

**Lower School Handbook  
2016-2017**



**Overview**

The best way to learn about the Princeton Day School lower school is to visit. We encourage all parents and friends of the school to make brief classroom visits and attend assemblies and special events. Parents wishing to visit classrooms should call the Lower School office prior to visiting to make arrangements.

Children of lower school age are more likely to express their general feelings in obvious, observable ways than are older children. At the same time, the younger students often have a harder time understanding or explaining their feelings and thoughts in clear, direct language. For this reason, it is especially important in the lower school that parents and teachers communicate clearly and directly, and coordinate their efforts to make life happy and productive for the students.

**Community Expectations**

Children in the Lower School are taught to respect and celebrate individual differences. The Lower School is a community where each member is important and valued. We believe in creating a safe environment for our students to take risks, solve problems, make healthy decisions, and assume increasing responsibility for their actions.

Within the Princeton Day School community, we feel strongly that individuals abide by rules and precepts for themselves as well as for the greater community. Mutual respect is the underpinning of forming a thoughtful, trustful place. There is an expectation for students to act thoughtfully and safely, to respect others, to show concern for others, and to be stewards for their environment.

When an infraction of these expectations occurs, Lower School teachers work with students in a respectful manner. When issues occur, we believe that students need to be accountable for their actions and work to understand and repair the harm that may have occurred. Most cases are resolved between student and teacher and take the form of quiet conversations about how to act appropriately in a community. If needed, plans may be

developed to help the student improve behavior. If a pattern persists and there has been sufficient warning to the student and his or her parents, a student may be asked to spend a day at home.

Jeopardizing the safety of others, taking or destroying school property or the property of others, excessive teasing, bullying and harassment are all considered serious offenses and can be punishable by suspension as determined by the Head of Lower School.

We discourage possession and use of cell phones by Lower School students. Students may use telephones in the lower school faculty room when an emergency requires a phone call.

### **Class Placement**

We care deeply about the growth of your child academically, socially, physically and emotionally and give a great deal of thought to each child's placement and the composition of each classroom. We take into account each child's strengths, interests, study skills, work habits, developmental needs, accomplishments, and learning styles. We intend for each classroom to be a heterogeneous balance of boys and girls, with a range of abilities, personalities, and interests. We carefully consider each child and make placement decisions that will put them in the best position for a highly successful school year with regards to all aspects of learning and development. The school does not solicit requests for sectioning students, and parents are asked not to make special requests for teachers and placement. The school must have the final say about educational grouping and placement of students.

### **Reports, Conferences, and Parent Communication**

The classroom teacher is a parent's primary adult source of information about school matters. Teachers send written reports home two times each year. Additionally, there are two annual conferences between parents and teacher. There are, of course, other times when parents need information about their children. Questions needing clarification and responses may come up at any time. As partners in their children's education, teachers and administrators want to work with parents to respond to questions and problem solve when issues are minor, so they can be resolved quickly and with good will.

Faculty and students maintain enthusiasm for intellectual and other activities in an atmosphere of courtesy and honesty. Safety, health and respect for others and their property are stressed daily. Everyone is involved in keeping the building and grounds neat, litter-free and in good condition.

A student should bring only the following items to school each day: clothing appropriate for study, recess and physical education; and a nutritious and satisfying lunch; any academic materials; any items that contribute to a classroom activity; any items necessary for "special" days (class trips, birthdays, etc.); any necessary notes from parents to teacher; anything else with explicit permission from the classroom teacher.

### **Academic Expectations and Support**

Children develop unevenly and uniquely; each child grows at a different rate in different skills and no two children have the same pattern of growth. Our curriculum is organized by grade level and by subject, but we neither demand nor expect that every child will proceed through our lower school curriculum in any exact sequence. Classroom teachers devote hours each week to thinking about and discussing individual needs and strengths, and developing the most appropriate plan for each child they teach.

Through conversations, reports and conferences, we communicate actively with parents. Information we receive from parents and constant communication among teachers help us to understand the learning stages and individual needs of each student.

Teachers are encouraged to review frequently, and modify when necessary, all aspects of the curriculum for their grade level and to explore the use of new books, computers and other materials. Since we have found that no single text provides the sequence and variety of activities that would be best for every student, our teachers use a variety of books and materials to teach each subject.

