

# **PRESCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK**



**2020-2021**  
**Garrison Forest School**

## MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY OF GARRISON FOREST SCHOOL

At Garrison Forest School, we prepare our students in and out of the classroom to thrive in a complex, changing world by:

- challenging them to strive for academic excellence and to grow into informed, independent, and creative thinkers;
- cultivating an authentic and resilient sense of self, grounded in respect and integrity;
- creating a diverse and inclusive community built on a spirit of caring;
- inspiring young women to lead and to serve with passion, purpose and joy.

Our motto informs our mission: *Esse Quam Videri*, To Be Rather Than to Seem.

## STATEMENT OF RESPECT

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

- strive to celebrate diversity both within our community and in our curriculum;
- are concerned for the well-being of all people;
- seek to build the self-esteem of all people;
- aspire to promote understanding among all people.

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

**Our Motto matters.** *Esse Quam Videri*, “To Be Rather Than To Seem,” has inspired our community since Garrison Forest School’s founding in 1910.

Today, it inspires our Core Values:

- Be Authentic.
- Be Brave.
- Be Compassionate.
- Be Curious.
- Be Spirited.

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

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	4
Personnel	4
Board of Trustees	5
Objectives of the Program	5
The Daily Schedule	5
After-School Programs	7
Field Trips	7
Food: Lunch and Snacks	7
The Curriculum	8
Parent Communication	11
Student Expectations and Discipline	12
Policies and Procedures.....	13
Attendance.....	13
Birthdays	14
Supplies	14
Emergency Drills	14
Maryland State Reporting	14
Fund-Raising Policy	14
Gift-Giving Policy	15
Student Records	15
Parent Involvement	15
Health Services	17
Events and Holidays	19
Important Numbers.....	21
Emergency Closings.....	21
Association of Independent Maryland Schools	22

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

The primary goal of Garrison Forest's Preschool is to provide students with an outstanding foundation for their upcoming academic program in an atmosphere of warmth and understanding. Central to this purpose are the beliefs that education should foster a child's growth as a total human being; that a caring, family atmosphere is crucial to the learning process; and that children learn best when they are actively involved. The program provides outstanding learning opportunities where children experience the success that nurtures self-motivation and responsibility. We strive to promote excellence in teaching and learning and to develop each child's sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Small classes, an intimate environment and a genuine concern for others combine to create an enthusiasm for learning that carries forward into the future.

## **PRESCHOOL FACULTY AND STAFF**

Director of Early Childhood Education    Jamie Roeder Bailey, M.Ed.

Counselor    Shondra Cowling, L.C.S.W.

Parent-Toddler

Threes    Sarah Baldwin, B.S  
              Sara Holford, B.A  
              Elizabeth Fraker, M.Ed.  
              Mary Beth Litz-Ayd  
              Joyce Peichert, B.A  
              Bryna Stoute, M.A.T.

Pre-Kindergarten    Valerie Marsh, M.Ed. / Amy Wagner, B.S..  
                                  Marion Fulford, M.S. / Randi Rombro, B.S.

Art    Korey Rosenbaum, B.S.

Music	Christina Keown, B.S.
Physical Education	Laura Cline, M.Ed.
Science / Imagineering	Christine Shriver, M.S.
Administrative Assistant	Cindy Isenhour, B.S.

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Garrison Forest School is governed by a Board of Trustees that meets several times per year and consists of alumnae, current and past parents, and friends of the school. The Board sets policy, makes financial decisions, employs the Head, elects new Trustees, and keeps the community informed about all aspects of school life. A list of the current Trustees is published in the School Directory.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESCHOOL**

The spirit of inquiry, independence and enthusiasm for learning that are integral to the Garrison Forest School Mission Statement are clearly evident in the Preschool. While the curriculum is structured, it reflects the needs of children for freedom and spontaneity. The faculty is committed to helping each individual child realize his or her full potential. Success and self-esteem are enhanced by a curriculum that carefully balances enrichment with the mastery of foundational skills. We recognize and support individual needs and differences and, at the same time, stress group cooperation and collaboration. In a challenging and stimulating environment, students are encouraged to advance as far as their maturity, interests and ability permit in every area and activity they explore. The emphasis placed on critical thinking, independence and self-expression is enhanced by the mastery of basic skills. We encourage students to question, to take risks and to think independently, helping them progress from concrete, multi-sensory experiences to abstract thinking.

Social and emotional growth is also carefully promoted. Each child's self image and self esteem are developed in an atmosphere of respect, cooperation, collaboration, kindness and the peaceful resolution of conflict. Students are guided in their ability to interact respectfully with both adults and peers. Independence and the acceptance of responsibilities, challenges and limits are also emphasized. Through daily interactions with each other, literature, discussion and the core curriculum, a system of ethical values based on the School's Core Values is cultivated in each student. The School's Statement of Respect is upheld and taught in ways that are developmentally appropriate, and it is incorporated into the daily lives of the students and the faculty. The children move through Garrison Forest with increased confidence and competence.

## THE DAILY SCHEDULE

Morning Carpool greeting for Threes and PK.....8:00– 8:30 a.m. (8:45 to 9:00 on Fridays)  
Classes begin for Threes and Pre-K.....8:00 a.m. (8:45 on Fridays)  
Parent-Toddler dismissal.....11:00 a.m.  
Threes and Pre-K morning dismissal.....12:00 p.m.  
Lunch Bunch dismissal.....3:00 p.m.

**Arrival:** School begins for Threes and Pre-Kindergarten students between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. (8:45 on Fridays). Children are greeted and parents walk their children to the exterior doors of their classrooms between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. In planning your morning routine, please be considerate of the teacher's schedule and of your child's need to have sufficient time to transition easily and successfully into the classroom.

