**MERRIMAC HEIGHTS ACADEMY**



**STAFF HANDBOOK**

**2024-2025**

**100-102 WEST MAIN STREET, MERRIMAC, MA 01860**

[**www.merrimacheightsacademy.org**](http://www.merrimacheightsacademy.org/)

MERRIMAC HEIGHTS ACADEMY

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

 **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EDUCATION

DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE

ASSISTANT

Teachers

Related

Services Staff

Subcontract

Direct Care

Instructional

Assistants

 FACILITIES

 MANAGER

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT OF HANDBOOK

# MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

##### THE MISSION

The mission of Merrimac Heights Academy is to provide our students with essential life skills training and individualized college and career readiness education using an experiential and project-based approach in a nurturing and personalized environment.

##### THE PURPOSE

* To provide middle, secondary, and post-secondary education, including career-technical training, to ensure successful transition into employment.
* To increase the propensity for global independence
* To decrease the juvenile delinquency and dropout rate that is more prevalent among students with disabilities.

##### THE OBJECTIVE

The objective of Merrimac Heights Academy is to maximize students’ potential in educational, social, vocational, recreational and community living skills; using diverse teaching methods that are tailored to meet the unique academic, social, and personal needs of each student following his or her IEP.

##### THE PHILOSOPHY

Merrimac Heights Academy believes and operates with the philosophy that most young students with language, learning and other developmental disabilities can achieve a level of independence that will enable them to become productive members of society. For some students, this instruction will need to be provided in a formalized and structured setting and then translated into the world at large with stringent community-based instruction.

# HANDBOOK STATEMENT

This handbook applies only to the Merrimac Heights Academy staff and replaces all other previous manuals and policies as of September 2023.

This employee handbook and policies manual contains information about the current practices and policies of Merrimac Heights Academy (hereafter also referred to as MHA) of Merrimac, MA. Please review this handbook carefully and retain it for future reference- your signature on the final page constitutes your ability to understand the policies as written and your notification of receipt of the handbook. The policies stated in this handbook are subject to change at the sole discretion of MHA. Each employee and all Board employees and Board members will be given a copy of these policies and procedures. A copy will also be available for public review at MHA during regular business hours. From time to time, you may receive updated information concerning changes in policy. All revisions, deletions or additions to the handbook will be made in writing, signed by the Executive Director, approved by the Board of Directors, and distributed to employees as a memo, dated accordingly and with a notice that the new policy will supersede previous versions. No verbal or oral statements changing the provisions of this handbook will be considered valid. If you have any questions regarding any policies, please ask the Executive Director or the HR Consultant of record.

This handbook is not a contract, expressed or implied, guaranteeing employment for any length of time and is not intended to induce an employee to accept employment. Nothing in this handbook is intended to unlawfully restrict team members’ rights to engage in any of the rights guaranteed to them by Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act.

Although we hope that your employment relationship with us will be long term, any employee without an express written contract dictating the length of their employment is considered “at-will,” which means that

either you or MHA may terminate this relationship at any time, for any reason, with or without cause or notice.

Please understand that no supervisor, manager, or representative of MHA, other than the Executive Director, has the authority to enter into any agreement with you for employment for any specified period or to make any promises or commitments contrary to the foregoing. Further, any employment agreement entered into by the Executive Director shall not be enforceable unless it is in writing. Finally, the information contained in this handbook should not be construed to be a guarantee that any particular action will be taken in any circumstances.

We expect you to represent our business with the highest level of integrity, which includes upholding all policies of MHA on our premises any time you are traveling with our students, working out in the community, representing us on social media or attending conferences on behalf of our school. We wish you the best of luck and success in your position and hope that your employment relationship with MHA will be a rewarding experience.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### Standards of Professional Conduct

All employees are obligated to exercise their best efforts in the performance of their services and to conduct themselves at all times in a manner consistent with the interests and ideals of Merrimac Heights Academy. MHA offers a program uniquely geared toward intensive and individualized academic remediation for students with special needs. In order to ensure the program’s integrity, it is expected that all employees will apply the highest professional standards of conduct relating to students. At all times, staff members should exercise sound judgment, acting with discretion while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

Merrimac Heights Academy expects its employees to establish themselves as appropriate role models and to stress clear, consistent expectations for student performance, and to balance structure and authority with empathy and compassion. We particularly guard against comments made by staff that, while meant to be humorous or informal, are flippant, sarcastic, or derogatory.

