

OUR SISTERS' SCHOOL STUDENT AND FAMILY HANDBOOK



2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR

**The handbook is carefully reviewed each year and adjustments for the coming year are made each summer. We welcome feedback from and conversation with families and students. Please email Ms. Herman directly: sherman@oursistersschool.org to make suggestions for '24-'25.*

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The OSS Mission

Our mission, as an independent, tuition-free, non-sectarian middle school, is to educate and inspire economically disadvantaged girls from the New Bedford area. Our Sisters' School empowers girls to step into the future with valuable life skills and a mindset of achievement and excellence by providing a safe, supportive, and academically challenging environment.

The OSS Vision

Our Sisters' School is a day school for girls in Grades 5-8, providing a safe, supportive, and challenging educational program for students of all faiths in the New Bedford area. Founded by a coalition of residents from the South Coast region interested in education, OSS seeks to foster the academic competence, social confidence, cultural proficiency, intellectual curiosity, integrity, and hope of its students and to nurture the full potential of their whole character in a small school setting. Our goal is to help students become lifelong learners who will contribute productively to the world they inherit. The School's faculty and staff work closely with the students' families and other volunteers, building ties between school and community and developing the kinds of personal and institutional support that will ensure the continuing success of OSS students in high school, college, and later life.



A Little Bit of History

Our Sisters' School was established in 2007 by a group of professional, community-minded individuals desiring to improve educational opportunities for young women in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Our doors opened to the first group of students in 2008 and welcomed a group of 5th and 6th graders, who bravely led the way and were inspired by the legacy of Sister Sailors before them. The name of our humble yet powerful school traces back to New Bedford's historic whaling era, when it was uncommon for women to join seafaring whaling crews on extended voyages. Known as Sister Sailors, these brave women were seeking, on the far-flung oceans of the world, precisely what our students are seeking today: to sail beyond familiar horizons into unknown oceans of adventure, learning and possibility.



OSS Anti-racism Statement

At Our Sisters' School, we are committed to an inclusive and diverse community, dedicated to our core values of Excellence, Community, Civic Engagement, and Leadership. We condemn all forms of racism — individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic. We are diligent in identifying, discussing, and challenging issues of race and ethnicity to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in all of our work, including student, staff, volunteer, and trustee recruitment, anti-racist curriculum development, and community engagement. We pledge to address any inequities we discover, using just and fair practices to yield a better understanding of ourselves and our school.

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2023-2024 Our Sisters' School Calendar

*This calendar is subject to change

June

**Note: Summer is a wonderful time to volunteer at OSS, particularly if you are able to help us clean or move spaces as we prepare the campus between school years.*

June 27: Begin scheduled Summer Learning Support

July

Scheduled Summer Learning Support continues

August

August 1-4: Uniform fittings for ALL grades @ 13 Russells Mills Rd. in South Dartmouth by appointment with Kristen (774-473-7693). Kristen will also be at OSS on Aug 25th at the registration party, but remember that it takes approximately 3 weeks for supplies to arrive, so waiting means your student will likely be wearing old stuff for the first few weeks of school.

August 10: End Summer Learning Support

August 24: Practice SSAT @ OSS 10am-12pm (optional for 8th graders interested in applying to independent schools)

August 25: Community Bloom event: Required Meeting for ALL families 5-6:30

- Bring completed Summer Learning Plans, Registration paperwork, appetite, curiosity, questions and good cheer.

August 25: Summer Learning Plans Due by 5pm

August 29-31: ALL students @ Brantwood Camp, **Drop off 8/29 @ 8:00am, Pick up 8/31 @ 4:00pm**

September

Latinx Heritage Month 9/15-10/15

September 4: **No School** — Labor Day

September 5: First official day of classes, students in uniforms

September 5: SSR Launch

September 6: CBC begins

September 8: **12:15pm Dismissal** at West Beach — all-school OSS by the Sea Day

September 11: Begin Evening Study

September 15: T1 Clubs, GFB & Dendrites Selection during Club Time, ACE Launch

September 19: Secondary School Planning Meeting for all Grade 8 parents and students, 5:30-6:30pm

September 22: Dendrites Conference #1 9:45-12:00

September 22: Begin T1 Clubs

September 26: Secondary School Fair at OSS for grades 7 & 8

September 28: Spirit Day

September 30: Required Meeting for all Grade 8 parents & students interested in Independent Schools, 10:30am-12:00pm

September 30: Student exhibit of art and poetry at 4 Corners Gallery, Tiverton, 5-8pm

October

Latinx Heritage Month 9/15-10/15

- October 3: Tool Belt Awards during SSR
- October 4: Required Back to School Night, No Evening Study (This event is required for adults and optional for students)**
- October 6: **No School** — Professional Work Day
- October 9: **No School** — Indigenous Peoples' Day
- October 12: September/October All School Birthday Party during Lunch
- October 13: Mid-trimester progress reports distributed
- October 13: Fall Festival hosted by the Family Engagement Committee, 3:00pm- 5:00pm
- October 16-20: STEAM Week
- October 17: Comment Review/Goal Setting during SSR w/teachers & tutors
- October 18: **No School** — Professional Development Day for All Staff; MassCUE
- October 26: All School Trip to Museum of Fine Arts and Colleges of Fens 8:00am-4:15pm
- October 26: Shift from CBC sailing to Winter Program
- October 28: STEM4Girls @ UMass Dartmouth 9AM-2:30PM (student sign-up)

November

Native American Heritage Month and Hunger Heroes Can Drive

- November 1: NB schools kitchen closed, OSS students pack own lunch
- November 7: Tool Belt Awards during SSR
- November 7: Required Family Meeting: Celebration of Adolescence
- November 10: **No School** — Veterans' Day Observed
- November 17: End T1 Clubs
- November 20: T2 Clubs, Dendrites and GFB Selection
- November 21: Attitude of Gratitude 6 pm - 8pm (Graduate event + 8th grade)
- November 21: End of T1, Grades Close
- November 22: **No School** — Professional Work Day
- November 23-26: **No School** — Thanksgiving Break (school resumes Nov. 27)
- November 28: Begin Grade 8 Secondary School Application Focus Days (special AM schedule)
- November 28: Bridgewater University Trip- Grade 5 and 7, 8:15-2:30
- November 28: Bridgewater University Trip- Grade 6 and 8, 8:15-2:30
- November 30: Spirit Day

December

Human Rights Month

- December 1: T1 report cards go home in Friday Folders, Begin T2 Clubs
- December 2: Grade 8 SSAT Test, 8:45am–12:15pm (optional, for those interested in applying to independent schools)
- December 5: Comment Review/Goal Setting during SSR w/teachers & tutors
- December 6: T1 High Honors and Honors Awards during Community Meeting
- December 8: Dendrites Conference #2 9:45-12:00
- December 14: Spirit Day
- December 14: November/December All School Birthday Party during Lunch
- December 18: **3:15 Dismissal** — Portfolio Conferences
- December 19: **3:15 Dismissal** — Portfolio Conferences

- December 19: Tool Belt Awards and Fire Stamp Ceremony during SSR
- December 20: **No Classes** — Portfolio Conferences (all day)
- December 21: **No School** — Begin Winter Break

January

- January 1: **No School**
- January 2: **No School** — Professional Development Day
- January 3: Back to school
- January 15: **No School** — Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service (students and families service opportunities)
- January 19: Mid-trimester progress reports distributed
- January 22: NB schools kitchen closed, OSS students pack own lunch, Comment Review/Goal Setting during SSR w/teachers & tutors
- January 25: Spirit Day

February

Black(er) History Month

- February 6: Tool Belt Awards during SSR
- February 6: Required Family Meeting
- February 8: January/February All School Birthday Party during Lunch
- February 12-16: Spirit Week
- February 16: Music & Performance Showcase, T2 Clubs End
- February 19-23: **No School** — February Vacation
- February 26: Back to School, T3 Clubs, GFB, and Dendrites selection
- February 29: Spirit Day

March

Women's History and Climate Justice Months

- March 1: End of T2, Grades close, Begin T3 Clubs
- March 4: **No School** — Professional Development Day
- March 8: T2 report cards go home in Friday Folders
- March 13: T2 Honors and High Honors Awards during during Community Meeting
- March 15: Dendrites Conference #3 9:45-12:00
- March 26: Tool Belt Awards during SSR
- March 28: Spirit Day & Spirit Show
- March 31: Family Service Hours deadline for **8th grade** families

April

Climate Justice and Poetry Months

- April 1: **No School** — Professional Work Day
- April 11: March/April All School Birthday Party during Lunch
- April 12: Mid-Tri Report cards go home
- April 12: Spring Carnival during Clubs
- April 15-19: **No School** — Spring School Vacation
- April 22: Back to School, Comment Review/Goal Setting during SSR w/teachers & tutors
- April 22: All-school shift back to CBC Sailing

- April 25: Spirit Day
- April 25: Poem In Your Pocket Day- all school SSR Poetry event
- April 26: Volunteer Luncheon
- April 30: Active Civic Engagement (ACE) due

May

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

- May 5: Annual OSS Car Wash (no rain date)
- May 6-10: Teacher Appreciation Week
- May 7: Grade 7 SSAT practice test (all)
- May 7: Required Family Meeting
- May 10: End T3 Clubs
- May 14: Tool Belt Awards during SSR
- May 17: OSS Festival of Arts and Achievement and Garden Giveaway, 4-7:00pm
- May 20-23: All school Portfolio Prep time during SSR
- May 20: All-school morning FAA clean-up
- May 23: Spirit Day
- May 23: Portfolios due
- May 27: **No School** — Memorial Day
- May 29: **3:15 Dismissal** — Portfolio Presentations
- May 30: May/June/July/August All School Birthday Party during Lunch
- May 30: **3:15 Dismissal** — Portfolio Presentations
- May 31: **No Classes** — Portfolio Presentations (all day)
- May 31: T3 ends - Grades close, but can still be impacted before report cards are finalized

June

Pride Month

- June 3: **12:15pm Dismissal** — Closing Core Value Fire Stamp Ceremony and Core Academic Awards
- June 4: **12:15pm Dismissal** — Grade 8 Graduation
- June 5: **12:15pm Dismissal** — Last Day of School: Field Day & Yearbooks
- June 10-14: June School 9am-12pm
- June 21: T3 report cards mailed home

Required Events and Meetings <i>*Extra 2 hrs. of OSS service assigned for any missed Required Event or Meeting, regardless of the reason.</i>	Highly Suggested
Community Bloom Event - 8/25 Back to School Night - 10/4 Required Family Meeting - 11/7 Portfolio Presentations - 12/18, 12/19, 12/20 Required Family Meeting - 2/6 Required Family Meeting - 5/7 Portfolio Presentations - 5/29, 5/30, 5/31	Fall Festival by FEC MLK Day of Service Music & Performance Showcase Teacher Appreciation Week Car Wash Festival of Arts and Achievement

Our Sisters' School Core Values

As learners working together toward our mission, we are guided by four key values: Community, Civic Engagement, Leadership and Excellence. These values, and examples of the ways in which they infuse each aspect of the OSS experience, are outlined below.