**All eligible students must ride in an approved booster seat or in a car seat.** Maryland law requires that all children under the age of eight and shorter than 4' 9" ride in an approved booster seat or car seat. Clearly labeled car seats and booster seats may be left under the awning at the front door if your child will be going home with another adult.

**Separation at Morning Drop-Off:** Younger children sometimes have difficulty separating from their parents. When you leave your child in our care, please be reassuring about when you will return, and then leave. If you walk your child to the classroom, you may wait to see that he or she is engaged in an activity or with a faculty member. However, staying too long will make the separation more difficult. If you are concerned, you may wait out of sight of your child, and we will gladly report back to you. We will also call you once your child is happily settled if he/she was indecisive or worried when you left. Children generally become eagerly engaged in a classroom activity shortly after a parent leaves, but it is our pleasure to reassure you with a phone call.

In the morning, it is important for the teachers to be able to greet the students as they enter the classroom and for the students to make a smooth and unhurried beginning to their day. It is difficult to have parent conferences at this time unless it is a matter that cannot wait. If you would like to talk to your child's teacher or to an administrator, please call or email and make arrangements in advance for a time that is mutually convenient.

**Dismissal:** At noon and at 3:00 p.m. parents again return to the exterior doors of the classrooms to pick their child up for the day.

**Pick-up Authorization:** Children are only permitted to be picked up by those authorized by the enrolling parent(s). These persons are listed on the Transportation Form. Please keep the list up-to-date. We appreciate it when you supply photographs of these people so we can have them on file. If you need to ask someone to pick up your child who is NOT on the form, please notify us ahead of time, either in person or by telephone. Anyone picking up a child should be prepared to supply photo identification.

If your child's carpool arrangements change during the school day, call the Preschool

Administrative Assistant at 410-559-3221. She will convey the information to your child's teacher. Children who carpool with students in the Lower School will be escorted to the Lower School at 3:20 p.m. and may be picked up there beginning at 3:30 p.m. This should be clearly indicated on your child's Transportation Form. Children enrolled in after school classes, including dance and Afterschool Care, will also be escorted. A child will be released to either parent unless a court document limiting parental rights is filed with the school.

## **AFTERNOON PROGRAMS**

**Lunch Bunch:** This afternoon program is offered to 5 day Twos, Threes, and Pre-Kindergarten students Monday through Friday from noon until 3:00 p.m. It is a time for greater freedom of choice, a less structured schedule, valuable additional socialization and a group small enough for the teachers to focus on individual needs and relationships. The schedule during the afternoon includes lunch, activities and arts and crafts, story time, rest time and free play both inside and outside. Registration is on a yearly basis for one, two, three, four or five days a week. Occasional afternoon drop-ins are also an option if space is available. If your child misses a regularly scheduled afternoon, the fee for the missed afternoon is not transferable. Registration takes place through the Preschool Administrative Assistant, and billing takes place twice a year. Registration for occasional days must be pre-arranged with the Administrative Assistant as long as space is available. If you need a particular day, please register in advance.

## **FOOD: SNACKS AND LUNCH**

**Allergies:** Several students in the Preschool have severe allergies. People with severe nut and dairy allergies have life-threatening reactions to ingesting even trace amounts of nuts and dairy products. Therefore, no nuts or nut products may be brought into the Preschool. Daily nut-free snacks are provided for all students. Parents of children in class with a student with allergies will receive more information at the beginning of the school year about additional accommodations for specific classrooms, including for birthdays and special snacks.

**Snacks:** Students are offered a daily mid-morning snack of saltines, graham crackers, Goldfish, fresh fruit, carrots, cereal mix, cheese sticks, yogurt or pretzels. Parents are encouraged to make arrangements with their child's teacher if they would like to bring a nutritious snack (fruit, cheese, yogurt, etc.) for the whole class. These snacks must be store bought with the ingredients listed. Most birthday celebrations occur during snack time in the child's classroom with parents generally providing mini-cupcakes or a special snack requested by the child having a birthday. Note that you can consider your child's school celebration an official birthday party – the friends are available and the classroom is set up to accommodate more young children than your home! You are welcome to make arrangements with your child's teacher to bring party napkins and plates and read a story to the class. Candy and junk food may not be brought to school. **ALL snacks brought from home must be nut free.**

**Lunch:** Preschool students bring their own lunches. Children eat in their classrooms under the supervision of one of the Preschool teachers. Fat –free or 1% Milk and water are provided by the school. To adhere to regulations from the Maryland State Office of Childcare, **no drinks, other than water**, may be brought to school unless parents request permission to provide a milk alternative (soy, rice or almond milk, for example).

Lunches brought from home should be healthy. “Junk food,” candy and soft drinks are not permitted. The children have a rigorous afternoon schedule and good nutrition plays an important role in each child’s ability to fully participate. In striving to teach children the benefits of nutrition and a balanced diet, it is counterproductive for them to eat the popular non-foods items on the market. Please read labels and strive for a healthy balance. We ask the children to leave large amounts of uneaten food in their lunch boxes so you can see what they did not want and better judge what to pack. Keep in mind that they are likely to eat fruits and vegetables when they are hungry and when healthy choices are being modeled by teachers and peers. Strive to try new foods periodically.

Although we refrigerate lunch boxes, please include an ice pack in your child’s lunchbox and avoid perishable food. An ice pack and the avoidance of meats and mayonnaise will help ensure that food does not become hazardous. Please do not send food that needs to be heated as teachers do not have microwaves or toaster ovens available in their classrooms.

