

FAMILY HANDBOOK 2025-2026



PRAIRIE CREEK
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

CONTENTS

- 3 **School Contacts**
 - Address, telephone, emails, fax, and website
 - Administrative staff
 - School Board

- 4-7 **School Mission and Philosophy**

- 8-14 **School Life**
 - Daily schedule
 - After School Care program
 - Classroom placement
 - Social curriculum
 - Academics and Assessment
 - Daily communications
 - Transportation procedures
 - Lunches & snacks
 - Clothing and Lost & Found
 - Emergency Closings
 - Field Trips

- 14-18 **Community Life**
 - Adult Roles & Responsibilities (parents, faculty, director, board)
 - Communications (calls, emails, Backpack Express)
 - Funding
 - Visiting in the classroom
 - Volunteering

- 19-23 **School Policies**
 - Attendance
 - Behavior
 - Conflict resolution
 - Fair Practice & Equal Opportunity
 - Annual Report information

- 23-26 **School Traditions**

- 26 **Prairie Creek Glossary of Terms**

Enclosure: Behavior Policy
 Bullying Prohibition Policy

Prairie Creek Community School

District #4090
27695 Denmark Avenue
Northfield, MN 55057
Phone: 507-645-9640
Fax: 507-645-8234

Attendance attendance@prairiecreek.org
(please email or call by 8:10 am if your child will miss school)

www.prairiecreek.org
Website

Prairie Creek Administrative Staff

Simon Tyler, Director
styler@prairiecreek.org

Colleen Braucher, Office Manager/Food Service Director
cbraucher@prairiecreek.org

Diana Drager, Office Assistant
ddrager@prairiecreek.org

Prairie Creek Board of Directors

Christine Williams	Parent Member, Board Chairperson
Kendra Rasmussen	Community Member, Board Vice-Chairperson
Ryan Kiesel	Teacher Member, Board Treasurer
Beth Molitor	Parent Member, Board Secretary
Cale Steinhoff	Teacher Member
Shelly Dickenson	Community Member
Jessica Provancha	Parent Member
Kiara Jorgenson	Parent Member
Margit Zsolnay	Parent Member
Simon Tyler	School Director (ex-officio)

PRAIRIE CREEK: MISSION & PHILOSOPHY

PRAIRIE CREEK COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Founded 1983

Converted to Charter School 2002

Expanded 2009

Prairie Creek is a community school

Families, teachers, staff, and students collaborate to create a joyful and challenging climate for learning. We work to build an inclusive environment to which all belong. We embrace the experiences, identities, and perspectives that we all bring.

Prairie Creek is a child-centered school

Children discover their power in an experiential learning environment. We honor the whole child and attend to the well-being of each individual - socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. We strive to know children deeply and assure them of their value.

Prairie Creek is a progressive education school

We are committed to inquiry, innovation, and reflective practice. We support children in developing the skills and habits of mind that cultivate a lifelong love of learning. We share our philosophy and practice with others and learn from them.

Prairie Creek works to make the world a better place

We engage in democratic decision-making and problem-solving where children are empowered to speak their voice and effect change in pursuit of a just and compassionate world. We challenge and prepare one another to understand and actively resist racism and other societal injustices. We nurture a close connection with nature and promote environmental stewardship.

What is a Progressive School?

Progressive education began in the early 1920s and had a strong, though sporadic, impact on American education. In the 1920s many independent schools were founded using the experiential approach described in the writings of John Dewey, a philosopher and a social and educational reformer. In the 1940s progressive schools became less popular, but with the idealism of the 1960s there was a new rise of interest in the educational approach known as progressivism. Today there are progressive schools all over the United States and some public school districts have also adopted the approach. Progressive schools share some common philosophies and practices:

- Curriculum is strongly influenced by what the children are interested in, and is child-centered rather than adult driven.

- Learning is "hands on" experiential, and the emphasis is on process rather than product. Children are "learning to learn."
- Learning is deep. Children learn through integrated, theme-based units or inquiry projects, and the "theme" often emerges from the children.
- The classroom is a democratic community. Children play a role in making and upholding the classroom rules.
- Parents are actively involved in their children's life at school and in the classroom. They are also part of a democratic community and have a voice in their children's education.
- Assessment is authentic and holistic. Children are well known by their teachers and peers.
- Narrative reports are written about children that cover all aspects of their development—social, emotional, personal, physical, and intellectual. Testing, grading, and ranking are curtailed or banned where possible.
- Classes are usually of mixed ages\.. Children are able to work at their own pace and cross-age friendships are encouraged.

Progressive schools practice a developmental approach which holds that each child is a unique being unfolding and developing according to a specific pattern and timetable. At each stage of development there are things that can be learned and things that should not be learned. Knowing and respecting a child's development is central to progressive education.

Progressive schools belong to a long tradition of education that has, at its heart, the ideal that children are unique and worthy of respect. In 1951 John French wrote: "The progressive school teaches the child to think for himself instead of passively accepting stereotyped ideas. It keeps always in mind that each child is different from every other; and that what makes an educated person useful in his particular walk of life, what makes him interesting, what makes him an individual, is not his resemblances to other people but his differences."

PRAIRIE CREEK AS A PROGRESSIVE SCHOOL

At Prairie Creek Community School we believe that children learn best when they like school and are stimulated by imaginative teaching in an atmosphere of mutual respect. At Prairie Creek, each child is respected as a complete and responsible person, and is encouraged to:

- Develop an understanding of self, a sense of personal worth, and the ability to accept both talents and limitations gracefully, while enjoying a general feeling of success.
- Develop an understanding of, and a respect and tolerance for, others. Learn to accept and appreciate individual differences, and differences in race, class, gender, and culture in the child's own community and around the world.
- Develop an active social consciousness, a global perspective, and a sense of citizenship through various forms of community involvement, including opportunities to serve.
- Develop an intelligence that is flexible, open, questioning, active, curious, objective, and critical.
- Develop intellectual discipline and persistence. Learn about the world and develop the skills to use and share knowledge.
- Learn to distinguish between failure and error, and see error as a part of learning.
- Develop the skills of self-evaluation and collaborative critique to support growth.
- Develop the creative capacity and enjoy a sense of freedom in self-expression.
- Experience the reverence, wonder, joy, affirmation, and humor of life.
- Learn to live by cooperation and consensus, and to solve problems nonviolently.
- Experience and accept healthy competition that leads to an appreciation of both self and others.
- Develop a sense of responsibility toward physical materials and the school environment, and a respect and love for the earth.

HABITS OF THE MIND:

“Habit is a cable; we weave a thread of it each day, and at last we cannot break it”
- Horace Mann

The Habits of Mind were identified through the work of Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick. They are a tool for identifying the habits of successful thinkers. At Prairie Creek, the Habits of Mind are used as a common language for articulating social and academic growth, and establishing goals.

The sixteen habits developed by Costa and Kallick are summarized below.