Staff must be vigilant in assuring that their interactions with students remain professional. Interactions that can be misinterpreted by students as sexual must be avoided at all costs. Actions between students and staff that could be so interpreted should be reported immediately to the Executive Director. Merrimac Heights Academy will refer reports of inappropriate staff-student relationships to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Family Services. A determination that inappropriate staff conduct did occur will result in termination of employment.

### Acceptable Use of Computers

Any computer files created, stored, received, or sent from Merrimac Heights Academy computer systems are and shall remain the property of MHA and are subject to being monitored and/or disclosed at any time by management. There is no right to privacy in email messages or passwords, and employees are deemed to consent to the monitoring and disclosure of the same and will make no claim against MHA relative to the computer system. Violation of this may result in discipline up to and including termination of employment.

MHA has internet access designed to further the mission of MHA. Users are responsible for ensuring that their activities adhere to acceptable use standards and values as outlined in this manual and others.

MHA relies on the honor of its staff to exercise appropriate respectful and responsible use of its network. MHA reserves the right to monitor all activity through random checks to ensure security and usage consistent with this policy.

Employees will not use computers at school for private financial or personal gain, advertising, political lobbying, or solicitation purposes; this listing may not be all-inclusive. All users are expected to use judgment and caution in any communications concerning students, families, and school districts. Initials of students, not complete names, must be used, even if the employee receives a communication in which the student is fully identified; a response to that email should remove the name, and use initials or first name only, instead.

The staff is responsible for enforcing these appropriate use rules, their duties include supervision of students.

### Policies Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination of Employees and Students

It is the policy of Merrimac Heights Academy that all employees and students should be able to enjoy a work and educational environment free from all forms of discrimination and harassment.

### Sexual Harassment

It is illegal and against Merrimac Heights Academy’s policy for any employee, male or female, to harass another

employee:

* by making unwelcome sexual advances, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature;
* to use an employee’s submission to, or rejection of, such condition as the basis for, or as a factor in, any

employment affecting the individual;

* to otherwise create an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment by such conduct

It is illegal and against Merrimac Heights Academy’s policy for any student, male or female, to harass another student or any employee of the school in any way, as defined in the preceding paragraph. Students found in violation of this policy will be subject to discipline up to and including expulsion. Sexual harassment is illegal under both state and federal law and in some cases, may be subject to prosecution under civil or criminal law.

Employees who feel victimized by sexual harassment should report the harassment to the Executive Director immediately. If the Executive Director is the person involved, or if the employee or student is more comfortable doing so, the matter should be reported to the President of the MHA Board or the HR Consultant of record. A sexual harassment complaint will be carefully investigated. All employees who may have knowledge of either the incident in question, or similar problems, will be questioned. If the investigation validates the complaint, appropriate formal disciplinary action will be taken against any employee or student engaging in sexual harassment. The disciplinary action may include warning, suspension, termination of employment, or expulsion from school. The complaint, the investigative steps, and findings will be documented thoroughly.

Employees who are dissatisfied with the resolution of a sexual harassment complaint may file a complaint with the Executive Director, Board of Directors or to the HR Consultant of record. No employee will be subject to any form of retaliation or discipline for pursuing a sexual harassment complaint.

We hope that you will feel comfortable reporting any harassment internally but if you believe you have been subjected to discrimination or harassment, in addition to reporting pursuant to the complaint procedure indicated above, you may file a complaint with the following government agencies that manage complaints of discrimination and harassment:

The United State Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) One Congress Street Suite 1001

Boston, MA 02114

(617) 565-3200

The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) One Ashburton Place

Boston, MA 02108

(617) 727-3990

### Anti-Hazing

Chapter 530 of the General Laws of Massachusetts strictly prohibits any conduct or method of initiation into any student organization, whether public or private, which willfully or recklessly endangers the physical or mental health of any student or person. Students violating this law will be removed from the organization and suspended from school as determined by the administration. They are also subject to legal prosecution.