## THE CURRICULUM

### CURRICULAR GOALS

Our first goal is to stimulate joyful intellectual curiosity and an appreciation for learning in community. With mindful attention to developing each child’s ability to respond with empathy, compassion and kindness to others, the teachers devote time and attention to gently nurturing a greater awareness of the present moment. This supports each child’s developing ability to interact appropriately with peers and adults in a group setting, gradually increasing the ability to react with increased self-control and compassion. The more academic aspects of the curriculum stem from this foundation of nurturing calm and consideration for the needs of others.

The new **Outdoor Classroom** is designed to support and supplement all of the curricular areas, particularly Language Arts, Math, and Science. Its primary purpose is to provide opportunities for joyful engagement with nature, promoting a sense of wonder, an understanding of ecology and environmentalism, collaboration, stewardship and responsibility. The imaginative and creative play inherent in the Outdoor Classroom will foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills while developing visual-spatial abilities and collaboration, and team-building. With its garden, music area, natural building space, mud kitchen and messy materials, gathering space and “meadow,” it’s the perfect vehicle for cross-curricular and interdisciplinary activities that allow children to delight in sharing the wonder and awe inspired by nature.

In the **Language Arts** program, concepts are revisited and expanded as the children progress through the curriculum. They are challenged at their appropriate level through activities that emphasize learning through meaningful experiences. From vocabulary development, phonological awareness, and visual and auditory discrimination in the Twos and Threes classrooms, to phonics, writing, and abstract and critical thinking in Pre-Kindergarten, our objective is to foster the development of able readers and writers who view printed material as an integral part of their lives.

**Math** activities make use of concrete, manipulative materials and are supplemented by informal activities throughout the school day. The *Math Their Way* program and teacher supplemental



materials and activities expose the children to an understanding of concepts and the way numbers work. In addition to reinforcing basic skills such as counting and one-to-one correspondence, this conceptual framework is an exceptional foundation for mathematical appreciation and understanding.

The **Social Studies** curriculum promotes an understanding of self and an awareness of others that is integrated into all aspects of the program. Children are encouraged to develop a sense of respect and empathy for other cultures, traditions and times. Through an age-appropriate exposure to multicultural perspectives and holidays, an appreciation for the diversity of our world is developed and fostered. These goals are accomplished through classroom themes, literature, hands-on activities, discussion and outreach projects.

## **SPECIAL RESOURCE CLASSES**

**Specials** enrich the core curriculum through the integration of Preschool curricular goals with additional teachers who specialize in their field. Specials teachers coordinate their goals and themes with those taught in the classroom. This provides additional reinforcement of the skills and vocabulary and allows the children to delve more deeply into topics of interest.

**Physical Education** is scheduled four or five days a week for Threes and Pre-K students in a dedicated gymnasium and twice a month for Twos in their classroom. The goal is to help children achieve and maintain their personal best in physical fitness, coordination, and stamina. It provides opportunities for cooperation and physical exercise and fosters the development of self-confidence, sportsmanship, and responsibility.

The **Science** curriculum is hands-on with a major focus on the biological sciences and nature. Young children are natural explorers, reveling in opportunities to try things that extend their natural curiosity. Science classes validate their quest for more information, providing opportunities and materials that lead to “ah-ha” moments and new understanding. Messy exploration in our Outdoor Classroom and in a dedicated Preschool classroom allows the teacher to scaffold learning and guide children from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from simple concepts to higher levels of understanding and from inquiry to insight. The rich and inviting experiences in Science, enhanced by related classroom themes, lend themselves to observation, comparison, classification, prediction, imagination and wonder.

In **Art**, the children learn to appreciate the beauty of the world around us. Classes stimulate an interest in a variety of mediums as the children experiment with clay, paint, found and recycled objects, and numerous other materials that nurture the connections between each child’s creativity and classroom themes. The hands-on nature of the Art classes also supplements the teachers’ goals for eye-hand coordination and the hand strength required for handwriting.

**The Music Program** encourages each child to grow in an understanding, appreciation and love of music. The children listen, sing and move to music of many diverse cultures. Instruments are plentiful, themes are coordinated with classroom work and skills are developed that form a strong foundation for music training. Music is held twice a week for students in the Hathaway Fine and Performing Arts Center.

In the Lower Division library, **Library** classes are scheduled for the children once a week. Students become familiar with the library and with authors and illustrators; they are introduced to appropriate quality literature and choose books to take home. The librarian also works closely with the Preschool teachers to research appropriate classroom titles and assist in coordinating lessons and stories with classroom themes. Guest readers include the Director of Preschool and the Head of School.

**STEM** takes place in the Lower School STEM room. Incorporating the thinking skills and creative problem solving practice that precede an interest and affinity for engineering, Imagineering is a unique opportunity for our students to use a variety of building materials, gears, magnets, and found items to design, test and experiment. They are encouraged to develop a mind-set that values creativity and persistence with problem solving. Pre-Kindergarten students have a class with our Imagineering teacher once a week and all children have additional opportunities to explore in the STEM Room during other times.

## **EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

**Instrumental Music lessons** are available to students beginning in Pre-Kindergarten in piano and violin. There are additional charges for these extra-curricular activities.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

Preschool teachers have access to advanced technology to create a learning environment that stimulates the interests of their students and provides them with a broad understanding of the topics in the curriculum. Classrooms contain wireless projectors or Smartboards and teachers are provided with Tablet PC's that can bring the outside world into the classroom in a multitude of ways. Our teachers and parents benefit from enhanced opportunities to communicate with each other and access appropriate information. Pre-K Teachers use their classroom Smartboards to enrich lessons and give children the hands-on, large motor practice that enhances understanding and the internalization of skills.

For children, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Office of Childcare for the State of Maryland recommend strict limits on educational passive technology for children. Therefore, educational passive technology that is age-appropriate is used occasionally in Pre-K and rarely in the Threes. To adhere to the recommendations, it is used a maximum of 30 minutes per week.