Community is at the heart of why we're here. Our Sisters' School was founded by a team of community-minded citizens who chose to invest in the economically disadvantaged girls of New Bedford. They knew that helping middle school girls realize their potential creates a ripple effect of benefits – raising local achievement levels, elevating standards and expectations, and improving prospects across the community.



As an all-girls school, ineligible for state funding, we rely on our community's generous support to carry on our work. The community sustains us in other ways as well, populating our executive board, providing academic coaching, leading clubs and sports - all on a volunteer basis. Our community ties are also strengthened by partnerships with parents and families and by our alliances with other area nonprofits.

Our students know that their community values them, and they return this generous spirit through the second of our four core values: Civic Engagement.



Civic Engagement is lending a hand in spirit of service and activism. In addition to academic aspirations, Our Sisters' School promotes civic engagement values such as honesty, integrity, empathy, respect for others, justice, community service, activism and advocacy. Civic engagement reflects our students' deep sense of responsibility.

Whether it is serving as a mentor or advocate, interning at a local organization, or participating in Community Core Advisory, our students gain confidence, experience, and inspiration by giving back. Having regular opportunities to share their gifts with others helps students further develop as active members of their community, responsible citizens, and role models for others.

This commitment to civic engagement creates a strong foundation for the third of our four core values: Leadership.

Leadership is seeing, showing, and paving a better way. If we could, we would offer a classroom seat to every middle school girl in our area who wants to attend. However, limitations require us to prioritize and select among applicants. In addition to other qualities and competencies, we seek candidates who possess what we call the 'eye of the tiger.' By that we mean that they convey a focused determination and an attentive eagerness. They see promise in the future and have passion for what they and others can achieve.



During their time at Our Sisters' School, our students are empowered by a "growth mindset"

that links success to their own aspirations, through effort and courage. Students learn that acting with confidence is how we *build* confidence; it's how we learn, grow, and succeed. As leaders, our students take responsibility for gaining the skills and experiences that the pursuit of their dreams will require.

Leadership paves the way for the fourth of our four core values: Excellence.

Excellence is achieving mastery, one step at a time. Excellence is both the pinnacle and foundation of our journey. It is what we want to achieve, and how we achieve it, step-by-step. At Our Sisters' School, we promote excellence through what we call our ABC's - clear, compelling, uncompromising standards for Academic, Behavioral, and Community performance. We also cultivate excellence through a focus on deeper learning competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication and collaboration.



Anchored by a student-centered philosophy, our belief is that excellence requires all students to have a voice in their learning and to find meaning in their work. Our teaching strategies are designed to maximize the classroom learning experience, leveraging hands-on activities, cooperative learning and individualized, expressive tasks to achieve conceptual understanding of skills. While addressing academic skills and standards, we teach students how to learn effectively, to self-manage, and to self-assess.

When students graduate from OSS, we know they are stepping into the future with valuable skills, tools, and mindsets of achievement and excellence.

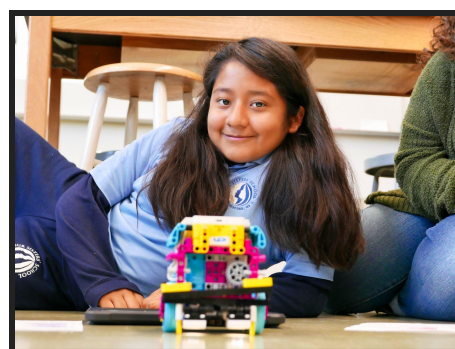
Equity, Justice, and Belonging

Our Sisters' School is committed to each Sister Sailor's greatness and growth. We embrace our rich social diversity--one of the greatest assets of our learning community. Every day we seek to build upon our strengths in service of our mission and create a more democratic, equitable, and antiracist school and society. Our EJB work is ever evolving throughout our structures, practices, and relationships. We aim to create and sustain the best environment possible in which each learner thrives and has access to opportunity, regardless of identity markers.

Our Equity, Justice & Belonging Leadership Team is composed of staff, students, families, Board of Trustees, and community volunteers. The EJB Leadership Team meets monthly to help us listen to needs, take action, and hold ourselves accountable while we continuously learn, improve, and celebrate.

For more information, go to <https://www.oursistersschool.org/equity-justice-belonging>.

THE OSS SCHOOL DAY



School Office Hours:

Monday-Thursday: 8:15am to 5:15pm

Friday: 8:30am to 3:00pm

Once a student is in our supervised care, they become our responsibility and cannot go off campus without permission and supervision. If a child is missing (ie: off campus without permission) we'll call the police.

Tardiness:

Any student who has not entered the building and/or is not prepared to begin the day before 8:10am Monday–Thursday, and 8:40am on Fridays must report to the school office to sign in, and they will be marked tardy. Families are expected to accompany their student into the front office to co-sign when a student is more than 15 minutes tardy.

Students who are tardy more than six (6) times or who are absent from school more than six (6) days in any one month will be referred for a conference.

We closely track tardiness at OSS to build habits for secondary schools, where student promptness is always enforced. Here is a quote from a high school admissions counselor to our Secondary Schools Placement Director, illustrating the importance of prompt habits: *"I have a question regarding X's attendance record. She has an excessive number of unexcused tardies. Many of them are just a few minutes late, but they are nonetheless, unexcused tardies. Is there something I should understand about this candidate before I move on?"*

Absences:

If a student must be absent, their parent or guardian should notify the School by calling or emailing absence@oursistersschool.org to let us know they'll be out. Students should not be the ones to communicate their own absences.

The Massachusetts General Law (Chapter 76, Section 2) specifies that a student under sixteen years of age may not be absent more than seven (7) unexcused days of scheduled school in any six (6) month period. Families/ guardians are required under the law to ensure regular school attendance of their children and are subject to penalty by fine for failure to comply with the law.

Absences are *excused* in the case of illness, emergency, or when the School grants that it is in the best interest of the student to miss school, and the student is in good standing with the school. Whether by email or on paper, a note must be submitted to the front office 24-48 hours after your child returns, or the absence will be considered unexcused.

If a student is absent for more than three (3) consecutive days for a medical reason, a doctor's note must be included for the absence to be excused. Students are responsible for completing all work missed and should proactively ask a teacher or a classmate for details so it can be completed promptly upon their return to school.

Families are required to request permission for a student to be absent for unusual circumstances, such as family travel. The family must complete an Official OSS Time Out of School Request Form **four (4) weeks** prior to the start of the requested vacation. Families that fail to complete the request form four (4) weeks prior to travel, or do not have the request

officially granted by the Head of School will be required to complete additional Family Service Hours billed at one (1) hour per day the student is absent. It is a burden on the School to accommodate student absences, so a formal request to the Head of School via the Official Request form is essential. **Accordingly, unless discussed and approved in advance by the Head of School, students are not excused from school for anything other than a family or medical emergency.**

Early Dismissal Protocol: Families/guardians must come to the main office to sign out a student for early dismissal. In order for a dismissal to be excused, there must be a medical reason, family emergency, or special permission given from the administration. If a student is dismissed for a medical appointment, upon return to school, the student may be required to bring a doctor's note for the dismissal to be excused. Students will NOT be dismissed early on an ongoing basis without permission from the Head of School.

Transportation

Families/guardians must make arrangements to have their children dropped off **at 8:00 AM Monday–Thursday and at 8:30 AM on Friday**, and to have their children picked up **by 4:15 PM Monday–Thursday (unless a student participates in Evening Study) and 3:00 PM on Friday**.



If your child is not riding the bus, please consult the OSS Family Directory to contact other families and arrange for alternative transportation for your child. To ensure safety, if you are carpooling outside of the OSS community, you must register the new driver with OSS and make sure all parties give consent to the new driver.

Families are expected to pick up their student promptly at dismissal. In the event that a family is late picking up their student, the family will be given a 15-minute grace period, then billed in 15-minute increments for any time thereafter at \$20.00 per hour. The accrued amount can be paid off by working extra Family Service Hours or by making a money payment at the end of the school year. *Tardy pick-ups on weekends are particularly unfair to staff.* We recommend that weekend late drivers also send an appreciation note with a thank-you gift certificate for a cup of coffee or a sandwich to the teacher who waited on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon with your child. Really.

If transportation to and from OSS is simply impossible for your family, please communicate with the Head of School. We'll help as we are able.