- **Persistence:** Stick to it! Preserving in task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.
- **Managing Impulsivity:** Take your time! Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.
- **Listening with Empathy and Understanding:** Understanding others! Devoting mental energy to another's person's thoughts and ideas. Make an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.
- **Thinking Flexibly:** Look at it another way! Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, and consider options.
- **Thinking about your Thinking- Metacognition:** Know your knowing! Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.
- **Striving for Accuracy:** Check it again! Always do your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.
- **Applying Past Knowledge:** Use what you learn! Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.
- **Questioning and Posing Problems:** How do you know? Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed and developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.
- **Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision:** Be clear! Striving for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.
- **Gathering Data Through All Senses:** Use your natural pathways! Pay attention to the world around you. Gather data through all of the senses, taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.
- **Creating, Imaging and Innovating:** Try a different way! Generating new and novel ideas, fluency and originality.
- **Responding with Wonderment and Awe:** Have fun figuring it out! Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty. Being passionate.
- **Taking Responsible Risks:** Venture out! Being adventuresome; living on the edge of one's competence. Try new things constantly.
- **Finding Humor:** Laugh a little! Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at oneself.
- **Thinking Interdependently:** Work together! Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Team work.
- **Remaining Open to Continuous Learning:** Learn from experiences! Having Humility and Pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.

PRAIRIE CREEK: SCHOOL LIFE

SCHOOL DAY SCHEDULE

Monday-Tuesday-Thursday-Friday 8:15 am - 2:30 pm. (Children should arrive between 8:00am-8:10am)

Wednesday (late start) 9:15 am -2:30 pm (Children should arrive between 9:00am-9:10am)

The school day ends at 2:30 pm (families picking up children by car should arrive between 2:35 pm - 2:45 pm, after the busses depart)

AFTER SCHOOL CARE SCHEDULE

Monday-Friday 2:30 pm - 6:00 pm.

Wednesday morning care 7:30 am. - 9:00 am.

AFTER SCHOOL CARE PROGRAM

Prairie Creek offers an After School Care program. This program is provided to assist families who are not able to access bus transportation or pick their children up at the end of the school day. The After School Care program is not designed, or staffed, to support “playdates” between children. To ensure proper staff to student ratios, the After School Care program is based on a monthly reservation schedule. Occasional program use may be available based on staff availability and must have pre-approval. A request made outside of the monthly reservation requires 48 hours’ notice and can be submitted in writing to the office staff. Information regarding costs for this program can be obtained from the office.

Please see the After School Care program handbook located on the website for policies and procedures.

CLASSROOM PLACEMENT

Prairie Creek has three classrooms for each of the school’s 3 combined-grade levels: K-1, 2-3, and 4-5, with an average of 20 students in each room. We strongly believe that children learn best in mixed-age, heterogeneously grouped classes. Classroom groupings are determined annually to accommodate new and re-enrolling students, and to create classes of approximately equal size.

The faculty and director make classroom placements. Parents are asked not to make requests for teachers. Children are assigned to classrooms based on a mix of their ages, skills, and developmental levels. Careful consideration is given to the personalities and learning styles of individual children and to social interactions between groups of children. In most cases, children will remain with the same teacher for two years.

SOCIAL CURRICULUM

Learning can only take place when children feel secure enough to make mistakes. This is possible only when children are a part of a community that values, models, and teaches kindness and tolerance. Teachers and children spend the first six weeks of the

school year making communities in classrooms and as a school – playing together at recess, discussing ethical conduct and developing the skills and language necessary for social problem solving.

Throughout the year, we meet as a class daily to celebrate together and solve any problems that might occur. We teach and use the conflict resolution model in which each child involved in a conflict shares his or her perspective and then listens to others' perspectives. Together they work to find a solution that is acceptable and strengthening for everyone.

Each classroom conducts daily morning meetings during which children greet one another, practice discussion skills, enjoy companionship, and set a peaceful tone for the day.

ACADEMICS

Prairie Creek teachers remain committed to preparing children to be citizens of a changing world. We teach children how to question and how to find answers to those questions. We develop classroom communities in which care and kindness trump competition. Students in our classes do real work that has intrinsic value. We nurture the natural curiosity and creativity of our students and hone those skills so that our students become effective researchers and problem solvers. We maintain small classrooms in which the individual contribution of each child is important.

To learn more about our philosophy of academics, including overviews of our comprehensive literacy and math plans, please visit our website or connect with one of the Prairie Creek teaching staff.

ASSESSMENT

Evaluation is a multi-faceted process at Prairie Creek. In order to build on the strengths of the students and assess their learning progress, the school employs a variety of formal and informal evaluative tools of a qualitative and descriptive, rather than quantitative, nature. Parents and teachers share information via regular newsletters, phone conversations, conferences, portfolios of children's work, and written narrative reports. Prairie Creek students also participate in Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) that are administered to 3 – 5 grade students in Reading and Math and to grade 5 students in Science. Student progress in Reading and Math is also monitored by Fastbridge evaluations. By statute, parents may request policy and procedure information regarding student participation in state assessment mandated by section 1111(b)(2) including parental right to opt their child out of assessments.

There are three official teacher-parent-student conferences each year:

1. Fall information-gathering & goal-setting conference: This conference provides the opportunity for teachers, parents, and children to share information in order to make the year as successful as possible. The information may include past history, present interests, and expectations and goals for the future. Teachers use the information gathered at conferences to plan approaches to individual children as well as the class curriculum and schedule.
2. Mid-year conference: This conference provides an opportunity for the child and his or her supporters to look back on what has happened during the early part of the year, assess progress and level of satisfaction, and suggest strategies and pace for the upcoming months. The assessment in this mid-year conference focuses on a portfolio of student work selected by the child with teacher guidance. As part of the conference, students share and discuss their work.
3. Spring conference: The final conference is scheduled in May. This conference includes written narrative reports from the teacher and another opportunity to look at portfolios and see work done and progress made.

Teachers use a variety of narrative formats, but all share the goal that parents and teachers receive the information and communication that they desire. We see assessment as being a process in which everybody needs satisfaction—students, parents, and teachers.

DAILY COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL & HOME

All students should come to school each day with a sturdy backpack—one with plenty of room for your child's gear and food for the day. Prairie Creek provides a Backpack Express folder with 2 pockets at the start of the school year. This folder shuttles back and forth every day between school and home, and is the best way for families and staff to communicate. Plan to check your student's Backpack Express daily, for messages from teachers, school announcements, permission slips, and other need-to-know information. If you have paperwork for teachers and school staff, this is almost always the best way to deliver those messages.

Families are also encouraged to routinely check the school website (www.prairiecreek.org) for information.

TRANSPORTATION

We recognize that by attending Prairie Creek Community School your family is also investing time and resources in transportation. Likewise as a part of a rural community we continue to be sensitive to our neighbors needs and desire to support them to the best of our ability. Therefore, we encourage the use of traveling by bus when possible. Regardless of your transportation choices, we thank you in advance for supporting the following expectations for a safe and efficient drop off and pick up routine.