**Technology at Home:** Technology provides us with increasingly important and useful educational tools. But parents who make these tools available in their homes must take responsibility for helping their children avoid the inherent dangers. Exposure to inappropriate material, loss of privacy, spam, cyberbullying, and plagiarism are all issues that are on your horizon. It is vital for parents to set clear expectations, limit use, and supervise their children. Although it is tempting to focus on the skills children can develop by using an iPad, iPhone or computer, face-to-face communication and the ability to interact with people is much more critical to a young child's development. Overuse of technology leads to difficulty interacting with others – and that skill is critical to all future learning and success, in school and in life. As soon as you put technology in the hands of your child, establish and maintain clear and strict rules:

- Limit screen time. For Preschool children over the age of two, the recommendation is to limit

- entertainment media to no more than 20 minutes per day. Studies have shown that excessive media use can lead to attention problems, school difficulties and sleep and eating disorders.
- Establish screen-free zones for your home. Ensure that all technology available to children and connected to the internet is in a public place that can be supervised. It should never be in a child's bedroom.
  - Turn off all electronics, including your own, during all meals.
  - Use browser controls and filters on any device available to children. (A directory of filtering programs is available at [www.safekids.com/filters.html](http://www.safekids.com/filters.html).) Understand that these controls cannot provide protection from all inappropriate or harmful texts or pictures.
  - And most importantly, have the conviction to “pull the plug” when your child violates your home policies.

## PARENT COMMUNICATION

Parent communication is vital to the education of your children. On Sunday, parents receive weekly emails called Preschool Parent Notes. These emails contain important information about activities, calendar changes, and reminders pertinent to Preschool students and families. **This is our primary means of communicating any schedule changes or major school events.** Please be sure to keep us informed about any changes to your email account. The Preschool Notes are also posted to the GFS website by Monday afternoon.

Teachers email individual newsletters to parents weekly, summarizing current curricular goals, outlining upcoming and current events and including reminders pertinent to their classrooms. They also use the learning platform Seesaw to help with communication between school and home. These efforts are key to parent communication and are designed to keep families informed and actively involved in the community.

**Progress Reports and Conferences:** All children are assessed in the fall with the Brigance, researched assessments approved and mandated by the Maryland Office of Childcare. Results are discussed with parents at the fall or the winter conference. With the exception of Parent Toddler, individual written Progress Reports are provided to parents in June. Conference Days occur in the fall, winter and spring. Written Progress Reports will not be sent to anyone other than a parent or official guardian without the written permission of the parent or guardian. This includes other educational institutions, psychologists and doctors.

**GrizzlyNet:** Parents are encouraged to log in and visit the secure Parent Portal on the Garrison Forest Website, [www.gfs.org](http://www.gfs.org), on a regular basis. You can view the weekly Parent Notes, school calendars and the GFS Library Catalogs and Databases. You can see pictures of your children and stay up-to-date on events and initiatives. Please use this feature of our website to keep your family's contact information current as our system uses that information to communicate.

## STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND DISCIPLINE

**Guidance and Discipline:** In keeping with the mission and Core Values of Garrison Forest School, our discipline policies guide children in the development of developmentally appropriate social skills. We want each student to grow in kindness, honesty, respect and consideration for others. Using activities and techniques based in Mindfulness and The Responsive Classroom, the teachers

carefully plan the classroom environment to encourage and foster peaceful living, cooperation and collaboration. The day is carefully orchestrated to provide the routines and consistency children need. Most importantly, the adult-to-child ratio is kept low enough for problems to be addressed promptly and each child's needs to be met judiciously.

**Teaching Strategies and Curriculum:** Young children are still learning the problem-solving skills to express their feelings in appropriate ways. Therefore teachers are pro-active, deliberately teaching cooperation, collaboration and compassion. Many materials and books support prosocial and nonviolent themes, inviting cooperation and the development of morals and a strong character. Teachers model mindful breathing, sharing, talking about feelings, respect for others and problem solving. With the help of our counselor, and through literature, group and individual discussions, role-playing and actual situations that arise in the classroom, we purposefully teach respect, responsibility, kindness, manners and an awareness of the needs and rights of others. When pertinent, teachers also discuss appropriate responses to conflict. Expectations for behavior are clearly delineated and discussed with the students on a regular basis. Cooperative and respectful behavior is praised and kind acts are modeled and noted. The need for discipline is circumvented and minimized by purposeful guidance and education.

**Responding to Conflict:** The safety of each child is our highest priority. In our classrooms, conflict can often be deterred with redirection, reminders and the provision of alternate choices. If transgressions occur between older students, teachers provide reminders and intervene as necessary. When teachers have established a relationship of trust and respect, they may move an uncooperative child to action with gentle, verbal encouragement. Children are reminded of previously learned rules and expectations and prompted to respect the needs of others. Depending on their age and ability to reason, they are encouraged to reflect back on an incident and resolve to make better choices in the future. Sometimes, privileges are withdrawn so they can learn the connection between their actions and logical consequences. Natural friction between children may be uninterrupted but closely supervised, providing the children with practice in problem-solving and conflict resolution. Aggressive behavior, however, is stopped immediately and calmly by the teachers and discussed privately with the child or children involved. A young child may be asked to sit quietly to regain self-control and may be removed from the activities of the other children for a short time, but children are never completely isolated from others.

**Parental Involvement:** Communication with families is at the heart of any discipline and guidance program. We welcome communication and initiate both formal and informal conferences. The school and families work together to resolve discipline problems and to plan for guidance. Learning discipline and good decision-making skills is a process. The efforts of the faculty, the parents and the administrators are all important in the creation of an optimal learning environment.