Chapter 269, Sections 17-19 of the General Laws of Massachusetts strictly prohibits hazing. Hazing may be defined as any form of harassment of other students, often as a type of initiation, which sometimes occurs on

teams, in clubs, or elsewhere in schools. Students who are judged to be involved with hazing will be suspended from school for one to five days, depending upon the severity of the incident. Bystanders who witness hazing and fail to report it may be punishable by detention, or in extreme cases, by suspension from school. This law also requires that schools distribute a copy of the law itself and to secure from each student a signed receipt, and to file a report and discipline code with the board of education.

Chapter 269 of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the following three sections:

* Section 17: Whoever is a principal organizer or participant in the crime of hazing as defined herein shall be punished by a fine of not more than one thousand dollars or by imprisonment in a house of correction for not more than one hundred days, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

The term "hazing" as used in this section and in sections eighteen and nineteen, shall mean any conduct or method of initiation into any student organization, whether on public or private property, which willfully or recklessly endangers the physical or mental health of any student or other person. Such conduct shall include: whipping, beating, branding, forced calisthenics, exposure to the weather, forced consumption of any food, liquor, beverage, drug, or other substance, or any brutal treatment or forced physical activity which is likely to adversely affect the physical health or safety of any such student or other person, or which subjects such students or other person to extreme mental stress, including extended deprivation of sleep or rest or extended isolation.

* Section 18: Whoever knows another person is the victim of hazing as defined in Section 17 and is at the scene of such crime shall, to the extent that such person can do so without danger or peril to himself or others, report such crime to an appropriate law enforcement official as soon as reasonably practicable. Whoever fails to report such crime shall be punished by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars.
* Section 19: Each secondary school and each public and private school or college shall issue to every group or organization under its authority or operating on or in conjunction with its campus or school, and to every member, plebe, pledge, or applicant for membership in such group or organization, a copy of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen.

Each secondary school and each public or private school or college shall file, at least annually, a report with the board of education, certifying that such institution has complied with the provisions of this section certifying that said school has adopted a disciplinary policy with regards to the organizers and participants of hazing. The board of education shall promulgate regulations governing the content and frequency of such reports and shall forthwith report to the attorney general any such institution which fails to make such report.

### Whistleblower Protection

Merrimac Heights Academy encourages any staff member or volunteer, to bring instances of improper conduct, such as waste, fraud, financial impropriety, or abuse, to the attention of a responsible person who can be counted upon to investigate the problem promptly and fairly. Any staff member or volunteer of MHA who reports waste, fraud, financial impropriety, or abuse will not be fired or otherwise retaliated against for making the report.

There are several ways to make a confidential - and anonymous if so desired - report of suspected waste, fraud, or abuse. Contact the Executive Director immediately, or if the concern is with the Executive Director, the concern may be reported in person or in writing to President of the Board.

All communication regarding the matter will be kept confidential to the extent reasonably possible. Disclosure of the reporting employee’s identity may be necessary to ensure a complete and fair investigation and to comply with applicable law.

The report shall be taken seriously and investigated. The person or persons charged with alleged impropriety shall be given an opportunity to respond to the allegations in person or in writing. Even if the matter is determined not to constitute improper conduct, the individual making the report will not be retaliated against. That person shall not be subject to any punishment – including firing, demotion, suspension, reprimand, harassment, failure to consider the employee for promotion, or any other kind of discrimination – in retaliation for making the report.

Following the investigation, MHA will:

* Provide the person filing a report with a summary of the findings;
* Take appropriate steps to deal with the issue addressed, including making operational or personnel changes, or justify why corrections are not necessary;
* If warranted, contact law enforcement to deal with any suspected criminal activities.