Through all subjects and all activities, we try to help our students to develop self-discipline, self-confidence, intellectual independence, initiative, responsibility and to learn to function happily and effectively in a group. Our students and teachers raise money and take part in worthy projects to help them gain a real understanding of the meaning of community service. We take entire grade levels on trips to provide a group experience that is fun and educational. We assign homework on a regular (but not necessarily daily) basis beginning in grade one; homework assignments progress in length and frequency as a child moves to higher grade levels, providing good work habits and preparation for the academic demands of the middle and upper schools.

We offer a thorough and complete academic education to students in pre- kindergarten through grade four. Our curriculum emphasizes work on the basic skills in depth while giving every student an introduction to a wide variety of creative, scientific and research activities taught by professionally qualified specialists. We want all of our students to develop their unique academic abilities to the fullest while discovering interests and finding success in other endeavors too.

### **Homework**

Homework provides an important opportunity for each child to exercise genuine independence and responsibility while developing the valuable habits of taking work home from school, organizing and doing it independently and returning it promptly and in good condition to the teacher.

Lower school students enjoy practicing newly acquired skills. Through homework, parents can get a glimpse of their child's developing skills and schoolwork.

We try to balance our lengthy, full school day and the work to be done at home; we want our young students to enjoy school, to enjoy homework, and to enjoy being children. We assign homework on a regular basis to allow both students and parents to plan homework

time effectively. Teachers notify parents of anticipated homework patterns and schedules. We want homework assignments to be clear and comprehensible and, when completed, to provide each child with a sense of accomplishment and success. We expect all of our students in grades one through four to read at home regularly for at least 20 minutes. Individual classroom teachers may expand this requirement. Parents should continue to read to their children on a regular basis.

The following are general guidelines: parents are asked to inform the teachers if a child seems to be doing substantially more or less homework. In grades three and four, students usually have 45 to 60 minutes of daily homework, not including "outside" reading. Students in grade two have 30 to 45 minutes of daily homework. In grade one, students have approximately 15 to 20 minutes of homework on those days when homework is assigned. Kindergarten students are asked to take materials home from time to time. Occasionally, kindergartners are requested to find and bring in specific items like fallen leaves, magazine pictures or a completed paper from home to school. As a general rule, no homework is assigned over official school vacations or over the weekends.

### **Parent Support**

Here are some suggestions for activities that parents can do with their children at home to support learning in school.

Read to your children (we suggest at least 30 minutes daily), let them read to you, or read silently together in the same room. Let your children observe you reading - books, magazines, newspapers, whatever. Show your children that reading is important to you. Talk to your children about books.

Help your children become familiar and comfortable with math, (counting, writing numerals, telling time, estimating, practicing math facts, playing number games, etc.). Work should remain fun for both child and parent. We urge brief periods of drill work repeated whenever convenient and wanted, rather than a long session that may become tedious. Repeated short practice sessions are the most effective device for learning rote material.

Play learning games with your children and encourage them to play such games with each other. For example, we recommend various forms of Lotto, Quizmo, Bingo, Monopoly and other games involving dice and play money. We also recommend games of strategy and puzzles. Many commercially available games are both fun and educational. A variety of books are available describing excellent educational games that can be constructed at little or no expense. Old-fashioned flash cards are inexpensive, useful, and can make practice fun.

Participate in Princeton Day School activities through the Parents Association and by reading various school publications. In the lower school, parents who wish to do so are encouraged to organize or assist with a project that has been coordinated with the classroom teacher.

### **Teaching Assistants**

The pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms have teaching assistants. There are two full time assistants in PreK, and one full time assistant in Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grades. Their primary focus is assisting classroom teachers in literacy and math instruction.

When you visit the lower school you will probably notice some older students, actively and happily participating in all aspects of school with the younger students. These older students from grades nine through twelve are participants in the Teaching Assistant Program (TAP). They work with faculty on a regular basis and receive service credit in most cases. The presence of these TAP students has increased the individual attention that younger students receive and has added significantly to the warm atmosphere felt by all in the lower school.