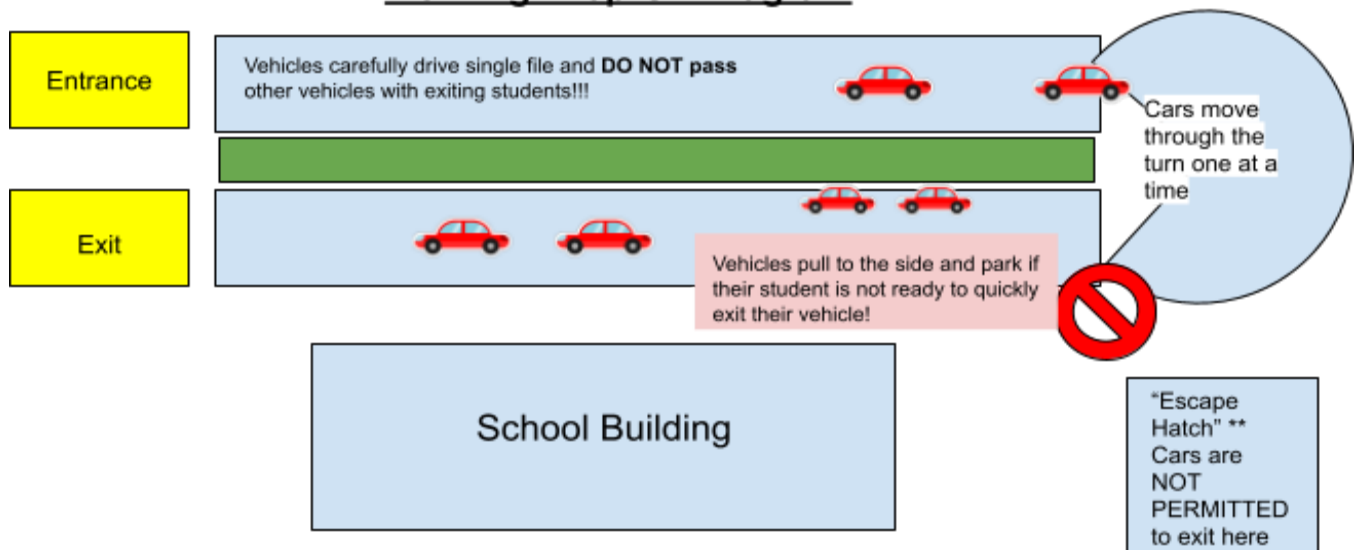
Morning Drop-Off Protocol: Drop-Off occurs over approximately 10 minutes and typically does not have OSS staff outside to supervise, so therefore adult drivers are asked to be vigilant about student safety.

- Vehicles should ALWAYS be in a single file and NEVER drive around another vehicle. Please wait until the line moves before driving forward.
- The first three (3) cars in line may release their students and students are to walk IN FRONT of their own vehicles and to the walkway to the school.
- If you or your student need more than 20 seconds to exit the vehicle (e.g., they have to get a large project from the trunk, have to collect belongings from around the vehicle,

Friday Folder still needs to be signed, etc), please park your vehicle and attend to what you need, then get back in the Drop-Off lane.

* Note, OSS doors open at 8:00am and not before. Students are not permitted on campus before 8am or after 5:15 without adult supervision.

Morning Drop-Off Diagram

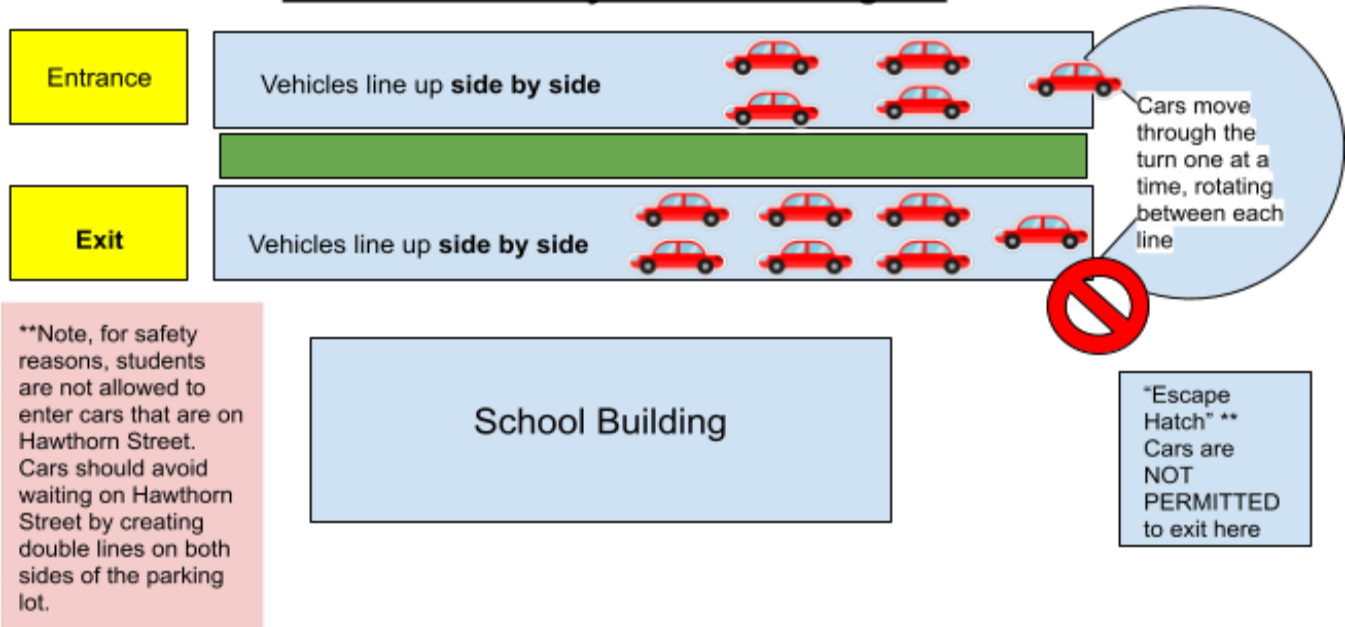


Dismissal Pick-up Protocol:

Vehicles should create two (2) lanes in both parking lots to prevent vehicles from having to be parked on Hawthorne Street. Note: this is DIFFERENT from drop-off when we only have one (1) lane.

- Students and supervising staff will walk between the 2 lanes of cars and students will enter their vehicles as they pass.
- **Vehicles should remain parked and completely still when students are walking in the lot.** This is imperative for student safety! Even if there is a "gap" between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you, please keep your vehicle parked until an OSS staff releases the line.
- Vehicles are expected to exit onto Hawthorn Street after passing the front door of the school. Vehicles are not permitted to use the "escape hatch" around the synagogue.

End of School Day Dismissal Diagram



**** Students in cars that violate our prescribed and agreed upon traffic patterns for either Drop-Off or Dismissal will receive a written warning from the school, after which point a student rider will serve a Silent Reflection on behalf of their driver.****

Family Engagement



All OSS community members contribute time, energy, and talent to our success, including families. Families play a critical role in partnering with the School to provide a quality educational experience for all students. Students and their guardians sign an agreement letter indicating their full commitment to the goals of OSS, and to high academic and personal standards. Demonstrated commitment is a condition for continued enrollment at OSS.

The **Family Engagement Committee** helps ensure that the School is aligned with family needs, desires and expectations. The committee includes OSS staff, OSS primary caregivers – including at least two representatives from each class, and supportive local community members. Meetings take place monthly and all families are welcome to participate in the work.

Families are expected to contribute to the OSS community by:

Family Service Program:

1. Families are required to commit to a minimum of 15 hours of service per family, per

academic year. This only includes service *to the School* (community service outside of the school, like independently volunteering at church or a community organization, does not count towards Family Service Hours).

2. Any service *to the School* or tasks that directly impact the school qualify as family service hours. Families can participate by helping to keep our building clean, morning supervision for students, helping put together classroom materials for teachers, etc.
3. Family service hours must be scheduled with the School prior to completion. Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator to schedule service hours. Our Volunteer Coordinator will be more than happy to work with families finding times and tasks that are mutually suitable.
4. Family Service Hours must be recorded in the Family Service Log in the office or shared with the Volunteer Coordinator via email and confirmed by an OSS staff member, as applicable. It is the family's responsibility to correctly record their hours. It is further suggested that families maintain their own record of hours they have completed.
5. Children and family members age 18 or older may help complete service hours for the family. Families will receive hours per person volunteering. (For example, if a parent and a sibling age 19 rake leaves for the school for two (2) hours, the family receives four (4) hours of service.) However, younger siblings can be distracting so please do communicate with the Volunteer Coordinator before choosing to bring them for volunteer hours. OSS students cannot complete service toward family service hours.
6. Some types of family service will require the completion of background checks; please check with the Volunteer Coordinator for more information.
7. For each academic year, family service begins July 1st and runs through mid- to late-May. The expectation is that families with balances will pay or work off the remaining hours before the last day of school.
8. *Family Service Hours that are not completed by the end of May will be billed at \$20/hr. Transcripts and report cards will be withheld from families whose balances are not zeroed out. Eighth graders with balances will not walk at graduation.*

Volunteer Drivers:

One very helpful way to fulfill family service hours is by becoming a volunteer family driver who transports students for field trips and other activities off-campus. All volunteer drivers must have a current CORI check, a valid driver's license, proof of current insurance for the vehicle they will be driving, and an acceptable driving record. They must further understand that they are only protected by their own insurance policies.

Admissions Outreach and Recruitment:

Another very helpful way to complete service is through outreach and recruitment of new student applicants. As with driving, outreach must be organized and documented with the Head of School before hours can be counted.