Bus Pick-up & Delivery

Bus transportation is provided to children who reside within Northfield School District boundaries, by Benjamin Bus Company (507-645-5720). In the morning, buses leave from neighborhoods and arrive at the Northfield Middle School, where students transfer to buses that then go directly to Prairie Creek. These buses pull up and park along the designated bus lanes and deliver students to the green doors that lead to the concourse inside the school.

The bus transportation changes each year, and is usually determined shortly before school starts. You should receive information and schedules in the mail directly from Benjamin Bus, with morning pick-up and afternoon drop-off times at your child's specific neighborhood stop.

In out-of-district areas such as Faribault, Farmington, Lakeville, Apple Valley, Rosemount, Cannon Falls, Nerstrand, etc., reimbursement for driving from home school districts is available to qualifying families upon parent request.

Behavior on the Bus

In order for the ride on the bus to be both safe and pleasant for everyone (including the bus driver), students are expected to follow the bus company rules and behave with the same consideration for others as we expect at school. This means that students are to remain in their seats except when exiting and entering, that they are not to annoy anyone either physically or verbally, and that they are to keep their voices at a quiet, conversational level. It also means that they must respond to the bus driver's directions quickly and cooperatively.

Benjamin Bus Company reserves the right to suspend the privilege to ride the bus for any student who has not followed these guidelines. They will usually first issue a warning slip, which goes to the child, the parents, and the school. Every year we talk with the children about appropriate bus behavior and appreciate the additional support of parents doing the same. If your child is having difficulty on the bus, especially on the Prairie Creek bus or with another Prairie Creek child, please inform the school office and we will do what we can to amend the situation. High and consistent expectations on the part of the adults for courteous behavior by the children usually result in a low incidence of problems for our students on the bus.

Car Drop-off & Pick-up

The beginning and end of the day are busy times with preparations, meetings, appointments, etc. for our staff and it is difficult to also supervise children. Students traveling by car should arrive between **8:00 am and 8:10 am**. Cars should arrive at the end of the day between **2:35 pm and 2:45 pm**.

We ask that drivers take their places in the line running from the front of the school (red doors). **At no time should cars block mailboxes or driveways on the east side of Denmark Avenue.**

When you arrive at the school to drop off your student, a staff person will help your child from the vehicle along the school sidewalk. We ask for your cooperation and support in order to keep the drop-off line moving and the school-day on schedule.

When picking up your child at the end of day, once the buses load and leave, cars will travel in line for curbside pick-up similar to the same routine as the morning drop-off procedures. With safety as our first priority, please be mindful that if the car in front of you has not proceeded ahead, you wait, rather than pull out to the side of the line and bypass.

For the safety of our staff and children please refrain from using cell phones while driving during the pick-up and drop off line.

Car Parking

If you need to come into the school at drop-off or pick-up time, please park in the north lot at the front of the building and—for safety reasons during this heavy-traffic time—walk hand-in-hand with your child to the school building. If you are coming into school during the day, please park in the north lot. For larger events, it is best to park in the larger lot; for overflow parking during these events; we ask that you park along the west side of Denmark Avenue (school side) and not the east side.

BREAKFAST, LUNCH, SNACK & DRINKS

For breakfast, if you would like you can order a breakfast from our caterer. Children will pick up their breakfast first thing in the morning.

For snack, we recommend that students bring something nutritious and sustaining, along with a drink from home or milk purchased from school (please, no pop or candy).

For lunch, families can either order a meal from the school's lunch service, or pack one from home. Our lunches are served by Prairie Creek staff and parent volunteers.

We offer milk with a variety of fat content to suit your student's taste.

The office will email out an order link for lunch, breakfast and milk for the upcoming month. Families are asked to fill out a separate online order form for each student at Prairie Creek by the given deadline. Please return payment to the office, if your child ordered milk for snack or lunch. **Please be respectful of the deadline. Any late orders will delay your child's meals for the month and you will need to send a lunch from home for a few days or a few weeks.**

We urge families to provide healthy low- or no-sugar snacks and lunches. Neither refrigeration nor microwaving is available for children's lunches or snacks.

Sending a water bottle with your child to school will also help ensure healthy hydrations. Be sure both the bottle and lid are labeled with their name.

If your child has special dietary concerns or needs please contact the school office. Allergies of all kinds are handled on a case by case basis and within individual classrooms.

Prairie Creek works to provide school food service that recycles, reuses, and composts leftovers. We invite you to join us in this effort by packing students' meals and snacks in reusable containers and encouraging them to bring disposable packaging home rather than adding to the school's waste stream.

Families are encouraged to complete the application for educational benefits. This may also be done at any time during the school year, should your financial situation change. The state provides meal program funding. Families are still encouraged to fill out the application. This information is used to provide additional funds to our school. Prairie Creek will notify you if you meet the qualifications.

CLOTHING

The weather in Minnesota can change greatly from morning to afternoon, especially during seasonal transitions. Please use good judgment and send a change of clothing in your child's backpack on these days. This is especially important when the grounds are wet or muddy, since it is, of course, messy, uncomfortable, and sometimes unhealthy for the child to sit in wet clothes for part of the day.

The children go outside every day—even in the winter. Unless it is raining or the weather is extremely cold, we expect that ALL children will be playing outside during recess when the air temperature is warmer than 0° F and the wind chill is warmer than -10° F. Please make sure your child is appropriately dressed with snow pants, warm coat, hat, mittens, and boots. We ask that you have a discussion and arrive at a resolution at home about expectations regarding appropriate winter clothing, and school staff will reinforce these safety and comfort decisions.

Your child should wear shoes at school. We do not allow the children to walk around in their snow boots or outside shoes in the school building. Please make sure they have an "inside" pair of shoes in their classroom at all times. Generally, most children simply leave a pair of shoes at school to change into. All children will need tennis shoes for use in the gym; these can double as inside shoes.

Please label your child's clothing clearly. All lost-and-found articles are collected in the large containers in the concourse. It's a good idea for parents to check it when they are at school. All unclaimed articles are donated to charity occasionally throughout the year.

EMERGENCY CLOSINGS

For severe weather, we follow the Northfield Public School closings, but because of the rural nature of our setting Prairie Creek in rare instances may close on additional days. In this rare case you would be notified by our school communication platform.

Communication Procedure

- Media outlets that will be contacted by Northfield School District are as follows:
 - KYMN – 1080 AM – Northfield
 - WCCO-TV, Channel 4, WCCO Radio and WCCO.com – Minneapolis/St. Paul
 - KARE-TV, Channel 11, and KARE11.com – Minneapolis/St. Paul
 - KDHL/Power 96 – Faribault
 - KSTP-TV, Channel 5, Minneapolis/St. Paul
 - KMSP-TV, Channel 9, Minneapolis/St. Paul
- Information will be disseminated directly to PCCS families via the automated contact system.