MHA will maintain confidential records of all actions taken under this policy. The Board of Directors has responsibility for oversight of compliance with this policy.

**ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES**

### Statement of Confidentiality

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1975 gives specific guidelines to educational institutions and employees regarding the confidentiality of student records and access to information about students. Merrimac Heights Academy informs faculty and staff members annually about the importance of confidentiality.

The most important features of the confidentiality law are:

* + The student’s right to confidentiality must be protected and it is the faculty and staff’s responsibility to

ensure that it is.

* + Parents have the right to see their child’s records within 45 days of their request.
	+ The parents may request that records be amended, and the school must respond to that request.
	+ MHA has procedures to ensure that the student’s right to confidentiality is maintained.
	+ Only individuals who need information to carry out MHA’s responsibility to provide an education for the student should have access to the records; no protected information about the student can be released without the parent’s consent.

Examples of violations of confidentiality are:

* + Discussing a student’s educational information with a non-parent. Under no circumstances should any

staff members discuss a student’s information with anyone other than Merrimac Heights Academy staff.

* + Releasing information that may not include a name but is identifiable to the child.
	+ Discussing a student’s placement or academic ability or concerns with another employee in front of

other students or the student in question

### Duties and Responsibilities

Employees at Merrimac Heights Academy are expected to be involved in all aspects of the students’ experience at MHA. Exempt employees are salaried, work a regular weekly schedule and seek the approval of the Executive Director for any change to that schedule. The understanding is that all exempt employees are expected to be aware of their role description and be diligent with task completion.

Exempt employees may have the opportunity to earn additional monies if the need arises and which serves the purposes of MHA and its students. An opportunity of this sort will be part-time and may not interfere with the regular role description. This may include tutoring, afterschool programs, special projects, or other needs as determined by the Executive Director. Non-exempt employees, certain part-time positions and all summer employees must submit hours on a bi-weekly basis. Status, pay and benefits for all employees are governed by the annual letter of intent, which is signed by the employee and the Executive Director.

All staff are employed at the will of Merrimac Heights Academy.

These staff distinctions, as outlined above, may also determine which duties individuals may have. These duties include meetings, progress reporting, monitoring students during lunch, field studies and overnights, study halls, attendance at special events such as open house, staff presentations, peer support and team participation. Part-time employees may have differentiated responsibilities, pre-arranged with the Executive Director.

All staff are expected review Emails on a timely basis and respond appropriately within 24 hours. If your response requires more time, send a quick "I'll get back to you as soon as I can" or, better yet, "I'll get back to you by noon tomorrow." This shows respect for the sender and is always appreciated. Before pressing send, make sure you are using email as an appropriate form of communication. When sending emails concerning student concerns, always BCC the executive director as most often S/he may be contacted and/or consulted for questions.

Certain employees are independent contractors; their work is governed by an agreement signed by the individual and the Executive Director. Independent contractors are not eligible for benefits and must maintain their own professional liability insurance.

Current job descriptions for all employees are attached to the letters of intent given to each employee upon hire.

### Absences

Educators who must miss a teaching day must have lesson plans for classes left conspicuously on a desk or with a colleague who can assist the substitute teacher. The Executive Assistant maintains a list of qualified substitutes; you must attempt to acquire your own substitute, except if an emergency prevents that. Notify the Education Director or the Executive Director if you are unable to find a substitute.

Related service personnel, e.g., SLP, PT, OT, counselor, should attempt to make up missed services as much as possible, since substitutes are rarely available. If there is an appropriately certified/licensed substitute, please contact that person and leave plans and daily schedule for him/her.

An anticipated absence for professional or personal reasons should be planned in advance so that appropriate coverage may be arranged. An employee who has exhausted all leave may have proportionate pay deducted from his/her paycheck.

### Staff Meetings

Merrimac Heights Academy values the opportunities that regular staff meetings present. These meetings are a conduit for essential information, important discussion, and critical input. Confidentiality concerning student issues is expected; sensitivity toward individual and family issues is critical in representing our students. The Executive Director and Education Director will determine the meeting schedules and attendance is expected.