Required Family Meetings:

Our required family meetings allow us to embrace the input of our families and clearly

communicate aspects of school life. **It is mandatory that every student have a parent/guardian or family representative (over the age of 18) present at every meeting.** Check the calendar for meeting dates and times. **Families who fail to attend regular family meetings will be expected to complete two (2) additional service hours for each missed meeting,** regardless of explanation or reasoning. Family representatives checking in 15 minutes or later after the start time of the Family Meetings will not receive credit for attendance to that meeting and will be billed accordingly. Similarly, the expectation is that family members stay for the entire meeting; leaving more than 15 minutes early may not warrant credit.

Portfolio Meetings:

Students reflect upon and share their learning a minimum of twice a year at portfolio conferences (December) and presentations (June). It is required that the student and a family member both attend. Additional meetings may be held throughout the year at the request of a student, guardian, or teacher.

Annual Activities Fee:

Our Annual Activities Fee is the annual contribution families commit to our school. It is an important part of the OSS budget that helps us provide for our Sister Sailors. Families will contribute the equivalent of \$25.00 per month for the ten months of the school year (\$250.00 total per year) for each child attending Our Sisters' School. Payment should be made in full at the START of the school year. In difficult circumstances, alternative plans can be made with the Head of School. **Report cards and transcripts are not released for students whose accounts are not at a zero balance; a student may not be eligible to return. Eighth graders with balances cannot walk at graduation.**



If the Annual Activity Fee creates a significant financial hardship for your family, please contact the Head of School to discuss the possibility of other arrangements. Please anticipate that the Annual Activity Fee is likely to shift from a fixed amount to a sliding scale; the fee will be based on income documentation (1040's) which must be fully submitted each spring.

As is convenient for you, use cash, check or Venmo to pay an OSS bill.

Food at OSS

Healthy Choices:

Children benefit from eating healthy foods¹. **Unhealthy fast food, soda, coffee and candy brought from outside are prohibited.** Sugary snacks are discouraged, but a few cookies or a small amount of chips are acceptable--please keep it reasonable. Personal size servings are appropriate; large sharing size bags are not allowed.

Water Bottles:

Reusable water bottles are highly encouraged and can be brought in from home or purchased from the school for \$2.00. Water bottles can be refilled throughout the day at our filtered water bottle filling station. Single-use plastic bottles are strongly discouraged.

¹ <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/current-dietary-guidelines/resources-everyone/tools-professionals>

Breakfast:

Students have the option of enjoying a free breakfast delivered from the New Bedford Public School System or eating breakfast at home before coming to school. Please help your child make healthy dietary choices. Research has shown that children who regularly eat breakfast have better behavior and academic outcomes than children who skip breakfast. Healthy breakfast options are high in protein and whole grains but low in added or processed sugar. Breakfast begins at 8:00 am Monday through Thursday, and at 8:30 am on Fridays.

Lunch:

Students have the option of enjoying a free lunch delivered from the New Bedford Public School System or bringing their own lunch from home. If choosing to order a lunch, students must be present during homeroom to submit their order. Otherwise, we expect them to come prepared with their own lunch. Lunches are stored in student lockers, and there are no microwaves available to warm food.

**COVID-19 SAFETY**

Breakfast, lunch with unstructured play time (recess) and Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) are all very important parts of the OSS day that will continue on a daily basis. The following systems help us eat comfortably, play safely, and build social relationships.

- Before and after eating a meal, all community members are encouraged to wash hands with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer.
- On most days (all conditions except extreme cold, heavy rain or thunderstorm), we eat lunch and enjoy recess in the Outdoor Classroom.
- Snacks are not allowed during classes, and are not encouraged between classes.

Evening Snack: Students *are* encouraged to bring a light snack to enjoy at the beginning of Evening Study. Snacks should be quick and tidy ex: fruit, cheese sticks, granola or cereal bars.

Drinks in classes: Water is the ONLY drink permitted in classrooms, and students are strongly encouraged to bring a reusable water bottle to school. Our respect for the environment discourages use of disposable (even recyclable) single-use bottles.

Drinks at lunch: Students are allowed milk, juice, and sports drinks at lunch in the Community Room and outdoors **only**. Soda and caffeinated drinks are never allowed at school in any season, nor are outside, branded beverages such as hot cocoa or coffee.

Eco-Friendly Packaging When Possible

OSS provides free breakfast and lunch through the New Bedford Public School System. We appreciate the resources that come to us and will serve them even though they create a lot of packaging trash. Our goal is to reduce waste (especially plastics!) and develop strategies to reuse and recycle even more over time. Along these lines, when we host family picnics, we appreciate that paper or recyclable plates and/or utensils are provided. Styrofoam plates, for example, are not recyclable nor biodegradable.

Morning and Closing Homeroom

Homeroom is an important part of the schedule that promotes organization habits, individual and collective focus, clear communication, community-building, self-regulation, and leadership. We teach students to maximize homeroom minutes. They must **read the Morning Message** and **organize** personal supplies and materials for the day. The homeroom teacher will check for any **uniform** infraction and handle it swiftly and politely. **Lunch orders** are taken and promptly delivered to the front office along with notes, Friday Folders, and other materials. Teachers enter **Attendance** into Gradelink.

What can students do once they are organized for the day?

1. Check their OSS email
2. Review for any upcoming tests or quizzes
3. Print out assignments (homeroom is NOT a time to complete daily homework)
4. Make a quick trip to the bathroom or fill a water bottle
5. Return or check-out a library book
6. Help others

Closing Homeroom is in our schedule for calm and thorough **personal organization and clean-up** at the end of each day.

Homework



Homework is an integral part of an OSS education that provides an opportunity to practice skills, reinforce content, as well as complete classwork. Becoming a self-directed learner includes developing time management habits; some homework can help to this end. Teachers assign daily homework and often over the weekends and school vacations. We intend to match homework expectations for each class and individual to their developmental needs.

Each student should carefully record all homework assignments in their agenda

planner when it is announced. Most students will complete homework at home. Students may choose or be invited to attend Evening Study. Depending on their work habits and needs, Evening Study participants may have to dedicate additional time at home to the careful completion of their assignments.

Consequences for missing assignments are up to each individual teacher's discretion. Through our MTSS process, *teachers will refer students for a family conference if a student routinely struggles to complete homework.*

Evening Study



- Evening Study will be offered by choice and invitation four (4) nights per week. Evening Study is supervised by OSS staff and volunteers from 4:15pm to 5:15pm, Monday through Thursday, and is designed to meet the following objectives:
- To provide a **very** quiet, comfortable, safe, and productive environment for students to complete their homework assignments.
- To provide academic coaching on schoolwork and assignments.

Expectations for Evening Study:

Arrival:

1. Students enter quietly and begin work at their desks as close to 4:15pm as they can.
2. Students may snack only at the start of Evening Study, at the discretion of the supervising staff.

Dismissal:

1. **Evening Study ends promptly in time for our dismissal when “cars should be rolling at 5:15.”** Cleanup needs to be as efficient as possible so that students maximize work time, clean thoroughly and depart the building on time.
2. Chromebooks need to be in the cart, plugged in, and accounted for. All students are responsible for their own Chromebook.
3. Students tidy their classroom before being dismissed; personal belongings need to be collected and the floor needs to be free of debris.
4. Lights are turned off, windows are closed, and the students line up quietly in the hallway until they are dismissed.
5. The teacher then follows the class outside, through the passage of cars, and back up to the front door, ensuring students get safely into proper cars.
6. Supervisors expect respectful, cooperative student behavior and will let the Head of School know if expectations are not met. *Supervisors will let the Head of School know if a child’s ride is more than 15 minutes late for pick-up.*

Active Civic Engagement (ACE) Commitment

Each school year students participate in service, advocacy, or activism that match their interests and impacts the wider community outside of OSS. Each student will **log all** their ACE actions and **formally reflect upon at least one (1) action** in writing and in their spring portfolio presentation. ACE actions must be approved by the Head of School or Volunteer Coordinator before beginning the action.

Students will self-manage and self-assess on a regular basis with teacher support. Students will submit at least two (2) drafts of any reflection form to the designated teacher. The most **complete and compelling** draft will be printed and live in the student’s portfolio. The Volunteer Coordinator will also keep a copy of each student’s form(s). The ACE commitment must be fulfilled in order to graduate or advance to the next grade. If the ACE commitment is not met by the due date, the student will serve a Saturday service day as assigned by the

Volunteer Coordinator where they will complete the required form and perform service around the school until the dismissal time.



School Uniform and Dress Code

Why? The OSS school uniform and the dress code help us learn without distractions from clothing and accessories. They help us look and feel like a team, unified and ready to play and work together. They help us be ready for action, allowing us to move freely and comfortably. Many students and families express enthusiasm for our dress code when they apply to OSS.



Finances should never prevent a student from being in uniform, and OSS will help families in need. Families for whom purchasing the uniform would add financial strain should contact the Head of School.

If a student is not in compliance with the dress code, the student is likely to receive a silent reflection and/or be asked to go home and change, or hand an item (smart watch, hoodie, etc.) to their teacher or to the Head of School until the end of the school day. **The School reserves the right to determine the dress code.**

WARM LAYER TOP:

- **Navy blue sweatshirts or an athletic jacket** with the school logo.
- **Solid navy blue sweatshirts or fleeces** of the same style but without the OSS logo are an option (no other prints, words, or designs).

These are the only allowable warm top options. Jackets and warm layer tops in other styles cannot be worn inside the school building.

POLO SHIRT TOP:

- **OSS polo shirts (short or long sleeve)** from the School's provider that fit as designed.
- OSS sports shirts are also allowed and can be ordered through the School's provider.
- During cold weather, a long-sleeve layer underneath the short-sleeve OSS top is allowed. Long sleeve underlayers must be solid navy blue, light blue, white, tan, or brown.

Students will be considered out of uniform if their shirts are much too big, too small or too short.