When there is the possibility of school closing early due to weather or emergency, we ask that you not call the school, as we need all lines open to contact families scheduled to stay for After School Care.

FIELD TRIPS

Expanding the learning environment beyond the school grounds is considered integral to the curriculum offered at Prairie Creek. We travel in classroom groups or as a total school group by charter bus. Written field trip permission slips must be signed by parents or guardians and returned to the school before the trip. Notice of field trips will be given as early as possible and at least one week in advance of the trip. In the interest of supervision and safety, there will be at least one adult for every seven children on field trips. A small fee is sometimes requested to help defray the cost of trips and transportation or admission costs, especially for all-school trips. Every effort will be made to keep fees for trips low - financial aid is available upon request. No child will be excluded from a field trip for lack of funds.

PRAIRIE CREEK: COMMUNITY LIFE

ADULT ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Parents at Prairie Creek should see their role as that of stakeholder, not stockholder. Their responsibility is to support and advance the school in its current operation so that the stake they hold, the education of their child, can be maximized. Parents are expected to respect the professionalism of school administrators, faculty, and staff, and see themselves as partners with the school. They should seek to resolve problems at the most immediate and appropriate level (i.e. talking directly with the teacher).

Faculty at Prairie Creek are mentors of children, focusing their time and energy on teaching and learning. Faculty should welcome parents as allies, being responsive to their concerns and questions while keeping the best interests of the children and their

class as a priority. Faculty members respect and respond to the school's leadership and play an important part in the leadership, leading by example in the areas of professional growth and development, curricular design and experimentation.

Director at Prairie Creek is our school's educational leader responsible for upholding the school's mission and values in all day-to-day and strategic decision-making. The director works with the Board to develop a vision for the school and to set policy. The director addresses grievances that can't be settled at a lower level, consulting with the Board when necessary, but making ultimate decisions.

Board of Directors at Prairie Creek has the responsibility of holding the school in trust, and ensuring the future of the school. They lead by developing policy and the strategic plan of the school and raising the funds required affecting the future of the school. The Board does not make decisions regarding the daily administration of the school. The Board of Directors is responsible for setting clear boundaries of responsibility, and for assuring that these boundaries are respected.

When all members of our community respect these roles and boundaries, trust grows and flourishes in our school.

The Board has 9 members. There are a number of ways to stay in touch with the Board:

- Read meeting agendas that come to your email before each meeting
- Read meeting minutes on our school website at prairiecreek.org
- Attend Board meetings Dates on our school website at prairiecreek.org

COMMUNICATIONS

The strength and viability of the Prairie Creek community depends on clear and frequent communication. Families are invited to call, email, or write to the school with questions, concerns, comments, and suggestions whenever they come up.

- Questions about the classroom are best directed to your child's classroom teacher; this is the recommended "first stop" for concerns or inquiries about your child's daily education.
- Questions about procedures and administrative details are best directed to Colleen Braucher, our office manager, or Simon Tyler, our director.
- Questions about fees and other accounts, call or write to Colleen Braucher, our office manager.
- Questions or concerns of a more general nature about the school or that don't fit these areas should be addressed to our director.

All of the Prairie Creek staff is committed to a high level of communication and we sincerely encourage you to keep in touch. Always feel free to contact the director to discuss concerns. If the director is not available please leave a message and the director will call you back at his earliest convenience.

To facilitate communication, the school has a general telephone answering machine on at all times.

Telephone Calls

Telephone messages for teachers will be passed on, and the teachers will return calls as soon as they can. Messages to students will be given to teachers, who then relay them to the students. Please get phone messages to us at least 1/2 hour before the end of the school day.

Children are allowed to call home with the permission of their teacher or another adult in the school. However, we ask that the purpose of those calls not be to make after-school friend arrangements; play plans are best arranged before the children come to school in the morning.

Letters, Notices, Announcements

Plan to check your children's Backpack Express (in their backpacks) each day for communications.

Families receive paper notices by Backpack Express and virtual notices by email of special events such as board meetings, social occasions, and other community gatherings. Watch for the Director's email updates and blog postings, which contains information on schedule changes, announcements, events, and requests from the school.

Teachers also write regular letters, newsletters, and blogs about what's happening in individual classrooms.

Parent-Teacher Communications

Prairie Creek is a community, family-based school. Perhaps its greatest strength is the combination of high quality teachers and involved parents. The following are certain approaches and procedures that make this collaboration work very well.

Families and teachers get well acquainted during parent visits, at school events, during the three annual conferences, through telephone calls and emails, and during spontaneous encounters or out-of-school social events. When either teachers or parents are feeling out of touch, it is probably because it has been a bit too long between contacts. It is especially important for parents who have particular concerns to voice them to the teachers as soon as possible, rather than waiting until the next conference date. Speaking about something at the time when it first occurs as a

concern prevents it from escalating and allows for alterations and corrections if they are seen as necessary.

Acknowledgments for things that are going well makes a great difference to any teacher or parent who is sincerely trying to do his or her best for a child. Sometimes it is most expedient for staff members to call parents in the evening and some may give parents their home numbers. However, Prairie Creek faculty work very long hours and we ask parents to respect their need for private family and personal time in the evenings and on the weekends.

FUNDING

Like other public schools, Prairie Creek receives state funding based on the number of enrolled students. However, the school is not allowed to raise additional funds through local tax levies, which is an option available to non-charter public schools.

It is relatively expensive to run a school like ours: the current level of state funding doesn't support things like our small classes, generous staffing, progressive curriculum, art residencies, trips, and so on. In response, our school conducts and hosts a variety of fundraisers and benefits throughout the school year. At any time donations can be made to our school through the website. This is an easy and efficient way for parents, extended family, alumni and community members to donate to our program. You can learn more by following the "donate" button link on our website SUPPORT page. The Board Development Committee leads the strategic plan for fundraising throughout the school year.

VISITING IN THE CLASSROOM

Parents are welcome in their children's classrooms in Prairie Creek. They are welcome whether they are there to assist in some classroom activity or to spend time with their child. Sometimes the teacher, the director, or another parent will ask for a parent to come in to help with something; sometimes the teacher will invite parents in to enjoy a special program or event; and sometimes the parents will decide that they would like to see how their child is doing in class. All of these occasions are opportunities for collaboration between the staff, parents, and children to be in action. All of them are opportunities for Prairie Creek to function like a true community during the daily operations of the school.

If you wish to visit your child's classroom, please send a note to the teacher saying what day you would like to come. This has two important benefits: it prevents situations such as your visiting at a time when there are schedule changes and the children are not in class or everyone is observing a special program or on a field trip. It also is a courtesy to the teacher and children to allow them to know and plan for what is going to happen each day, including what visitors may be coming to their room. The visit of a parent is something that can often work nicely into the curriculum and can benefit everyone if the teacher knows ahead of time and can plan. Occasionally there are times when teachers will request that there be no observers or visitors.