At Garrison Forest, the joy of learning and respect for other people are considered primary expectations. Children are taught to behave in a courteous, thoughtful fashion. Our goal is to allow all individuals to grow and learn in a healthy and happy environment. When there is a serious deviation from this goal, the Director of Early Childhood Education and counselor will work in consultation with the parents. Any disciplinary action will be appropriate to the age of the child and the situation and in line with the guidelines of this policy. Gross misconduct, including physical harm to another student or behavior determined to be detrimental to the school community, may result in suspension or expulsion.

**The Dress Code:** All Preschool students must wear sneakers or rubber-soled shoes with a strap, every day. Parents are also asked to ensure that their children dress for the weather, including raincoats and sufficient outerwear for a trip across campus. Every day, students leave their main classroom buildings to travel to Specials, either in the adjacent Lower School building or in the Athletic Center or the Fine and Performing Arts building. We will also take advantage of the new Outdoor Classroom, even when it's muddy. Use parental discretion with respect to the wearing of jewelry during the school day. Small, simple jewelry is permitted, but parents should be aware that these items are easily misplaced and lost during an active school day.

**Please mark all clothing with your child's name.** We cannot emphasize enough the importance of clearly marking ALL clothing, including sneakers.

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **ATTENDANCE**

Each school day is integral to a coordinated program that provides the best possible education. Students are expected to attend school every day, on time, unless sickness or other special family circumstances interfere. Parents should call the Administrative Assistant to report absences. Please report the reason for your child's absence so we can make decisions about communicating with other parents regarding contagious illnesses. **Students must be fever-free for 24 hours (without the aid of fever-reducing medication) before returning to school.** Children who have vomited or had diarrhea should also stay home for 24 hours from the time of the incident.

#### **COVID-19 Response and Protocol**

Please refer to the GFS COVID-19 Resource page for updated information: [gfs.org/reopening](https://gfs.org/reopening).

Please make every effort to schedule appointments after school including those with doctors and dentists. Although there may be occasions when it is unavoidable, students benefit from consistency. If a student must leave school early or arrive late due to a doctor's appointment or another compelling reason, please send a note to the teacher or email 24 hours prior to the absence. Absences for religious holidays are the exception.

Chronic lateness is disruptive to the other members of the community and detrimental to a child's social and academic adjustment to the school day. The opportunity for socializing that begins each school day is an important part of the curriculum, proving important time for the children to experience the give-and-take of a classroom community and develop the friendships that enhance each student's school experience.

**Physical Education:** All students are expected to participate in P.E. classes and join their peers in outdoor recess if they are in school. **A doctor's note is required if a doctor requires the school to excuse a child from P.E. classes.** The parents of any student who cannot participate fully in a P.E. class must contact the Director of Early Childhood Education directly and in sufficient time to make any necessary adjustments. Depending on the location of the P.E. class and the specific activity, we will determine if the student will observe P.E. or stay in another supervised location for the duration of the class. A student who is capable of walking to the location of the class will observe and participate in a way that is medically reasonable.

## **BIRTHDAYS**

We encourage parents to use snack time at school as your child's official birthday party. You are welcome to join the class for snack, take pictures, and bring party plates and napkins. It's the best way to "invite" the whole class for a party that is appropriately short and fun. Teachers welcome mini-cupcakes, healthy snacks, and other simple refreshments sent from home. Keep in mind our "No Nuts" policy. Parents must make arrangements in advance with classroom teachers for all treats at school. Classroom teachers cannot take responsibility for party invitations being distributed at school. We ask that families remain sensitive to the feelings of classmates when deciding who to include, and we require that all invitations be issued by mail, email, or phone.

## **POTTY TRAINING**

All children need to be fully potty trained for entry into the 3's and Pre-K classrooms. They also need to be trained for the Early Birds and Little Woodlands programs. Children should be independent in the bathroom. Teachers can help with snaps, zippers, etc on clothing, but children need to be able to initiate the bathroom process on their own.

Children in the 2's program do not need to be potty trained. Teachers will work on the process throughout the year in the classroom.

## **SUPPLIES**

The school provides most supplies as part of the Preschool tuition. Occasionally, teachers may ask students to bring in special supplies for a project. Student costs for field trips, including transportation, are also covered by tuition. When parents are invited to accompany their child on a trip they may be asked to pay for any adult entrance fees or tickets.

**Totebags:** All students must have a tote bag at least 12" by 12." **Backpacks are not allowed** as they are too difficult for the students to manage and make it difficult for the teachers to add materials to a student's bag. GFS totebags of the appropriate size and shape are available for purchase in the GFS school store and small recycling "shopping" bags are also appropriate.

## **EMERGENCY DRILLS**

In accordance with Maryland State Law, fire and evacuation drills are held throughout the year at different times of the day. Early in the school year all students are instructed in proper procedures and a scheduled fire drill is held. Unannounced drills are held monthly from that point on throughout the year. In addition, emergency school-wide evacuation and lock-down drills are also held periodically.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE MARYLAND STATE REPORTING POLICY**

Some student-faculty communications are subject to state laws regarding confidentiality. According to Section 5-704 of the Family Law volume of the Annotated Code of the State of Maryland, any teacher or other professional employee of the school who has reason to believe that a child has been subject to abuse or neglect must immediately make a report to the appropriate authority. Notification of the report should be given to the Head of School and the school counselor. In

complying with the mandate to report, the person so reporting is given immunity from criminal or civil penalties or liability when that person, in good faith, makes such a report. Such reports are confidential.

## **FUND-RAISING POLICY**

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

## **GIFT-GIVING POLICY**

At holidays, birthdays and the end of the year, parents and children often want to remember their teachers in a special way. Parents and children sometimes create personal cards and/or simple, homemade gifts for teachers and staff members. Gifts of books may also be given to specific classroom libraries or the Lower Division library. Families wishing to express their appreciation are encouraged to do so in a way that involves the children and is meaningful to the teachers.