BOTTOMS:

- **Solid navy blue athletic pants, shorts, or skirts/skort**s unless otherwise notified. Not leggings.
- Skirts must at least reach fingertips, and because we often play and exercise in fitness, shorts can be worn under skirts. If tights are worn, they must be school appropriate and not ripped.

Please consider the weather when selecting bottoms. We spend so much time outside!

SHOES:

- So that we are always ready for sports, field trips, sailing, or walks to the zoo, **sneakers must be worn at all times at OSS** and are the only acceptable footwear.
 - Sneakers must have non-marking soles (*i.e. cannot leave marks on gym floor*).
 - Sneakers must be fastened at all times. *Students who are unable to manage their shoe laces will be asked to acquire sneakers that don't need to be tied.*
 - Sneakers may get dirty--OSS is not the place for pristine footwear.
 - Sneakers should not be a financial burden to families, be distracting, nor create negative social dynamics or peer pressure. *Please use your judgment and keep it simple in the spirit of functionality, comfort, and community.*
- **Winter boots:** During the winter months, students may wear winter boots to school but must change into their sneakers as soon as they arrive. Boots must be stored inside student lockers until dismissal or lunch for warm, wintry play.

STEP IT UP OPTION:

Students are strongly encouraged to also have a nice pair of **khaki pants and/or skirt** for special events. Students will be notified when it is appropriate to wear khaki bottoms.

ADDITIONAL ACCESSORIES:

1. Artificial fingernails and eyelash extensions are not allowed.
2. Headphones are not worn as attire. They are only used in classes as approved by the supervising teacher.
3. Inside the school building, no hats (except for OSS issued winter hats) or sunglasses can be worn.
4. Coats are permitted only for outdoor activities.
5. Watches are permitted, however "smart watches" are not. Any wristwear or other body wear that connects to the internet or can be used as a phone is not permitted.
6. If you wear something valuable, it is your responsibility. We may not be able to help you recover lost items.

PACE Passes:

Students can earn a dress down pass for achievements such as Tool Belt Award, Honor Roll and birthday celebrations. In order to ensure school photos are consistent in appearance, students may NOT use a Pace Pass on school picture day.

Communicating Student Progress & Achievement

Our Sisters' School views families as partners in monitoring progress and achievement for students, and creates numerous opportunities for communication around student learning. Teachers and caregivers may communicate by email and phone in addition to using the following systems:

Gradelink

OSS teachers regularly document student progress on classwork and homework assignments;

assessments like quizzes, tests, and projects; as well as personal habits and use of Community Core tools. Grades and sometimes descriptive notes are entered into Gradelink, our online data management system. Students and families are assigned their own login information which allows them to access Gradelink at any time.

Printed Progress Reports

Toward the end of each month students bring home two copies of their progress reports, one for their family to keep and one to be signed and returned to the office each Monday morning. Mid-trimester progress reports usually include narrative comments written by teachers. *Silent reflections are assigned to students who fail to return signed Friday Folder materials on time.*

Report Cards

Printed report cards are published and sent home at the end of each trimester.

Portfolio Meetings

Students reflect upon and share their learning a minimum of twice a year at portfolio conferences (December) and presentations (June). Additional meetings may be held throughout the year at the request of a student, guardian, or teacher.

Portfolios and our conversations about them provide a system to track and celebrate student growth over time. Families, students and faculty are required to attend meetings. Students lead them, presenting selected pieces of work to their families and highlighting their learning, their strengths, and their remaining challenges. We also discuss goals for the coming term, as well as areas where families and faculty can provide additional support to students. Portfolio presentations are essential for transitions between grades as they help teachers, families, and students recognize progress and evaluate preparedness for the next grade.

OSS Grading Scale

A+	97-100	A	94-96	High Honor Roll: All grades 90 and above
A-	90-93	B+	87-89	Honor Roll: All grades 84 and above
B	84-86	B-	80-83	
C+	77-79	C	74-76	
C-	70-73			
NY	69 or less ("Not Yet" or below grade level standard)			
IC	Incomplete			

Student Promotion, Retention & Invitation to Return

When making decisions about a student's promotion to the next grade level, the School reviews a wide range of data including the student's academic grades, standardized assessment results, qualitative teacher observations of the student, and the student's social and emotional maturity. If a student is struggling at OSS, families will see this reflected in comments and grades, particularly on mid-trimester progress reports and end-of-trimester report cards. Students may be required to attend tutoring or additional support services.

In some cases, the School may mandate retention as a condition of enrollment or may retain a student with passing grades if the team feels it is in the best interest of the child. Every attempt

will be made to communicate possible pathways and include families on decisions as early on as possible, recognizing that year-end assessment data will also be used in making these decisions and may not be available until near the conclusion of the school year.

At the end of each school year, students may be issued a letter inviting them to return. An invitation to return will not be granted in the case of failure by either the student or the family to fulfill school expectations (financial, academic, behavioral and/or community). The student will be unenrolled from OSS.

Electronics

Telephone, Email and Social Media Usage: Students are not permitted to use school telephones or personal cell phones unless permission is granted by a staff person. Students will not be disturbed during class time or activities to receive non-emergency telephone calls. We prefer that students who don't feel well at school request to call home from a school phone rather than privately contacting families so that we can do our best to support the student. Use of social media is prohibited unless specifically directed by a teacher.

Headset and music use: The general rule is that students are **not** permitted to listen to music on headphones during class or any other time. Teachers are allowed to make exceptions in special circumstances. Student headsets are meant for academic purposes: e.g. language class or science video.

Use of Unauthorized Electronics:

The School reserves the right to confiscate any unauthorized item in the student's possession on school premises, including but not limited to toys, games and other unauthorized devices.

All electronics must be turned off and remain in a student's locker during the school day. Guardians may pick up confiscated items from the Head of School.

Cell Phones:

Cell phones are allowed to be carried into the school building, and must be immediately turned off and stored in student lockers, never to be seen or heard while in the building.



On occasion, teachers may allow students to use personal cell phones during instruction to aid in a project that is enhanced by the use of technology. The teacher will clearly explain expectations including the start and end times that cell phones are allowed to be out and in use. Students are expected to return cell phones to the off position and place them back in their lockers immediately after permissible classroom use.

Non-class specific cell phone usage is never permitted in the building and only very limited and responsible use of cell phones is permitted during field trips. *If use is deemed irresponsible, a teacher will take the phone and deliver it to the Head of School to be retrieved after school hours by a parent or guardian.*

Chromebooks (notice [Chromebook Contract at end of Handbook](#))

1:1 Laptop Responsibility Contract Description

Students participating in the OSS 1:1 program will be issued a school-owned Chromebook and a laptop charger for use on campus. A limited number of Chromebooks for home use are available for check-out.

Expectations for Responsibility and Internet Safety

Students must be responsible, honest, and appropriate with their laptops. Students and parents/guardians will be held responsible for any violations that occur and families will be responsible for lost, damaged, or misused equipment. OSS is committed to fostering Internet safety. While using your school-issued Chromebook, OSS provides appropriate content filtering. Any attempts to defeat or bypass the OSS network or to modify the Chrome operating system may result in administrative disciplinary action.

Third Party Applications

OSS is absolved of all responsibility as it relates to student use/purchase of any and all third party applications.

Games

Unless specifically directed by a teacher, students may not play games on an OSS laptop. At OSS we value community and social time, and laptop games detract from our collaborative culture. Students who choose to play games during school hours will face disciplinary action.

Guidelines for caring for your laptop

- Chromebooks are put away in their charging stations when students are not using them.
- When students unplug their Chromebooks from the charging station, they must do so gently. It is very easy to break a Chromebook by yanking out a charger.
- Students may not carry around a laptop with the screen open, or hold it in one hand.
- Food and drinks may not be out around computers.
- The screen must be visible to the teacher, on a flat, safe surface (but not the floor).
- School ID stickers and labels may not be removed from a Chromebook. If a label needs to be repaired, the student should notify Ms. LeBlanc. If the student picks at or removes the label, that student will be assigned a Silent Reflection.
- Remember, Chromebooks are the property of OSS. Do not try to repair or take apart any part of your laptop, and do not write, draw, paint, or place stickers/labels on them.

* Students are responsible for the laptop they have been issued. Laptops damaged or in need of repair must be reported immediately. Students will write an incident report and give the damaged laptop to the Director of Operations who will meet with the Head of School. The student will be issued a replacement laptop as soon as possible so as not to interfere with their academics. Parents will be notified of the damage and associated cost as soon as possible.

Current Charge Structure for Chromebooks:

- Damaged beyond repair, lost or stolen laptop: \$275
- Broken key(s) or USB-C port: \$200
- Deep scratches, chipped plastic, or cuts to the rubberized surfaces: \$75

- Damaged, lost, or stolen power adapter: \$35

Illness and Medication

If a student must be absent, their parent or guardian should notify the School by calling or emailing absence@oursistersschool.org to let us know they'll be out. We'll coordinate health and academic support from there. Students should not be the ones to communicate their own absences.

If students become ill during the school day, they should let their teacher know so that they can receive care. The teacher will ensure the student is supported by an adult.

The School cannot offer full day sick care. Families/guardians must make arrangements to have their sick children taken home. In the school registration process, each family must provide the name of an adult who will be responsible for the child if a parent/guardian cannot be reached in the case of illness or other emergency. It is critical that caregivers keep the school informed of any changes in emergency contact arrangements. If neither the parents/guardians nor the emergency contact person can be reached, the school will act in what they consider to be the best interest of the child, including sending the student to the emergency room for treatment or further diagnosis as needed.