The all-staff meetings will occur weekly. Additionally, other groups (related services staff) meet regularly with staff to ensure program integrity and communication. Suggestions for the staff agenda should be submitted to the Executive Assistant.

### Substance Abuse Policy

Substance abuse in the workplace causes adverse impact to businesses and can render the workplace unsafe to co-workers, our students, and visitors. It is the policy of MHA to create a drug-free workplace in keeping with the spirit and intent of the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988. The use of controlled substances is inconsistent with the behavior expected of employees, subjects all employees to unacceptable safety risks, and undermines MHA’s ability to operate effectively and efficiently.

Therefore, the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, possession, sale, or use of a controlled substance in the workplace or while engaged in MHA business, off school premises, is strictly prohibited. Likewise, employees may not work or be on MHA premises if the employee is under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances, unless such use involves prescription medication determined by MHA to be legal and permissible under the circumstances. If you appear to be under the influence and unable to work safely, you may be sent home (or driven home) and not allowed to work while you are impaired. You may also be subjected to reasonable suspicion drug testing, in compliance with local, state and Federal Laws. Failure to pass a drug test may result in termination. At its discretion, MHA may require employees who violate this policy to successfully complete a drug abuse assistance or rehabilitation program, at the employee’s expense, as a condition of continued employment.

Consistent with our fair employment policy, MHA maintains a policy of non-discrimination as related to reasonable accommodation for recovering addicts and alcoholics and those having a medical history reflecting treatment for substance abuse conditions. We encourage all team members to seek assistance for any substance abuse issue before they are unable to perform their job, injure themselves or others or are subject

to disciplinary action or termination. Employees convicted of controlled-substance-related violations in the workplace, including pleas of nolo contendere (i.e., no contest), must inform MHA within five days of such conviction or plea. Your employment or continued employment is contingent upon your full cooperation with the substance abuse policy and any violation may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

**Note 1:** Although the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has legalized marijuana for both medical and recreational purposes, MHA is not required to allow the use of marijuana in the workplace or for employees to come to work under the influence, with certain medical use exceptions that must be cleared with the Executive Director.

**Note 2:** It is the policy of Merrimac Heights Academy to have an alcohol-free environment. Therefore, no one is permitted alcohol use on campus or at any school-oriented function. It is assumed that there will be no alcohol at events where students are expected to be present. Exceptions to this policy must be approved by the Board. If alcohol is served at non-student-attended events that you are attending as a representative of or on behalf of MHA, we encourage you to consume reasonably at such functions and violation of the company policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### Smoking

Merrimac Heights Academy is a smoke-free campus. Smoking or vaping is not permitted on campus at any time, including smoking in vehicles on campus. Tobacco use in any form is prohibited at all times inside all buildings and transportation vehicles occupied and/or used for instructional or extracurricular purposes.

### Dress Code

Staff has the opportunity to be some of the best role models our students may have. We can use this teaching opportunity to model that there may be different dress requirements for different occasions. Attire should reflect the professionalism of our staff and Merrimac Heights Academy’s status in the community. Any attire that compromises an employee’s ability to present in a professional manner is not acceptable; any question about professional attire is left to the discretion of the Executive Director.

Some examples of attire that may be considered unacceptable include, but are not limited to apparel glorifying drugs, alcohol, or violence; short skirts or shorts; bathing suits; body hugging clothes; hats or bandanas in the school buildings; excessive body piercings.

Staff involved in direct instruction should dress in a manner that is appropriate for the educational activities for the day. All staff will dress in business casual attire for any professional meetings; this expectation does not include weekly internal meetings.

### School Trips

A proposal must be submitted to the Education Director for any trip with or without overnights. This proposal must include a statement that details of how the trip connects with our curriculum, an itinerary, details of cost, and an explanation of the qualifications of the employees to lead this trip. Any plans to raise funds need to be included as well. The proposal should be submitted as early as possible. Overnight trips must be approved no less than two months prior to the intended departure date. The Executive Director must approve all field trips.