Ideally the parent and teacher talk briefly before a visit about what is going on in the room and how the parent can fit in and participate. The parent may get a clearer idea of the curriculum objectives, what social dynamics the teacher is working on with the group, what support he or she would like to have from the parent with regard to classroom management. It is common for a child to behave a little differently when his or her parent is in the room and to want special attention from the parent. However, children are at their most natural if the parent relates to other children and not just to their own child. The teacher can give some help in managing this.

It is also important for visitors to take their cues from the teacher. If the teacher has a signal for quiet, all the visitors as well as the children need to respond to the signal. Sometimes it gets a little tricky for parents to discern what the appropriate behavior is, and if this hasn't been worked out in advance between the parent and the teacher, close observation will usually fill in the gap. Every extra adult in the room is an opportunity for good role modeling for the children, which is one of the big benefits of parent visits.

If you are going to give a presentation in the classroom or discuss something with the children, a little preparation with the teacher is also useful to figure out timing, connections between the subjects discussed, the general curriculum of the class, and group dynamics.

VOLUNTEERING

Family involvement is crucial to the success of Prairie Creek. Parents are encouraged to volunteer throughout the school year. Sharing your personal resources of time, talents, and skills enables our teachers and staff to focus on the important things—our children!

After the first six weeks of school, there are many opportunities to volunteer during the school day. The possibilities are almost endless: parents serve lunch, shelve books in the library, weed the gardens, cook for events, plan the annual auction and other fundraisers, help with school pictures, host 5th-grade graduation and kindergarten orientation, set up for curriculum night and honoring night, assist with vision and hearing screening, act as chaperones for field trips, aid in art and music events, act as room representatives, assist with technology projects and so much more. There are numerous special events throughout the year that simply can't operate without parent involvement—and it is parents who, through their volunteer efforts, benefit and beautify the school.

CHILDREN'S PARTIES

Prairie Creek strongly discourages parents from organizing birthday parties or social events that impinge upon the school day. Children's parties create an additional burden of management and communication for staff and can lead to ill-feelings around inclusivity and gift-giving.

PRAIRIE CREEK: POLICIES

ATTENDANCE

Prairie Creek School values regular and punctual attendance for many reasons:

- Consistent school attendance is important for the community life of the classroom since each member's contribution is significantly valued. Regular attendance is necessary to allow the teacher to best meet the needs of each student. It also allows each student and family to maximize the daily opportunities offered by the Prairie Creek program.
- Frequent absences may put the child at a learning disadvantage because it is often difficult to extract a classroom conversation or experience and fulfill that opportunity on a separate or individual basis.
- Some expectations of routine and structure are important in a child's life. If there is a problem or concern regarding school, the child's presence is crucial to pursuing a satisfactory resolution. Families can rely on their partnership with the teacher and the school to handle any difficult situations that may arise.
- Prairie Creek encourages families to take vacations or leaves from school during periods outside our student contact days. If for some reason this is not possible, please inform the school as soon as possible.
- Prairie Creek adheres to state laws and guidelines for student attendance. Our complete attendance policy can be found on the school website.

What to do in the case of tardiness or absence

Children are expected to arrive at school on time each day.

**Parents must contact the school each day when children are to be absent.
507-645-9640 attendance@prairiecreek.org**

It is necessary to communicate with the office to inform the school of a child's absence so that the school knows the whereabouts and welfare of each child. Your cooperation is essential. Staff will be on duty from 8:00am to 8:10am welcoming your children in the morning. After 8:15am the security door will be locked and anyone entering the building will need to wait at the door until someone from the office can buzz them into the building. Children who are late to school must report to the school office for an admission slip.

Contact the school by 8:10 a.m. on the day of absence or if your child is going to be late for the day. If your child is gone for more than one day, we ask that you inform the school each day of absence. To do this, you may call by phone or send an email. When sending an email, type your child's name in the subject line and include in the body of the email the reason for absence (cough, sore throat, fever, etc.).

The school maintains records on all student attendance. In the event of repeated unexcused absences, and/or tardiness, the school administration will contact parents or guardians and seek to work cooperatively to solve attendance problems.

ILLNESS

The school makes every effort to promote the general health and well-being of all students and minimize absences. To protect the school community from communicable diseases, parents are required to report all illnesses, including head lice, strep throat, high temperatures, covid-19, influenza, etc. We keep track of student illnesses and inform families if a student has a particular communicable ailment. Families will be notified in writing (back pack express) or by email if a student in their child's class has a communicable disease. After School Care families will be notified with a note posted on the After School Care child sign-out sheet of an illness in a child who was at After School Care. We are also required to report some illnesses to the Department of Health.

Any child who shows signs of contagion should not attend school or After School Care. Keep your child home if they have symptoms of the flu or other communicable illness. Sick children must stay home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone, without the use of fever-reducing drugs like Tylenol or Motrin. Additionally, children with bacterial infections (ex. Strep throat) must be on antibiotics for 12 hours before returning to school. Children may return to school and After School Care after they are free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing drugs like Tylenol or Motrin. A fever is defined as a temperature of 100.0 degrees or higher. Please note that if your child is sent home from school with a fever, we expect that he or she will stay home the next day as well. Finally, a child who has vomited or had diarrhea in the past 24 hours should not be in school.

It is important to our school community that we all help children to develop good habits about their health:

- Teach your child to clean their hands often—with soap & water (for at least 20 seconds) or alcohol-based rubs.
- Teach your child to cover coughs and sneezes—with a tissue or their elbows.
- Teach your child to avoid sharing personal items—including drinks, food, utensils, combs and brushes and hats.

Sometimes a child comes to school, feels too ill during the day or at After School Care to stay, and parents must be called. If parents cannot be reached, we will contact the emergency contacts until we reach someone who is able to pick up the child. The child will be sent to rest in a quiet area until a parent arrives. To avoid this uncomfortable situation, and to avoid contagion (at the onset of symptoms), if your child does not feel well enough to work at school or has not been fever-free--without medication--for a full 24 hours, parents are directed to keep your child at home.

In the case of head lice, should this be discovered at school, parents will be notified immediately so they can care for their child as soon as possible. Parents are expected to treat their children's head lice at home, and will not be readmitted to their classrooms until the school determines that the infestation has been properly addressed.

The school also needs to be informed of any medical condition or allergies your child may have. Families will have the opportunity to share this information during the "Fall Registration" process in August through the JMC family portal. There is also an opportunity for families to give permission to dispense over-the-counter medicine to your child during the school day. Please keep us updated on any changes that may occur during the school year.

BEHAVIOR

Classroom Discipline

At Prairie Creek, children are given the opportunity from their earliest days at the school to begin to develop self-discipline and independence. The goal is for each child to be intrinsically motivated to show self-control. Children are taught that there are logical consequences for their actions and that the freedom they experience at the school must be balanced by responsibility on their part. The Social Curriculum guides teachers, aides, and volunteers in their interactions with children in the school and in the classroom.