### **Communications**

Parents are encouraged to visit our school website, [www.pds.org](http://www.pds.org), and click on "Inside PDS" for information about happenings in the Lower School. In addition, Lower School parents will receive a weekly email newsletter, the LS News, which provides the latest information about events and activities. Our faculty is always willing to explain anything that parents find puzzling. Trip information is frequently included in the LS News. To ensure students enjoy school trips to the fullest, parents should read the trip information carefully and provide whatever clothing, food, or money may be indicated as appropriate for that trip.

### **Daily Schedule**

The school day begins officially at 8:00 a.m., but we encourage students to arrive prior to the start of school. Being on time – every day – ensures all students have full benefit of each day's instruction. Being on time also teaches students about responsibility and punctuality – traits essential to their success later in school and in their working lives after graduation.

Students are greeted and able to go into their classrooms at 7:45 a.m. Since many students arrive early because of transportation arrangements, they may go to the Lambert Library, which opens at 7:15 each morning. An adult will greet them there and send them to classrooms at 7:45 a.m. Please note that any students arriving after 8:00 a.m. are marked as tardy.

### **Attendance: Absences and Tardies**

If it is known in advance, a student should bring a note to his teacher announcing an expected absence. If a child becomes ill suddenly at home, a parent should telephone the Lower School office ext. 1500 prior to 8:30 a.m. of that school day to notify us of the absence. Parents may call the lower school office to ask the classroom teacher to arrange for the pick up of books and assignments for an absent student. If there is to be any significant change in a student's transportation home, the classroom teacher should be notified in writing to prevent confusion at the end of the day.

### **Morning Snack and Lunch**

A nutritious morning snack is provided for every student. Students may bring their own lunches to school, or join the FLIK Lunch Program to purchase lunch. Details of that program are sent home in the summer. Students are expected to be sure that any area in which they have been eating is left clean.

### **After School Programs**

The Stay & Play Program is available for children in PreK through fourth grade. The program runs from the time of dismissal until 6:00 p.m. Originally designed to meet the needs of working parents, the Stay & Play program is now attracting children who join just for the fun of it. Snacks are provided, followed by announcements and then supervised playground time. Returning inside, children may choose to complete their homework, play board games or be involved with drama, crafts or drawing. Children may participate in the Stay & Play Program on a full-time or daily basis. Registration for individual days should be called in 24 hours in advance, but several spots are reserved for emergency "drop-ins." The After School Courses and Stay & Play brochure contains registration forms and detailed information about the programs and will be posted on the school website.

To reach Stay & Play and After School Courses during the school year call Heidi Spillane at (609) 924-6700 ext. 1502 or the Stay & Play cell number (609) 915-0145.

### **Dress**

The Standards of Dress at Princeton Day School reflect both philosophical and practical considerations. They seek to recognize, balance, and respect an individual's need for self-expression and comfort during the school day with the acknowledgement that PDS is an educational institution and academic community of learning.

The Lower School standards of dress reflect the need to dress in a manner conducive to both work and play:

- Clothing and footwear should not interfere with participating in recess and classroom activities or negotiating the stairs.
- Sneakers are required during PE class.
- All clothing must be clearly labeled with the student's name.
- Hats must be removed inside classrooms and other indoor gathering spaces.
- Several times throughout the year, students are required to wear Assembly Dress clothing. Assembly Dress means dresses, skirts and tops, dress pants (no jeans), a collared shirt, and shoes other than sneakers. If special attire is required, children and parents will be notified well in advance.

### **Guidelines for Use of iPads in the Lower School**

The PDS Lower School has initiated a 1:1 iPad program with our third and fourth graders. These students have access to an iPad during the school day. By integrating the iPad into the curriculum, our students are empowered to take ownership over their learning, which leads to greater engagement. The following guidelines have been designed to help the students understand how to use the technology safely and effectively.

- iPads are to be used for educational purposes only and as directed by the teachers. Online games or web sites that are not related to education are not to be used.
- Students may not record sound or take photos or videos unless it is for educational purposes. Students must get permission from their teacher beforehand.
- Students will be given a Princeton Day School email account to be used for educational purposes only. Any other e-mail accounts must not be accessed at school unless permitted by a teacher.