Infectious disease control measures that are practiced at OSS include compliance with state immunization requirements for school entry, the use of universal precautions, and the use of illness stop-spread prevention guidelines, which may involve temporary exclusion of a child from school. Communicable diseases or conditions that warrant exclusion include, but are not limited to: lice, chicken pox, strep throat and conjunctivitis (pink eye). If your child is diagnosed with any communicable disease, please call to inform the school. A student may return to school after a diagnosis of strep throat after being on antibiotics for 24 hours. Similarly, a student is not allowed back until they have been fever free for 24 hours after an illness. *(Please see COVID-19 Protocols section.)*

All medications, including over-the-counter medications, brought to school should be delivered to the main office by PARENTS/GUARDIANS along with the appropriate documentation. Students will NOT be permitted to self-administer medication without an Authorization for Dispensing Medication form signed by the parent/guardian and/or a Medication Order completed and signed by a licensed prescriber. Medicines should be delivered to the School in a container labeled by a pharmacy or manufacturer.

Over-the counter cough drops of any sort are allowable as long as they are consumed discreetly, responsibly and are not shared. In the event that cough drops are shared, become distracting or are consumed like candy rather than like medication, the student will be asked to deliver the cough drops to the office and may retrieve them at the end of the school day.

The School will make a very limited number of over-the-counter medications (OTC) available to students. Only students who have a signed authorization from families/guardians will be allowed to self-administer the following medications:

OTC Product	Dosage	Frequency
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Acetaminophen Regular Strength 325 mg 1 tablet

Ibuprofen Regular Strength 200 mg 1 tablet

Each student is required to have up-to-date immunizations and an annual physical examination. Documentation of both must be provided to OSS on an annual basis, before the 1st day of school.

In Case of an Emergency

- In the case of a student crisis, we will call the appropriate services: police, ambulance, or crisis center and inform the family.
- In the case of a school-wide emergency, such as a lockdown or fire, we will inform families as quickly as possible.
- If a student is missing, we will check the building and school grounds thoroughly, contact the family immediately, and call the police.
- Professionals (teachers, staff, etc.) who work with children are mandated reporters for any observed or suspected abuse.
- In case of a building evacuation requiring relocation, the designated meeting location is the Buttonwood Education Center at the Zoo.



COVID-19 Protocols

Our number one priority remains the health, safety, and wellness of our community members.

Vaccination for COVID-19

We very strongly encourage vaccination for eligible children and adults. If a student is vaccinated, please provide vaccination details to the school to be added to their health record. Please also inform if and when a student has tested positive for COVID-19. This will help speed our understanding of community immunity and help us to make programming decisions as the year progresses.

We know there may be some who have questions about vaccinations, and we encourage you to contact Nurse Gale Beaton as you need. Staying healthy is still a collective effort -- higher vaccination rates allow for more vibrant, relaxed learning and community experiences.

Facial Masks

We understand that the virus most effectively spreads person to person through airborne respiratory droplets and that facial coverings are a very strong first prevention tool. OSS will

take a conservative approach and at any point, may require that all staff, learners, and visitors wear mask facial coverings over both nose and mouth *when indoors and students are present*.

All OSS staff and students should have several masks ready for use. Also, the School has plenty of masks available to anyone who needs them.

Hygiene Routines

Handwashing and Sanitizer

Handwashing and sanitizing are part of our routines and rituals and are always great habits to practice. Hand sanitizer will be available and easily accessible; washing with soap and water is even better.

- Before and after lunch, all community members will wash hands with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer.
- Students will have assigned locations (bathrooms, media lab, art studio, outdoors) to reduce the number of people waiting for a sink.

Flu Shots

Given that mild COVID-19 symptoms can be confused with flu symptoms, health officials have strongly recommended that we get a flu shot early in the season (begins in September). OSS will encourage students and staff to follow state and local recommendations when they are updated.



COVID-19 Testing

OSS encourages students and staff to be tested for COVID-19 whenever there are concerning symptoms. If someone tests positive, please contact Ms. Herman.

Arrival Screening

Families are responsible to screen their learners for symptoms at home before coming to school each and every day. Staff must screen themselves as well. **It is in all of our best interest to [stay home](#) if we have any [symptoms](#).**

Protocol for Symptomatic Student

This protocol is adapted for OSS based on the recommended MA DESE protocol.

As stated, families are the most important first line of defense for monitoring symptoms. However, OSS teachers and other adults will be prepared to send a student home if they have a fever or any symptoms at any point during the school day.

1. Symptoms like injuries and menstrual cramps can be treated at the Health Station, but if a student presents any possible COVID-19 symptom, an adult will help the student call home for pickup.
2. While waiting for pickup, the staff member will ensure that the student is properly wearing a mask that fully covers the nose and mouth.
3. The student will need to get tested:
 - a. If the **test is negative**, the student may return to school pending guidance from their clinician, our nurse, and/or at least 24 hours have passed without symptoms.
 - b. If the **test is positive**, the student should remain home, rest, and monitor symptoms for a minimum of 5 days. To communicate why the student is absent, the parent/guardian should communicate with office@oursistersschool.org or contact mroy@oursistersschool.org and participate in follow-up steps under OSS and Nurse Beaton's guidance. For an efficient and safe return to school, wearing a mask for 5 days (inside and outside) following the end of symptoms is our current protocol.
4. If a student needs to wear a mask and a staff member finds that they are not wearing it, or are not wearing it properly, OSS may send the student home to try again the next day, or the following day.

Close Contact with a Positive Case

It might happen that a student or staff person is asymptomatic and has close contact with a confirmed positive case. Such close contact is defined as within 6 feet while indoors for at least 15 minutes.

If so, individuals do not need to quarantine as long as they do not show any symptoms, however they may need to mask for up to 10 days. The CDC and New Bedford Health Department recommend testing 5 days after exposure, at which point it is possible that the mask may be removed.

Testing results:

- a. If the **test is negative**, the student may cease wearing their mask.
- b. If the **test is positive**, contact office@oursistersschool.org or contact mroy@oursistersschool.org and, with Nurse Beaton's supervision, we will guide you through more steps of the protocol.

Communications

Any very important message regarding the pandemic or changes at school will be communicated in Ms. Herman's weekly email. This includes notice of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a student or staff person.

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing



The OSS community demonstrates incredible levels of adaptability and resilience. We are committed to maintaining a strong community of care, particularly during a pandemic - compounded by so many economic, social, and political shifts.

Some of the ways we attend to and support mental health and emotional wellbeing at Our Sisters' School *include but are not limited to:*

- Including study of trauma-sensitive practice and antiracism in staff professional development
- Providing counseling services onsite
- Practicing routine mindful breathing techniques throughout the school day
- Explicitly teaching and practicing Community Core Tools, strategies for facing and coping with present challenges, and ways to communicate and respect personal boundaries
- Providing generous access to materials for artistic self-expression
- Differentiating and personalizing instruction to meet each learner's needs to the best of our capacity
- Providing academic support as needed
- Making space for students to process feelings and experiences without "overdoing it" -- fostering a school environment that is safe for sharing but also a hopeful refuge from worry
- Encouraging critical thinking and respect for facts and sound research over uninformed fear or rumors
- Being mindful of physical demands (including screen time) in the creation of schedules and assignments
- Providing opportunities for regular physical activity like fitness and sailing
- Offering optional yoga classes
- Directing current families and graduates to community resources
- *Communicating Clearly* with and *Listening to Learn* from each other

Our Sisters' School Gender and Gender Identity Policy

While OSS's mission is to educate and inspire economically disadvantaged *girls*, it is also our mission to provide a safe and supportive environment in which each learner thrives and has access to opportunity, regardless of identity markers. As such, we are committed to balancing open communication with families and accepting and honoring the gender identity of each member of our community.

- Faculty, staff, students and families will be able to use and be identified by the name and pronouns that are most affirming to them. These names and pronouns will appear on information including but not limited to class lists, rosters, email addresses, school certificates and diplomas. (*Transcripts are official documents with legal implications and therefore a student's legal name (as opposed to preferred name) is required to be used.)
- On an annual basis parents/guardians will have the opportunity to note their child's preferred name and pronoun. Likewise, toward the beginning of each school year each student will be given opportunities (written and oral) to express their preferred name and pronouns.
- The role of the school is to support students in ways that honor the student, are developmentally appropriate and encourage communication between student, school and parents. Should a student express a chosen name or pronoun that is different from the information provided at the time of registration or should they change their preferences during the course of the year, the school counselor will work with the student to offer support and to develop a communication plan. The counselor will reference the [Gender Spectrum Appendix D](#) to create a plan unique to each child.

If the student and counselor feel it is in the best interest of the child to do so, they will work together to ensure the students' parents/guardians are informed. If the counselor deems it is not, the student's privacy will be respected and the family will not be informed by the school counselor until the situation changes.

- Should an *enrolled* student transition socially and/or change their preferred pronouns to "he" or something other than "she", their gender identity and pronouns will *not* preclude them from remaining enrolled at OSS.

School Conduct and the Disciplinary Process

Students at OSS are expected to behave as engaged community members, displaying the best possible conduct at all times. We collaborate with families to develop students' abilities to take responsibility for their actions and to learn from them. Knowing that middle school children are young and need guidance, we are prepared and intentional about offering direction. If traditional directions, re-directions or coaching are not sufficient, a team of teachers will review a broad range of proactive and reactive support interventions. OSS is committed to restorative practices and logical consequences. Teachers will guide students through methods for healing relationships with individuals or the community whenever needed.

Our Sisters' School is fully funded by grants and private donations. All students who attend OSS are on full scholarship. *These scholarships are granted only for as long as students demonstrate that this investment in their OSS education is good for them, their peers, and OSS.* OSS employs teachers with a broad range of experience ranging from novice to master.

OSS runs on a very limited budget, does not have a special education program, teacher aides or a full-time nurse. OSS is not in a position to host students who require regular behavioral redirection or severe academic interventions. Neither physical nor emotional bullying is tolerated. Any such offense requires disciplinary steps.