Teachers, parents, and volunteers speak respectfully to all children, never belittling, shaming, or blaming. Adults at the school do not raise their voices to children or restrain a child against their will, unless they deem that the child may hurt themselves or others. At all times children are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve and they are helped compassionately by teachers and adults to change their behavior when it is necessary.

In cases where a child is having difficulty in the group, or difficulty following the expectations of behavior within the classroom, teachers will try a number of strategies in order to help the child change the behavior. The steps used at Prairie Creek include:

- Reinforcing—noticing appropriate behavior and commenting on it
- Redirection—reminding the child about expectations and correct behavior
- Removing—asking the child to move to another place in the circle or room, or asking the child to go to another room for a break to refocus

All children at Prairie Creek have the right to learn in a classroom that is free from excessive interruptions. The discipline procedures outlined above describe how occasional disruptive behavior is handled at the school. On occasion a child's behavior may become so disruptive that other children are being affected and the learning in the classroom suffers. If a child is showing repeated behaviors in the classroom that are

hurting his or her social interactions in the class, disturbing the work of the group, or jeopardizing academic progress then the school will take the following steps:

Conflict Resolution

Prairie Creek recognizes that conflicts will arise between children, between children and adults, and between adults. We understand that this is part of community living. However, in keeping with our philosophy and our social curriculum, it is the policy of the school that all conflicts will be handled in a respectful manner, and resolved peacefully and without force.

When children have conflicts with one another, adults help by modeling for the child how to listen to others and how to problem-solve together. Adults aim to support children in coming to a win-win solution. At all times children are listened to and encouraged to listen to others. Respectful conflict resolution includes speaking in a quiet voice, using respectful and non-abusive language, listening while the other speaks, waiting until the anger subsides before trying to work it out, and never using force of any kind, verbal or physical.

All adults who work with children in the school, including but not limited to paid faculty, teaching assistants, parents, and volunteers, are expected to abide by these standards for resolving conflicts. Any violation of these guidelines by professional staff will result in disciplinary action by the director. In the event of a violation by a volunteer, the director shall be entitled to restrict or prohibit the volunteer from working with children at the school.

Discipline at Prairie Creek is consistent with Minnesota's Pupil Fair Dismissal Act.

The following board approved policies relating to student behavior and safety can be read in full on the school website:

Student Discipline Policy (*full policy attached at the end of this handbook*)

Bullying Prevention and Response

Hazing Prohibition

Weapons on School Grounds

Discrimination Harassment and Violence Prevention Policy

MISCELLANEOUS

Fair Practice & Equal Opportunity

Prairie Creek Community School does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, sexual orientation, disability, color, national or ethnic origin in its educational policies or opportunities, admissions policies, employment, or any other program offered by the school.

Annual Report

Each year a report on the previous year is written and made available to the parents and staff at Prairie Creek. In addition to a description of the program for the academic year, this report contains the final audited operating statement and balance sheet for the fiscal year. Any questions on the financial report are welcome and can be addressed to the director or the treasurer of Prairie Creek. If you would like to read this annual report you can find it on the “Accountability” page of our website. Paper copies of the report are also available in the office upon request.

PRAIRIE CREEK TRADITIONS: THE STORY OF US.

Back in 1983 when the small group of parents envisioned a school community where children, teachers, parents and staff work together in a child-centered, progressive environment they envisioned a very special school with beautiful traditions that would set aside Prairie Creek for all the rest. While the mission stands strong today— this next section shares many of the customs, traditions and details that we often forget to share...but we want you to know! Use this information as a basis to ask questions and look forward to participating in and celebrating the story of us!

Back to School Social

On the Thursday before school starts, all Prairie Creek families come together at school and meet up with friends and greet newcomers. This is a time to also bring school supplies to your classroom.

First Day of School

If your child rides the bus, parents leave home in time to meet them at school when the bus arrives. If you drive your child by car, parents park and walk their child in. As the students file onto the school plaza, we all wave and cheer. Once students are inside the school, parents have a chance to visit over coffee and refreshments. We try to maintain a degree of separation, so parents provide a cheering crowd, and stay outside until the students get in their rooms.

Please note: if you are unable to be there, know that your child will be waved at, and cheered for, by other parents—remember, we look out for each other!

First Six Weeks

The first six weeks of school emphasize the importance of students and classes settling into the routines of the school. One instance of getting settled is recess play. Teachers intentionally scaffold this time: for the first days, students play with just their class, then with their age-level cohorts, then other grade levels, then children lead games, and finally the school opens up the woods and playground and circle up to discuss issues. Conflict mediation and multi-age play are emphasized and taught directly by the teachers. This very purposeful introduction is a central part of our social curriculum.

All School Gathering (ASG)

The entire school—students, teachers, staff—meets weekly for about 30 minutes in the gym to sing, visit with each other, tell and hear stories, perform plays and music, mark special occasions, and spend enjoyable time building community.

Bird Buddies

All students get to meet students in other grades through our Bird Buddy program. Bird Buddies attend special events, eat together, and read together during school. Buddies rotate throughout the year.

Curriculum Night

A parent-only evening during the first month of school. We strongly encourage both parents to participate in this crucial introduction to your child's year, held in the school gym and classrooms.

School T-shirts

At the beginning of the year, each student draws a self-portrait to be printed all together on our school t-shirt.

Fall Goal-Setting Conferences

Parents, teachers, and students set goals together for the year. These goals usually are in the domains of language arts, math, theme/project, social/emotional/physical, and "Habits of Mind."

January and May Conferences and Narratives

Children present their work to their parents and teacher. Teachers present a narrative description of the child's work. Parents and teachers then meet without the student to discuss questions, challenges, and goals.

December Special Persons Day

Students invite a grandparent or other special adult person to school, and we invite the Castle Rock community to join us for coffee. Parents are asked to leave this event to students' special guests.

Valentine's Day

This is one of the most beloved of Prairie Creek traditions. Students bring valentines for their classmates and friends in other classes. The bags for the valentines are placed in the gym. We get together to play Love Bingo, give hugs, and open our valentines.

5th Grade at Wolf Ridge

5th graders attend a week of classes at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center on the North Shore (while their 4th-grade classmates spend the week on a special project).

Open Houses for Prospective Students

Open houses provide prospective families with an opportunity to learn more about Prairie Creek and to see and discover the uniqueness of our school.

April Honoring Week

5th graders present their Honors Projects, a capstone for their work at Prairie Creek. Honoring Night is held for 5th graders so the students and their mentors can celebrate all they have accomplished.

May Day Community Celebration

This is a big community event that most families and many alumni attend. We parade through Castle Rock, waving to our neighbors and displaying artwork and costumes we have created. After the parade, the 5th graders do the Maypole Dance. Folk dancing and a potluck meal round out the event.