The minimum number of chaperones on any trip is two (2). All chaperones must be employees of Merrimac Heights Academy. The maximum student to staff ratio is 4:1.

All school rules apply on school trips. Students who violate a major school rule, or whose continued presence is a detriment to the trip, will be sent home at the discretion of the chaperone. Any additional expense in this situation will be the responsibility of the student and the family.

Staff conduct throughout the trip is held to the same standards as if they were on campus. Children of staff are not permitted unless they are the same age as trip participants. Parents of students may participate in the trip but cannot be considered chaperones unless they are employees of the school.

For all trips off campus, parents should be notified either formally with a permission slip, or informally in an informational note. When the destination is beyond the town of Merrimac, a signed permission slip is necessary and should be sent out a week in advance of the trip. If the trip is within Merrimac, a note of explanation should be sent out a few days in advance of the trip.

### Transportation

Merrimac Heights Academy owns one 12-passenger van that is to be used for official school business. It may sometimes be necessary to rent vans or buses for approved school trips. When using a school or rented van, the driver is covered by MHA’s insurance. Employees who drive school vehicles will be subject to a driver’s record check, in accordance with the insurance policy.

If any employee experiences an accident while driving a school vehicle, they must call the local police to report the accident and not leave the scene until cleared to do so. The staff member must also call the Executive Director to report the accident. Do not at any point admit fault in the accident, as this may be contrary to our insurance company’s direction.

Employees may use personal automobiles for school business at their own risk but should not feel obligated to do so. Employees may use their personal vehicles only if they are insured at or above the following limits:

1. $100,000 bodily injury
2. $300,000 aggregate
3. $100,000 property damage
4. A combined single limit of $300,000

Proof of insurance and copies of vehicle registration must be submitted to the Executive Director. MHA’s

insurance does not cover personal automobiles.

### Purchases

All purchases must be made through a purchase request form and must be approved by the Executive Director or designee. The Executive Director or Assistant will be responsible for making the purchases. Staff are not encouraged to make purchases that require reimbursement unless under dire circumstances.

A suitable original receipt should accompany items purchased by staff with personal cash to be reimbursed. A purchase request form should be used for reimbursement purposes. Any items for which a faculty member has been reimbursed are the property of Merrimac Heights Academy and should be clearly marked as such. Before making a purchase, effort should be made to determine whether the resource is already available. Stationery and office supplies, for example, are bought in bulk. Requests of this sort can be submitted to the Executive Director and or designee.

### Reporting Progress

Merrimac Heights Academy will maintain progress information for each student on an ongoing basis, found in the following:

* IEPs, including a history of standardized tests and assessments administered at MHA.
* Summaries of parent conference notes
* Narrative progress reports
* Student issues team meeting notes available to staff
* Summaries of IEP team meeting notes
* Transition notes

If at any time Merrimac Heights Academy determines that a student is not progressing at the rate anticipated, the Education Director will contact the LEA and parents, for the purpose of reviewing the IEP and considering modifications. This contact will occur via telephone, email or posted mail.

Merrimac Heights Academy will evaluate students’ skills, competencies, and knowledge four times per year on

each enrolled student. This documentation of progress will be reported though:

* Copies of the IEP progress report, quarterly updated and distributed.
* Quarterly report cards
* Parent conferences as needed These reports will:
* describe the progress toward meeting the IEP goals.
* include a record of attendance.
* be written in terminology which is understandable to the parent, and in the native language or other mode of communication used by the parent.
* be provided to the sending LEA and the parent of the student.

Reports are written in terminology that is understandable to the parents and in the native language or other mode of communication used by the parent. These reports are provided to the sending LEA and the parent of the student.

The evaluation of student performance is an important responsibility. Objectivity using hard measurement is critical; your own comments must be carefully monitored before reports are shared with students or parents. It is vital that all comments be well presented.