## **STUDENT RECORDS**

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

- Personal and family data
- Progress Reports
- Other records which may contribute to understanding the educational progress of the student

All information in a student's file is considered confidential, to be used only by school personnel in planning and developing an educational program for the child. Parents and/or legal guardians may have access to their child's records upon written request to the Director of Early Childhood Education and by appointment. Requests for access to student records will be honored within 24 hours of receipt of a written request. Information contained in a child's cumulative school record will not be released to another school or individual without the written permission of the child's parent or guardian. Information considered in the Admission process is not subject to these policies and will not be made available to parents. Testing administered by outside evaluators or psychologists will become part of a student's school file only if desired by the parents or guardians. The inclusion of such testing however, is extremely helpful to all teachers as they prepare the curriculum and attempt to make any recommended accommodations.

## **PARENT VISITATION**

At this time, we are unable to host parents on campus and in the preschool building. We are hopeful this will change soon in response to updated COVID regulations.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

One of Garrison Forest's greatest strengths is the degree to which parents are involved in the School. There are numerous opportunities for parents to become involved both in the Preschool and in the community as a whole. We value our volunteers but may not always be able to use each person who is available. Class parents and teachers are in touch with parents about classroom needs throughout the year. If you are interested in volunteering in a special way, please speak to a Parent Association Representative, an administrator, your class parent or a teacher. Information about involvement in the School's Parent Association is also at [gfs.org/parent/parent-association](http://gfs.org/parent/parent-association).

### THE PARENT ASSOCIATION

The Garrison Forest Parent Association exists to support the educational choice parents have made for their children. The role of the Parent Association is to strengthen the triangle that students, faculty and parents share. The Parent Association also supports Parent Education initiatives. Meetings are held regularly for representatives from all areas and divisions of the school.

**Fundraising:** The Parent Association sponsors fundraising activities, including Grizzly Gear (the sale of used uniforms and other items) to support its own operating budget. Any additional Parent Association fund-raising projects or promotions must receive prior approval by the Development Office. For the Preschool and Lower School, Spring Fling is the primary means of funding assemblies, field trips and special events.

**Parent Association Representatives and Team Parents:** Preschool Representatives to the Parent Association Board act as liaisons between the Parent Association Board and the Preschool. The reps work closely with the Director of Early Childhood Education and serve as the coordinators of Class Parents. The Preschool Representative serves on the Parent Association Executive Board and attends general Board meetings.

**Team Parents** are liaisons between classroom teachers and parents. They work closely with the teachers planning field trips, helping with holidays and special events and encouraging parent participation in various School events.

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

Through planned activities, each child learns the values and pleasures of giving to others. Projects and activities are designed to include the children in an age appropriate way and may include outreach within or outside the immediate school community. Each of the four divisions of the school takes on individual projects and often requests the help and involvement of other members of the community. Some programs, such as Race for the Cure, are school-wide efforts and bring the talents and efforts of the entire school together for a common cause. Additional age appropriate endeavors are often incorporated into daily activities, discussions, classroom projects and literature.



## HEALTH SERVICES

The goal of the Garrison Forest School Health Services is to maximize the potential of all students to learn and grow by promoting and protecting their health at school. Everyone in a school setting is working in close contact with others, so we work actively to protect students and others in the school community from disease and infection. The spread of many common contagious conditions can be prevented or ameliorated by teaching and encouraging good hygiene including using proper hand washing techniques, covering skin trauma, avoiding shared personal items and maintaining a clean environment. Our housekeeping standards remain exceptional and are based on Health Department recommendations for schools. We are vigilant about monitoring our community and require that students and teachers be cleared by a health care professional to return to school after contracting certain contagious infections. Our team of registered nurses provides coverage whenever school is open and a school physician is always on call.

## HEALTH RECORDS

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

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

## IMMUNIZATIONS

Each child's immunization record must show the day, month and year of each vaccination and must be signed by a physician or health department official. **No child will be admitted to school without providing proof of current required immunizations unless officially exempted for medical and religious reasons that satisfy Maryland law.** Consult with the school nurse, the Health Department or your physician about requirements and proper documentation for exemptions.

## MEDICATION POLICIES

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

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

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

## MEDICAL NOTIFICATIONS

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

## USE OF THE HEALTH CENTER

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

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

#### **COVID-19 Response and Protocol**

Please refer to the GFS COVID-19 Resource page for updated information: [gfs.org/reopening](https://gfs.org/reopening).

### **EVENTS AND HOLIDAYS**

**\*\*These events may be altered due to COVID-19**

**All-School Events:** Throughout the year, students and faculty get together as a School to promote camaraderie and solidarity within the GFS community. Events may include a Community Connections Day, Race for the Cure in October, a multicultural pot-luck dinner in the fall, a celebration of Thanks and Giving in November, a “green” environmental event in April and Field Day in May. Stay abreast of these events and others through the GFS web calendar.

### **PRESCHOOL EVENTS**

**Parents' Day:** In October, parents of Threes and Pre-K are invited to spend the morning with their children. They will have some time in their classrooms as well as attend a Specials class. This is an exciting event for the children as they are proud of their accomplishments and appreciate sharing their school life with their parents.

**Preschool Pizza and Art Night:** This is a creative event in the early evening that begins with pizza for families in the school's Dining Hall. The children participate in make-and-take artistic activities assisted by the Preschool teachers and students from the Middle and Upper Schools. The Art Event takes place in the spring on the same night as the Lower School Art Show.

**Assemblies and Recitals:** Several times a year Preschool students have an assembly period. The programs are varied and draw on the expertise and interests of parents and outside resources. In addition, in February and in May, time is devoted to our own Garrison Forest Preschool musicians, those who take instrumental music lessons on campus.