OSS students may not date other OSS students; our community is too small, dating is exclusionary, and a break-up creates complex dynamics that can distract and possibly endanger the safety of the community.

In the spirit of inclusivity, students are not allowed to create or distribute party invitations during the school day. If your family is planning a party for your OSS student, please encourage them to do so discreetly and/or consider inviting the whole class.

On a routine basis the faculty and staff will handle minor disciplinary infractions and class attentiveness issues. Each situation requires an individual response based on the student's needs and the circumstances particular to the situation. However, in non-emergency situations, the following general consequences may be progressively administered for repeated and/or escalating negative behavior.

Possible OSS Disciplinary Actions:

- Verbal redirection(s) and/or warning by teacher
- Brief "Refocus" time in classroom or in neighboring classroom
- Silent Reflection (not a detention and does not appear on a student's permanent record)
- Restorative problem-solving "Real Conversation" and/or guided circle
- In-class or afterschool writing assignment to be reviewed and signed by a guardian
- Discussion with teacher and parent/guardian by telephone
- Saturday Study Hall (this *is* the equivalent of a detention and will go on a student's permanent record)
- Teacher conference with parent/guardian in person
- Referral to the Head of School for an in-person family meeting
- In-school suspension
- Home suspension followed by a parent/guardian conference before the student may return to school
- Expulsion, and when appropriate, referral to law enforcement personnel and/or courts

Silent Reflection: The purpose of a Silent Reflection is to give the student an opportunity to reflect on behaviors and choices, identify possible harm, plan to repair or "fix" it, and set a better course for next time. It allows a student to process and communicate how she experienced a situation. Any OSS staff can assign a Silent Reflection at their discretion. Silent Reflections can be assigned for behavioral or procedural issues including but not limited to: missing assignments, inappropriate laptop usage or care, out-of-uniform apparel, disruptive behavior, or tardiness to classes. A missing, tardy or incomplete Friday Folder will result in an automatic Silent Reflection. A Silent Reflection does not count as an official detention and will not go on the student's permanent record. The accumulation of four (4) Silent Reflections in the same month will result in a Saturday Study Hall (see below).

- **Silent Reflection Protocol:** Students who receive a Silent Reflection will serve it during

the next lunch period. Students respond to guide prompts and write a reflection that will be sent home, submitted to the assigning teacher, and kept in the student's file. A teacher will review the written reflection with the student to ensure clear, mutual understanding of the situation as well as an adequate plan to repair any harm and strategies to avoid a future recurrence. *If students are more than 10 minutes late for a Silent Reflection*, they will need to serve the remainder of the reflection period, as well as an additional Silent Reflection the following day.

- **Family/Guardian Responsibilities:** If students participate in Silent Reflection, their families/guardians will receive a copy of their child's Reflection in their Friday Folder. The family is required to review, sign and return the Reflection to the front office.

In-School Suspension: Students may be referred for in-school suspension by the Head of School when they have not responded to repeated efforts by their teacher(s) to change behaviors that are unacceptable or for repeated or habitual, lesser infractions of school rules. In-school suspensions may also be a first-time consequence for more serious infractions. An in-school suspension will require students to remain on the school premises and complete the work assigned by their regular teachers; these students will be separated from classmates and peers, and will lose all social privileges.

Saturday Study Hall: Students may be assigned a Saturday Study Hall (SSH) by the Head of School for either academic or social mishaps, or after the accumulation of four (4) Silent Reflections in one month. Students attending SSH are required to be in school uniform and may bring school-acceptable snacks if desired. Chromebooks may ONLY be used to complete school assignments if permission is given by the supervising teacher, and no other technology is permitted. SSH usually runs on the 4th Saturday of the month from 9:00am to 12:00pm. Families will be notified of any changes to the schedule. Saturday Study Hall appears on a student's permanent record.

The Board of Trustees of OSS empowers the Head of School with the full authority to address all disciplinary issues including the right to rescind a scholarship at any time, for any reason.

Academic Integrity

OSS prides itself on being a school of integrity and honesty. We expect honesty in all situations. At all levels of the school, considerable trust is placed in our students. Students have a wide range of obligations and privileges, both personal and academic. Therefore, students are expected to be worthy of trust, to be able to make a clear distinction between their own work and that of someone else, and to be open and straightforward in their dealings with other people. Lying, cheating, and stealing will not be tolerated and will be cause for suspension or other disciplinary actions at the discretion of the Head of School.

Academic dishonesty can be considered anything from copying someone's homework, to plagiarizing another person's writing in an essay, to bringing the answers to a test into the classroom, or failing to cite a source. Any form of cheating is unacceptable at OSS and will be dealt with in the following way:

Step One: A conversational warning to student and family from teacher; Head of School will be informed of the incident and a note will be put into the student's record. A Silent Reflection will be assigned and carefully reviewed. A failing grade will be assigned for the assignment in question.

Step Two: For a second offense, a meeting with family will be called, a failing grade will be assigned for the assignment in question, a Saturday Study Hall and an extended written reflection will be assigned.

Step Three: For a third offense, a meeting with family will be called, a failing grade will be assigned for the assignment in question, and an In-School Suspension will be served.

Step Four: The student will be expelled.

Should a student be found with a phone or smart device on their person during an assessment, regardless of reason or purpose or excuse, 50 points will be deducted from their test score as a consequence for it not being in their locker.

As mandated by Massachusetts state law, Our Sisters' School abides by the following rules and regulations:

Conduct that Result in Home Suspension or Expulsion:

- Use or possession of alcohol, drugs, drug paraphernalia, tobacco and tobacco products, or other illegal substance, including unlawful possession of prescription medications (see section 37H of Chapter 71 of the Massachusetts State Law);
- Assault (including sexual), battery, or causing physical injury, of another student or a staff member (for the latter, see section 37H of Chapter 71, above);
- Possession or use of a weapon, simulated weapon, or other device than could be used as a weapon or incendiary device or part thereof including firecrackers and matches (see section 37H of Chapter 71, above);
- Fighting, verbally assaulting, or threatening an employee of the school, a visitor, or another student;
- Throwing of personal or school objects from windows or in stairwells, whether or not directed at an individual;
- Vandalizing, defacing or destroying any part of the school or school department [or another student's] property (also requires restitution);
- Bullying, harassment (including sexual harassment), abuse, or physical or psychological intimidation of another person or serious threats to cause future harm to the school, particular student(s), the student body, or the faculty;
- Use of vulgar, sexist or demeaning language;
- Engaging in verbal abuse such as name-calling, ethnic or racial slurs or derogatory or discriminatory statements addressed to others that may bring about disruption of the school program, violence, or otherwise detract from the school's educational mission;
- Defiance of the authority of school personnel, including but not limited to refusal to obey a lawful directive of an administrator, teacher or other school staff member;
- Endangering the safety of other on a school bus or other school transportation by, among other things, throwing objects out of windows or distracting the driver in any way;
- Leaving school premises without approval (including unauthorized presence in non-school areas of the building); refusal to attend class or engaging in other activities that cause disruption or disorder in the classroom;
- Theft or threat thereof, or forgery or the attempt to do either;
- Extortion or threat thereof, demanding money or something of value from another student;
- Scholastic dishonesty, including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism (representing someone else's work as your own), and giving false verbal or written information to a school employee;
- Improper use of computers/networks (e.g., inappropriate internet sites; threats to others);
- Behavior that is contrary to school and community standards of decency such as inappropriate touching, groping and displays of affection, or behavior that seriously disrupts the educational purpose of the school or endangers the safety of others;
- Violation of a civil or criminal statutes, laws or school regulations (see section 37H ½ of Chapter 71, above with respect to felony charges and convictions);
- Inciting or daring others to do anything prohibited by the above statements.

Alternatives to Suspension

While the school reserves the right to suspend students, well grounded research on the effects of detentions and out-of-school suspensions on drop-out rates indicates that students are more likely to drop out when schools resort to punitive actions for behaviors that are more aptly viewed as manifestations of personal health and self-esteem issues. Whenever possible, the school will focus on developing personal responsibility and restitution rather than suspensions to redress grievances. *However, the common welfare and well-being of all students is a paramount concern of the school.* Therefore, suspensions and expulsions will be distributed as deemed necessary by the Head of School.

Possession of Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Weapons

The OSS Board of Trustees and staff are dedicated to providing a healthy, safe, and productive learning and recreation environment for its students, staff, and visitors to its facilities. Therefore, the Board of Trustees absolutely prohibits the use, possession or distribution by any individual, including school staff, of tobacco products within the school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses or in other school vehicles and at all school-sponsored functions; the use or possession of any weapon (or realistic simulation); and the use or possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia or illegal substance (or realistic simulations). Violations will be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

Specifically, Massachusetts General Laws Ch. 71, § 37H provides in relevant part:

- a. Any student who is found on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic

games, in possession of a dangerous weapon, including, but not limited to, a gun or a knife; or a controlled substance as defined in chapter ninety-four C, including, but not limited to, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, may be subject to expulsion from the school.

- Any student who assaults school staff or other educational staff on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, may be subject to expulsion from the school.
- Any student who is charged with a violation of either paragraph (a) or (b) shall be notified in writing of an opportunity for a hearing; provided, however, that the student may have representation, along with the opportunity to present evidence and witnesses at said hearing before the Head of School and/or Board of Trustees. After said hearing, the Head of School/Board of Trustees may, at their discretion, decide to suspend rather than expel a student who has been determined to have violated either paragraph (a) or (b);
- Any student who has been expelled from a school district pursuant to these provisions shall have the right to appeal to the Board of Trustees. The expelled student shall have ten days from the date of the expulsion in which to notify the Board of her appeal. The student has the right to counsel at a hearing before the Board. The subject matter of the appeal shall not be limited solely to a factual determination of whether the student has violated any provisions of this section.
- When a student is expelled under the provisions of this section, no school or school district within the commonwealth shall be required to admit such student or to provide educational services to said student. If said student does apply for admission to another school or school district, the superintendent of the school district to which the application is made may request and shall receive from the Head of School of the school expelling said student a written statement of the reasons for said expulsion.

