout, teaching and practicing of expected behavior, parental contact, or referral to the Principal.

Personal Items

Personal items brought to school can become a distraction to learning. To support a focused learning environment, students should leave toys, collectibles, trading cards, stuffed animals, and other non-school items at home unless specifically requested by a teacher.

If a student brings a toy or other non-school item to school, staff may ask the student to place it in their backpack, or the item may be held in the office until the end of the school day. Repeated incidents may require a parent or guardian to pick up the item from the office.

School Issued Devices

At MES, we are very fortunate that each of our students has a school-issued laptop to assist them with their learning. We also know that for our youngest learners bringing their devices back and forth each day can make their backpacks quite heavy and potentially lead to more damage to the devices. To assist students with proper laptop care, our school has access to locking laptop carts. These carts provide the opportunity to leave the laptop at school overnight.

While teachers will support and instruct students in understanding this responsibility, **students remain responsible for securing their laptops and caring for them**. Grade-level teams will communicate to students and parents the plan for managing laptops. For more information about laptop care see the STUDENT DEVICE & RESOURCE ACCOUNTABILITY section of the SMCPS website.

Lost and Found

MES makes efforts to return items to students. Lost and found items are located in the cafeteria for students to check during lunch. Additionally, lost and found items are displayed at our community gatherings. Finally, items will be displayed on ClassDojo. If they are unclaimed after these efforts, items will be donated to a charitable organization.