The Game of Village

Each spring, the 4/5 grade students participate in an extensive project called Village. Village is a multidisciplinary, hands-on experiment in human society. Students organically develop a world in 1/24 scale. Lessons in mathematics, government, economics, architecture, language, history, public speaking, engineering, biology, and current events emerge from the students' interests and desires. Within the framework of the game, students eagerly seek out and learn the information they need – a hallmark of progressive education.

All School Literary Magazine

During the last week of school, the Literary Magazine arrives. Each student has a piece of work included. We autograph and celebrate our work as writers.

Last Day of School Carnival

On the last day of school, we create a mini-carnival to welcome summer. Each class hosts a booth or two, and we enjoy each other's company for one last morning. This is a student and staff event only.

5th Grade Graduation

At the end of the school year we host a Saturday morning event to celebrate our graduating students. The 4/5 teachers share stories about each of our departing 5th graders. Afterwards, we share refreshments together.

GLOSSARY OF PRAIRIE CREEK TERMS

Spirit of the Game

A common phrase used primarily during PE class. Refers to playing a game with the right attitude.

Trust the Truthful Tagger

Another PE phrase used frequently during our myriad tagging games. It's imperative for players to trust the tagger, and for the tagger to be truthful in order to play "in the spirit of the game."

Inside Shoes/Outside Shoes

The bane of the K/1 teachers! All students (K-5) must change shoes when they go from outside to inside and vice versa. It's good to consider when purchasing your child's shoes, in that it's easiest for children to keep up with the group if they have easy on/easy off footwear. Teachers prefer tennis shoes for indoor shoes. Also: when in doubt, have your kids wear rain boots or snow boots. The woods tend to be muddy.

Rambles

Hikes around the neighboring hills, dales, and fields--part of our "Lifelong Fitness" PE curriculum (and another reason why inside and outside shoes are essential).

Adopted: 9/28/23

Student Discipline Prairie Creek Community School

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish Prairie Creek Community Schools' expectations for student conduct. Compliance with this policy will enhance the school's ability to maintain discipline and ensure that there is no interference with the educational process. The school will take appropriate disciplinary action when students fail to adhere to the expectations as established in the Family Handbook established under this policy.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Board of Education believes that discipline is the positive direction of behavior toward established standards of conduct, fully understood by all, and based upon reason, judgment, and the rights of others. School discipline is to be administered firmly, fairly, and with consideration for the maturity of the individual student.

III. STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

At Prairie Creek Community School, children are given the opportunity from their earliest days at the school to begin to develop self-discipline and independence. The goal is for each child to be intrinsically motivated to show self-control. Children are taught that there are logical consequences for their actions and that the freedom they experience at the school must be balanced by responsibility on their part.

All disciplinary actions shall be processed pursuant to Prairie Creek Community School's discipline policy and the requirements of the Minnesota Pupil Fair Dismissal Act. Any student who violates a school policy or rule may be subjected to the consequence established in the family handbook.

It shall be the policy of the school that the following will not be tolerated:

1. Disruption of the learning process
2. Interference with the orderly conduct of school and school activities
3. Violations of public law

The Prairie Creek Community School Board will support school personnel who, when dealing with students in disciplinary matters, act in accordance with state law, school policy, sound professional judgment, and individual program procedures.

The Prairie Creek Community School Board delegates implementation of the policy on student discipline to the school administration, who shall develop and annually review sound disciplinary procedures with their teaching staff as detailed in the Family Handbook. The Family Handbook, issued pursuant to this policy, shall be annually reviewed and approved by the School Board.

Parents/guardians/caregivers may contact the Director to discuss an infraction and consequence assigned if they have questions regarding the situation. Please refer to Concerns or Complaint Resolution Policy.

IV. DISTRIBUTION OF POLICY

The school Director, or Designee, will notify students and parents of the existence and contents of this policy through the Family Handbook, which shall be available online and by request from the school office.

Revised:8/28/14

Adopted: 6/21/12

Bullying Prohibition Policy

PURPOSE

Prairie Creek Community School strives to provide safe, secure and respectful learning environments for all students in school buildings, on school grounds, school buses and at school-sponsored activities. Bullying, like other disruptive or violent behavior, is conduct that interferes with a student's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to educate.

This policy protects students against bullying and harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, immigration status, sex, marital status, familial status, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, including gender identity and expression, academic status related to student performance, disability, status with regard to public assistance, age, military status, unfavorable discharge from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic defined in Chapter 363A. This policy also protects any student who voluntarily participates in any district function or activity, whether the student is enrolled in the district or not.

DEFINITIONS

- Prohibited conduct ("bullying") means any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students creating an actual or perceived imbalance of power between the student engaging in bullying and the target of bullying that has or can be reasonably predicted by repeated forms or pattern to have one or more of the following effects:
 - Placing the student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or property.
 - Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health.
 - Substantially interfering with the student's educational opportunities and performance.
 - Substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.
- Bullying may take various forms, including without limitation, one or more of the following: harassment, threats, intimidation, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, theft, public humiliation, destruction of property, or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.
- "Cyberbullying" means using electronic information and communication technologies to bully. This may include, but is not limited to a transfer of a sign, signal, writing, image, sound, or data, including a post on a social network, Internet, website or forum, transmitted through a computer, cell phone, or other electronic device.
- "Remedial response" means a measure to stop and correct prohibited conduct, prevent prohibited conduct from recurring, and protect, support, and intervene on behalf of the student who is the target of the prohibited conduct. Remedial response also means a measure to stop and correct retaliation for asserting, alleging, reporting or providing

information about prohibited conduct (retaliation) or knowingly making a false report about prohibited conduct (false report), prevent retaliation or false reports from recurring and protect, support and intervene on behalf of the student who is the target of the prohibited conduct.

- “Immediately” means as soon as possible but in no event longer than 24 hours.
- “District employee” includes school board members, administrators, educators, aids, school counselors, social workers, psychologists, other school mental health professionals, nurses and other school-based/linked medical providers/health professionals, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, extracurricular activities advisors, paraprofessionals, school employees, agents, volunteers, contractors, or persons subject to the supervision and control of the district and its students.

PROHIBITIONS

Bullying of a student or group of students is prohibited:

1. During any school-sponsored or school-sanctioned programs, activities, events or trips.
2. In school buildings, school property, on school buses or other school district-provided transportation, and at designated locations for students to wait for buses and other school district-provided transportation.
3. Through the transmission of information from a school district computer or computer network, or other electronic school equipment.
4. When communicated through any electronic technology or personal electronic device while on school property, on school buses or other school-provided transportation, at bus stops, and at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities.
5. Off campus communication and use of electronic technology which seriously disrupts any student's education.

Apparent permission or consent by a student being bullied does not lessen the prohibitions contained in this policy. Retaliation against a victim, good faith reporter, or a witness of bullying is prohibited. False accusations or reports of bullying against another student are also prohibited.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION **Parent/Guardian Guide to Statewide Testing**

This document provides basic information to help parents/guardians make informed decisions that benefit their children, schools and communities.