Felony Complaints and Convictions

As prescribed by state law, students who are charged with a felony related to the use or possession of the above listed products and items, or any other felonious activity, will be scheduled for an expulsion hearing to be effective until the charges are dropped or the student is returned to the community.

Specifically, Massachusetts General Laws, Ch. 71 §37H ½, provides:

“(1) Upon the issuance of a criminal complaint charging a student with a felony or upon the issuance of a felony delinquency complaint against a student, the principal or headmaster of a school in which the student is enrolled may suspend such student for a period of time determined appropriate by said principal or headmaster if said principal or headmaster determines that the student's continued presence in school would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of the school. The student shall receive written notification of the charges and the reasons for such suspension prior to such suspension taking effect. The student shall also receive written notification of his right to appeal and the process for appealing such suspension; provided, however, that such suspension shall remain in effect prior to any appeal hearing conducted by the superintendent.

The student shall have the right to appeal the suspension to the superintendent. The student shall notify the superintendent in writing of his request for an appeal no later than five calendar days following the effective date of the suspension. The superintendent shall hold a hearing with the student and the student's parent or guardian within three calendar days of the student's request for an appeal. At the hearing, the student shall have the right to present oral and written testimony on his behalf, and shall have the right to counsel. The superintendent shall have the authority to overturn or alter the decision of the principal or headmaster, including recommending an alternate educational program for the student. The superintendent shall render a decision on the appeal within five calendar days of the hearing. Such decision shall be the final decision of the city, town or regional school district with regard to the suspension.

(2) Upon a student being convicted of a felony or upon an adjudication or admission in court of guilt with respect to such a felony or felony delinquency, the principal or headmaster of a school in which the student is enrolled may expel said student if such principal or headmaster determines that the student's continued presence in school would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of the school. The student shall receive written notification of the charges and reasons for such expulsion prior to such expulsion taking effect. The student shall also receive written notification of his right to appeal and the process for appealing such expulsion; provided, however, that the expulsion shall remain in effect prior to any appeal hearing conducted by the superintendent.

The student shall have the right to appeal the expulsion to the superintendent. The student shall notify the superintendent, in writing, of his request for an appeal no later than five calendar days following the effective date of the expulsion.

*****Please review, sign, and return the following pages*****

Our Sisters' School

Family Agreement

I, _____, understand that my child's education at Our Sisters' School is a rare opportunity that offers numerous choices for my child's future. I understand that this opportunity is valuable and will require a great commitment of time, energy, and care on the part of Our Sisters' School's staff and volunteers. In return, this opportunity requires that I participate fully and work together with OSS. By signing the Family Agreement for the coming school year, I pledge to do the following:

Attendance, Punctuality, Breakfast _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I will provide student transportation.
- I will make sure my child arrives every day by 8:15 am.
- I will ensure my child eats breakfast earlier at home or arrives at 8:00 am to eat at school.
- I or another authorized adult will pick my child up promptly at dismissal time every day.
- I will communicate with the Head of School to arrange any excused absences.

Uniform/Hygiene _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I will purchase and replace the required uniform pieces for my child as needed.
- I will make sure my child comes to school clean and in a clean uniform every day.
- I will label uniform separates, like sweatshirts, with my child's name or initials.

Academic Excellence _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I share high expectations with the School for my child's academic success.
- I will hold my child accountable for completing assignments.
- I will read to my child or encourage my child to **read at least 30 minutes daily**.
- I will work cooperatively with my child's teachers, respectfully communicate my questions and concerns, and thoughtfully consider suggestions they make about what I can do at home to help my child succeed.
- I or another caregiver will attend all portfolio meetings.

Behavior _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I will expect positive behavior from my child, and I support the School's expectations for positive behavior and social and emotional growth from my child.
- I agree to support the health of the School and the academic, social, and emotional growth of all students. Disruptive student behavior of any sort will not be tolerated.
- I understand that consequences are not handed out thoughtlessly or lightly and that healing harm done to oneself, another person, or the community is a priority.
- I will cooperate with the School to address my child's misbehaviors and mistakes.
- I understand that the Head of School exercises full discretion in the provision or removal of my student's scholarship and enrollment at any time.

Communication _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I will carefully read, sign, and return the contents of my child’s Friday Folder before the start of school on Monday morning.
- I will communicate regularly and honestly with my child’s teachers about any factors that could affect my child’s behavior and learning in school.
- I will give the School accurate phone numbers and email addresses where I can be reached during the day, and I will inform the School immediately of any changes.
- I will make sure the School has accurate emergency contact names and numbers in case of emergency and I cannot be reached.
- I understand that Our Sisters’ School often uses email to communicate; I commit to checking my email frequently for school communications.
- I will respond as soon as possible to any call, email, or text that comes from OSS staff.
- I, or a family representative, will attend Required Family Meetings throughout the year. I understand that should my family miss a required meeting, two (2) service hours will be added to the Family Service Hours balance regardless of the reason for the missed meeting.

Health _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I will make sure that my child’s medical forms are up to date.
- I will make sure that prescription medications are never in the hands of my student, and always delivered directly to an OSS adult on the administrative team.
- I understand that Our Sisters’ School does not have a full-time nurse or counselor and cannot provide professional support for many health-related needs. Should a student develop a health-related need while at Our Sisters’ School, the School may not be in a position to adequately support the student and the student may have to withdraw from OSS.

Giving Back: My Contributions to Our Sisters’ School _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I will pay a \$250 dollar annual fee at the START of each school year (unless I make special arrangements in advance with the Head of School).
- I understand the failure to meet my financial obligation may result in my student’s inability to advance to the next grade and/or the withholding of important school documents.
- I commit to volunteering at the school for a minimum of 15 hours per academic year, per child (starting July 1). I will compensate the school for any incomplete Family Service Hours at the rate of \$15.00 per hour.
- I understand that all OSS students complete and log Active Civic Engagement(ACE) actions.

Computer Use _____ **MY INITIALS**

- I have read the Chromebook and Creative Suite Technology Contracts, agree to the terms stated in the documents, and returned the signed contracts with this Parent Pledge.

I understand that my ability to uphold my commitments to the School as outlined above factors into my child’s eligibility for a scholarship in the next school year.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Signature(s):

Date: _____

Date: _____

Chromebook Contract

School Rules on Computer Account Use (whether from school or home)

When using my OSS computer account, I agree to:

- Accept personal responsibility and follow all rules when using my account
- Conduct myself in a safe, respectful and responsible manner on any OSS computer
- Use an OSS account for any OSS related email
- Only use my computer for educational purposes
- Make sure no one else uses my OSS account or my computer
- Notify a teacher or school employee immediately of any improper use by myself or others
- Protect my password and respect the privacy of others' passwords

Additionally, I understand that I am to follow the rules and avoid:

- Sending or displaying offensive messages or pictures
- Using inappropriate language
- Harassing, insulting or attacking others
- Damaging computers, computer systems, software, or computer networks
- Violating copyright laws (for example, by illegally listening to music online) and plagiarizing from websites
- Using another's ID/password
- Using Facebook, Twitter and any other social media unless given special permission by an OSS staff member
- Using my Chromebook to take or post selfies or as a device to listen to music without permission

Additional notes:

- The school staff will make every effort to guide usage, but is not able to constantly restrict, monitor or control the communications of students utilizing the school network.
- Use of school computers and internet access is a privilege - not a right. Access may be denied to those students who violate basic school rules. Saturday Study Halls will be assigned to students who chronically or egregiously fail to honor this computer usage agreement. Students who can't reliably use an OSS computer appropriately may not be able to function as an OSS student and therefore, may need to withdraw from OSS.
- Computer network storage spaces are treated as school property. Students should not expect that files stored on school servers will be private.
- No distinction will be made for a violation of the rules while utilizing an OSS created account whether this violation occurred while using an OSS provided Chromebook or personal device.
- Families also share the responsibility for computer guidance and should contact the school's administration if they need guidance or need to report any problems.
- Students may not touch or use another student's Chromebook.

Student name and signature

Date

Parent/Guardian name and signature

Date

Creative Suite Technology Agreement

We use a variety of cutting edge tools as part of our Creative Suite and STEAM Lab curriculum to enhance our learning and to allow us to explore several exciting technologies in-depth. These tools include a 3D Printer, a Laser Cutter, iPads, Robotics, Circuit Boards, etc. We are proud that our curriculum keeps developing, therefore, maintaining these tools is truly important to the sustainability of our program.

Please review in detail and sign with your student(s), accepting the responsibility that these Creative Suite tools require.

As a student, I will :

- Handle my Creative Suite tools carefully and respectfully honoring the OSS core values
- Be on task and use tools as directed
- Ask permission and make sure my hands are clean before use
- Report loss or damage of Creative Suite tools immediately to a teacher
- **Not** alter setting or configurations under any circumstances
- Always return the Creative Suite tool to its proper place

It was then made clear that if any of these expectations are not observed, one or all of the following will be a result:

- Immediate loss of privileges of said technology in STEAM Lab
- Saturday Study Hall
- **In the event of loss or damages, the student and their family will be held financially accountable and will need to replace the item at cost**

If you have any questions regarding Creative Suite technology policies please refer to the Technology use guidelines in the OSS Student Handbook, or reach out to the Creative Suite teachers for further clarification.

***Please sign that you have read and understand the Creative Suite Technology Agreement:**

Student name and signature

Date

Parent/Guardian name and signature

Date