**Field Day** is an exciting event for Lower Division students in May. This event highlights the fun and sense of accomplishment associated with healthy physical activity.

**Grandparents' Day** is held each year in April for Threes and Pre-K. It provides an opportunity for grandparents and Special Friends to spend some time with their Garrison Forest students. Invitations are mailed to all grandparents based on the information we receive on the Parent Information Form that is sent home the previous year in the May mailing. Please be sure this information is kept up-to-date.

A **Halloween Parade** is held for all Lower Division students on the school day closest to Halloween. Students arrive in costume for the parade. Parents are welcome to join us for coffee before the parade and watch the students walk across campus, through the Middle and Upper Schools and back to their buildings. After the parade the students change their clothes and resume a normal schedule.

**Orientation Day:** Before classes begin, students and their parents come for an official orientation in small groups. Students meet their teachers and classmates, acclimate themselves to the classroom and spend some time with a Specials teacher. Parents meet the teachers and other families and spend time with the Director of Early Childhood Education being oriented to our procedures and policies. Parents also spend time with the teachers, finding out more about the routine of the school day and events and activities relevant to each classroom. Specific times for each family and/or grade level are included in the August mailing.

**Parent Conferences:** Communication with parents is vital to the success of each child. To request a conference, other than on a regularly scheduled Conference Day, call or email your child's teacher. The Director of Early Childhood Education may be involved in conferences upon the request of a parent or teacher. Specials teachers and the School Counselor may be invited when it would be helpful. Conference Days take place for Pre-K and Threes parents in the fall, mid-winter and in May. Attendance at the first two conferences is required. In May they may take place at another time or by phone. There are no classes for students on Conference Days and childcare is provided for students and siblings for the duration of a conference time. For all Preschool students, with the exception of Parent-Toddler, written reports summarizing your child's experience and growth are sent to parents at the end of the school year.

**Plays and Concerts:** The Threes and Pre-Kindergarten students perform in a yearly play. It's a time for parents and other children to enjoy the creative efforts of the students and share in their enthusiasm for drama and singing. The play takes place as the final event before Spring Break.

**Spring Fling** is an important event run by Preschool and Lower School parents. It is held on Saturday, the first weekend in May. Proceeds go to an Assembly, Field Trip and Special Events fund for the Preschool and Lower School.

**Valentine's Day** is celebrated with the children exchanging valentines with classmates and having parties in their classrooms. Class Parents and classroom teachers organize this celebration.

**Winter Holidays:** All students learn about the major winter holidays in educational classroom lessons. They share the traditions of their own families and learn about the holidays of their classmates in age appropriate ways. Gifts are not exchanged among children at school. If a child wishes to give a gift to a teacher, a personal card, a simple hand-made gift or a book for the classroom or the library is suggested. Money may not be collected for gifts for faculty members.

## **REQUESTS FOR ACCOMMODATIONS**

GFS complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and all other federal, state and local laws regarding students with disabilities. GFS will provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities and will not discriminate against any student by excluding the student from fully participating in any student program in violation of the law. Requests for accommodations must be made to the Academic Resource Center (the "ARC"). Review of these requests is made on a case by case basis for each individual student. The ARC will decide which accommodations are to be offered in consultation with the parents, Faculty, and the Division Head and/or Head of School if appropriate. GFS requires documentation from a qualified healthcare provider including relevant test results supporting the request for accommodation. It is difficult for the school to honor informal requests for accommodation, so please be sure to follow this procedure.

## **GENERAL CIVILITY**

GFS takes seriously its mission, philosophy and statement of respect as articulated at the beginning of this handbook. All students, parents, guardians and other student representatives are expected to engage with GFS employees in a manner that conforms to the values of GFS. This includes interacting with all GFS employees in a respectful and civil manner during conferences, school events and in any other communications. Students, parents, guardians and other student representatives are prohibited from raising their voices, yelling, becoming aggressive verbally or

physically, threatening, bullying belittling or engaging in any other similar behavior during interactions with GFS employees, on GFS property, or during GFS sponsored activities. Should any issues arise under this general civility policy, they will be addressed by the Division Head.

### **IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

Garrison Forest School Switchboard	410-363-1500
Jamie Roeder Bailey, Director of Early Childhood Education	410-559-3220
Cindy Isenhour, Preschool Administrative Assistant	410-559-3221
Fax, Preschool	410-559-3241
Afterschool Care (Michele Berman)	410-375-4580
Health Center	410-559-3200
Garrison Forest Website and Parent Login	<a href="http://www.gfs.org">www.gfs.org</a>

### **WEATHER AND EMERGENCY CLOSINGS**

In the event of an inclement weather closing or delay, an email message is sent to the parents' primary email address and cell phone number. The message is delivered at or around 6:00 a.m. or as soon as the decision is made. Information regarding the School's schedule is also available via the School's main telephone number, 410-363-1500 and information is posted on the School's website, [www.gfs.org](http://www.gfs.org). If there is a delayed opening, start times may be at 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. Parents are encouraged to use their best judgment in deciding when it is safe to travel.

In the event of an emergency (such as a major evacuation, relocation or lockdown) an emergency voice and email message is sent to every telephone number (home, work and cell) and email address (home and work) on file for each student.

### **THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MARYLAND SCHOOLS**

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

**PARENTS:** Working together, parents and school professionals exert a strong influence on children to become better educated; they also help them to mature by modeling adult working relationships based upon civility, honesty and respect. To ensure effective teamwork between independent schools and parents, independent schools must communicate their procedures to parents, who, in turn, share the important responsibility to become informed members of the school community.