Why statewide testing?

Minnesota values its educational system and the professionalism of its educators. Minnesota educators created the academic standards which are rigorous and prepare our students for career and college.

The statewide assessments are how we as a state measure that curriculum and daily instruction in our schools are being aligned to the academics standards, ensuring all students are being provided an equitable education. Statewide assessment results are just one tool to monitor that we are providing our children with the education that will ensure a strong workforce and knowledgeable citizens.

Why does participation matter?

A statewide assessment is just one measure of your student's achievement, but your student's participation is important to understand how effectively the education at your student's school is aligned to the academic standards.

- Students who do not participate will receive a score of "not proficient."
- Students who receive a college-ready score on the high school MCA are not required to take a remedial, noncredit course at a Minnesota State college or university in the corresponding subject area, potentially saving time and money.
- Educators and policy makers use information from assessments to make decisions about resources and support provided.
- Parents and the general public use assessment information to compare schools and make decisions about where to purchase a home or to enroll their children.
- School performance results that are publicly released and used by families and communities, are negatively impacted if students do not participate in assessments.

Academic Standards and Assessments

What are academic standards?

The Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards are the statewide expectations for student academic achievement. They identify the knowledge and skills that all students must achieve in a content area and are organized by grade level. School districts determine how students will meet the standards by developing courses and curriculum aligned to the academic standards.

What is the relationship between academic statewide assessments and the academic standards?

The statewide assessments in mathematics, reading, and science are used to measure whether students, and their school and district, are meeting the academic standards. Statewide assessments are one measure of how well students are doing on the content that is part of their daily instruction. It is also a measure of how well schools and districts are doing in aligning their curriculum and teaching the standards.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)

- Based on the Minnesota Academic Standards; given annually in grades 3-8 and in high school in reading and mathematics; given annually in grades 5, 8 and in high school for science.
- Majority of students take the MCA.
- MTAS is an option for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for English Learners

- Based on the WIDA English Language Development Standards.
- Given annually to English learners in grades K-12 in reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- Majority of English learners take ACCESS for ELLs.
- Alternate ACCESS for ELLs is an option for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Why are these assessments effective?

Minnesota believes that in order to effectively measure what students are learning, testing needs to be more than answering multiple choice questions.

- To answer questions, students may need to type in answers, drag and drop images and words, or manipulate a graph or information.
- The reading and mathematics MCAs are adaptive, which means the answers a student provides determine the next questions the student will answer.
- The science MCA incorporates simulations, which require students to perform experiments in order to answer questions.

All of these provide students the opportunity to apply critical thinking needed for success in college and careers and show what they know and can do.

Because test content represents the academic standards as completely as possible, preparing for and taking the assessments uses the very same knowledge, processes and strategies included in the standards.

Are there limits on local testing?

As stated in 120B.301, for students in grades 1-6, the cumulative total amount of time spent taking locally adopted districtwide or schoolwide assessments must not exceed 10 hours per school year. For students in grades 7-12, the cumulative total amount of time spent taking locally adopted districtwide or schoolwide assessments must not exceed 11 hours per school year.

In an effort to encourage transparency, the statute also requires a district or charter school, before the first day of each school year, to publish on its website a comprehensive calendar of standardized tests to be administered in the district or charter school during that school year. The calendar must provide the rationale for administering each assessment and indicate whether the assessment is a local option or required by state or federal law.

What if I choose not to have my student participate?

Parents/guardians have a right to not have their student participate in state-required standardized assessments. Minnesota Statutes require the department to provide information about statewide assessments to parents/guardians and include a form to complete if they refuse to have their student participate. This form follows on the next page and includes an area to note the reason for the refusal to participate. Your student's district may require additional information.

A school or district may have additional consequences beyond those mentioned in this document for a student not participating in the state-required standardized assessments. There may also be consequences for not participating in assessments selected and administered at the local level. Please contact your school for more information regarding local decisions.

When do students take the assessments?

Each school sets their testing schedule within the state testing window. Contact your student's school for information on specific testing days.

- The MCA and MTAS testing window begins in March and ends in May.
- The ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs testing window begins at the end of January and ends in March.

When do I receive my student's results?

Each summer, individual student reports are sent to school districts and are provided to families no later than fall conferences. The reports can be used to see your child's progress and help guide future instruction.

How much time is spent on testing?

Statewide assessments are taken one time each year; the majority of students test online. On average, the amount of time spent taking statewide assessments is **less than 1 percent of instructional time** in a school year. The assessments are not timed and students can continue working as long as they need.

Why does it seem like my student is taking more tests?

The statewide required tests are limited to those outlined in this document. Many districts make local decisions to administer additional tests that the state does not require. Contact your district for more information.

Where do I get more information?

Students and families can find out more on our [Statewide Testing page](https://education.state.mn.us/Students%20and%20Families/Statewide%20Testing/) (education.state.mn.us > Students and Families > Statewide Testing).



Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.31, subdivision 4a, requires the commissioner to create and publish a form for parents and guardians to complete if they refuse to have their student participate in state-required standardized assessments. Your student's district may require additional information. School districts must post this form on the district website and include it in district student handbooks.

Parent/Guardian Refusal for Student Participation in Statewide Assessments

To opt out of statewide assessments, the parent/guardian must complete this form and return it to the student's school.

*To best support school district planning, please submit this form to the student's school no later than January 15 of the academic school year. For students who enroll after a statewide testing window begins, please submit the form within two weeks of enrollment. A new refusal form is required **each year** parents/guardians wish to opt the student out of statewide assessments.*

Date _____ (This form is **only** applicable for the 20____ to 20____ school year.)

Student's Legal First Name _____ Student's Legal Middle Initial _____

Student's Legal Last Name _____ Student's Date of Birth _____

Student's District/School _____ Grade _____

Please initial to indicate you have received and reviewed information about statewide testing.

_____ I received information on statewide assessments and choose to opt my student out. MDE provides a *Parent/Guardian Guide to Statewide Testing* on the [MDE website](#) (Students and Families > Statewide Testing).

Reason for refusal:

Please indicate the statewide assessment(s) you are opting the student out of this school year:

_____ MCA/MTAS Reading

_____ MCA/MTAS Science

_____ MCA/MTAS Mathematics

_____ ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS for ELLs

Contact your school or district for the form to opt out of local assessments.

I understand that by signing this form, my student will receive a score of "not proficient" and waives the opportunity to receive a college-ready score that could save him/her time and money by not having to take remedial, non-credit courses at a Minnesota State college or university. My school and I may lose valuable information about how well my student is progressing academically. In addition, opting out may impact the school, district, and state's efforts to equitably distribute resources and support student learning.

Parent/Guardian Name (print) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

To be completed by school or district staff only.

Student ID or MARSS Number _____