**Parents and the Board of Trustees:** Decision-making authority at the highest level resides in a volunteer Board of Trustees whose membership often includes current parents. The Board of Trustees does not intervene in the daily affairs of the school, such as curriculum development and hiring, evaluating, or firing of faculty and staff. Instead, the Board focuses on three areas critical to the success of any independent school: it selects, evaluates, and supports the Head of School, to whom it delegates authority to manage the school; it develops broad institutional policies that guide the Head in running the school; and it is accountable for the financial well-being of the school. In the conduct of its official business, the Board acts only as a whole; individual Trustees, including the Board Chair, have no authority to act unless specifically authorized to do so by the Board acting as a whole.

AIMS encourages parents who are interested in high-level decision making to stay informed about the work of the Board of Trustees by reading school publications, talking to the Head of School, and attending appropriate meetings. Parents with concerns about the school or with decisions made by the administration or faculty are encouraged to inquire about and follow the school's review process, but they should not expect the Board of Trustees to act as an appeals board. In a day school, trustees often interact with others within the school community and hear concerns about the daily operation of the school. As a matter of good practice, the trustee reports those concerns to the Head of School.

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

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

- AIMS encourages parents to work productively with teachers and administrators by staying informed about their child and important events in the life of the school. Thoughtful questions and suggestions should be welcomed by the school. It is incumbent upon the school to provide parents with timely and pertinent information.
- Parents best support a school climate of trust and respect by communicating concerns openly and constructively to the teacher or administrator closest to the problem. Efforts by parents to lobby other parents will be viewed by the school as counterproductive.

- While parents may not agree with every decision by the school, in most cases, the parent and school will find enough common ground to continue a mutually respectful relationship. In the extreme case, however, an impasse may be so severe that the parent cannot remain a constructive member of the community. In such cases, both the parent and the school should consider whether another school would be a better match for the family.

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

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

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

**DIVERSITY:** To maintain educational excellence, to prepare students for a changing world, and to further the aims of a nation dedicated to great ideals of social justice and equity, AIMS urges school leaders to galvanize their communities to be more inclusive in seeking talented students, teachers, and administrators; to forge multicultural curricula; and to create and sustain cultures that better reflect the enormous variety among people. The ability of AIMS schools to thrive in the future will depend in part upon their ability to make good on the promise of diversity ideals by implementing concrete and far-reaching changes.<sup>1</sup> Support for diversity in its many forms will encourage students to challenge their assumptions, take intellectual risks, and learn to work collaboratively with different kinds of people. Moreover, the acquisition of multicultural competencies is now critically important for every student.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that diversity in schools supports educational excellence; that demographic and economic changes are accelerating; and that in other sectors of society, notably in business and higher education, diversity has become essential to institutional success:

- Because human variety plays an important role in the intellectual, social, and emotional development of children, diversity is closely related to educational excellence. Students "learn more and think in deeper, more complex ways in a diverse educational environment...and they are better prepared to become active participants in our pluralistic, democratic society."<sup>3</sup> Diversity also brings texture and richness into students' lives and



challenges them to grow intellectually and emotionally through a process of understanding and synthesizing differing points of view.

- In 1995, the United States population was estimated to be 74% non-Hispanic White. By 2050, the non-Hispanic White population will have decreased to just over one-half of the total population. After 2020, the Hispanic population is projected to add more people to the United States every year than will all other groups combined.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

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

### **The Board of Trustees**

- Working with the Head of School, the Board develops and approves a formal diversity statement, either within the mission statement or separately, which both defines diversity in relation to the school's mission and articulates a clear rationale for its importance to the school. The statement is widely distributed, including to parents and alumni. School leaders at all levels are consistent and clear about the school's commitment to diversity.
- The composition of the Board reflects its commitment to diversity and is a model to the entire school community.
- Trustees receive diversity training. Although Trustees play no role in the daily management of the school, their understanding of diversity issues is crucial to their ability to make wise decisions about whom to hire as Head of School, school policy, funding priorities, and strategic planning.
- The Board ensures that diversity is an important part of the Head of School's responsibilities and provides the resources necessary, including financial.
- The Board's agenda reflects the importance of diversity by dedicating the time necessary at regular meetings for trustees to stay informed about diversity good practice and to make wise diversity policy decisions for the school community.

### **The Head of School**

- The Head of School dedicates sufficient time and focus to diversity. Without the Head's direct, intensive involvement, diversity may not be viewed as important as other school priorities.

- Moreover, the Head's vision and determination are often essential in helping others in the community to understand the importance of diversity to the school's mission and to its students. Only the Head can ensure that diversity is a priority for all constituencies.
- The Head ensures that all members of the school community receive diversity training, including the administrative team, faculty, staff, students, and parents.
- The Head of School places a high priority on attracting and retaining a diverse administration and faculty, not only because students need and deserve such role models and resources, but also because diversity among the adult professionals brings energy and insight to the school's efforts to diversify its curriculum and culture. To reach out to diverse candidates, the Head goes beyond traditional employment resources and establishes direct contacts with colleges, universities, and other community resources that serve historically underrepresented people.
- The Head of School assures that the school's curriculum, pedagogy, and culture reflect the school's commitment to diversity and the need to teach multicultural competencies in order to prepare students for an increasingly diverse world.

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

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

### **Diversity and Parents**

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

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

<sup>2</sup> "...education for the twenty-first century must not only help students to become literate and reflective citizens who can participate productively in the workforce but it must also teach them to care about other people in their communities and to take personal, social, and civic action to create a more humane and just society." *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, James A. Banks (Allyn and Bacon 2002).

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

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Report. Local demographics often mirror these national trends. In Montgomery County, Maryland, for

example, the non-White population will grow by 56% between 2010 and 2030. Maryland State Data Center.

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