Comments should be personal, diagnostic, and definitive as to steps that have been and will be taken to develop student potential. Use appropriate English. The comments are a representation of you as a teacher and MHA as a school. A lack of student success demands diplomatic but honest explanation. Include specific suggestions for the future. Back up generalizations with specific evidence. Do not simply mention that a student has failed to turn in homework assignments, state how many and when. Do not merely describe a student as inconsistent; give his or her scores.

Recommendations for professional, medical, or psychological assistance are always inappropriate. Those should be discussed with the Education Director. Use of subjective, pejorative, or demeaning language when describing a student’s work ethic or skills is unacceptable.

Any communication with the parents and/or guardians must be copied to the Executive Director. Your communications may be shared with the student’s sending school district. If you receive any communication from a parent who expresses concern regarding any aspect of a student’s program, this must be shared immediately with the Executive Director and Education Director.

### EMPLOYMENT

### Equal Opportunity Employment Policy and Disability Accommodation

Merrimac Heights Academy is committed to basing judgments concerning the employment of individuals upon their qualifications and role performance, with the overall goal of a cohesive staff. In accordance with this policy and as delineated by federal and Massachusetts state law, Merrimac Heights Academy does not discriminate in admissions, educational programs, or employment against any individual on the basis of that individual’s sex, gender identity, race, color, religion, ancestry, age, handicap (disability), sexual orientation, status as a special disabled veteran, national or ethnic origin, criminal record (inquiries only), mental illness, retaliation, sexual harassment, active military personnel or genetics.

MHA is committed to providing equal opportunities to qualified individuals with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other applicable state and federal laws. This may include providing reasonable accommodation, where appropriate, which would allow an otherwise qualified individual to safely perform the essential functions of the job. It is your responsibility to notify the Executive Director, Human Resources, or your supervisor of the need for accommodation. Upon notifying the Organization, we may need your permission to obtain additional information from your physician or other medical or rehabilitation professionals, as permitted by state laws and HIPAA laws. MHA will only seek this information to determine the appropriate type of accommodation requested or the functional limitations resulting from your disability. All medical information received by MHA in connection with a request for accommodation will be treated as confidential.

### Recruitment and Hiring

The Executive and Education Directors identify staff needs. The Executive Director serves as the public point of contact for all positions. The Executive Director reserves the right to re-assign personnel in the best interest of MHA. Being a small school, there is a limited number of positions/roles. In general, all open positions will be announced internally and externally. The Executive Director and the Education Director, along with other members of the staff as appropriate, will conduct an interview with qualified candidates. An application or resume submitted for employment may be kept on file for twelve (12) months for all non-hired candidates. For successful candidates, your completed application to work at MHA is a document that contains affirmative statements by you concerning your work and educational history that can and will be verified by Merrimac Heights Academy and will be retained in your file throughout your employment. Any misstatements, falsehoods or claims made on the application will be grounds for rejection of employment or termination of employment if discovered afterwards.

Relevant licenses/certifications are required. All offers of employment are conditional until the criminal records check (CORI), and fingerprinting required of all educational employees, is returned with no applicable offenses. Failure to pass a criminal pre-employment background check will be grounds for withdrawal of an offer of employment subject to the provisions of the Fair Credit Reporting Act and the Academy’s CORI policy, which requires any and all information to be reported to the applicant. Staff members who have not met the requirements for the appropriate educational credentials may be expected to be working towards achieving that certification within a reasonable, negotiated period of time.

In the event that an investigation is returned that includes information that shows that a potential employee has been convicted of a crime covered by the pertinent MA Criminal Records statute within the past 7 years, no employment will be offered. The criminal records check will be conducted every 3 years for all employees.

For current employees, those who have undergone fingerprinting/background check performed by the MA Department of Safety, Division of State Police will be considered to have met the background investigation

requirement of this policy. The Executive Director may require additional checks at any point in the employment term.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 requires employers to verify both the identity and the work authorization of all employees before they are authorized to begin work. You will be required to provide authentic documentation of both identity and your legal right to work in the United States. Failure to provide such documentation within three (3) days of your start date will result in a suspension of your employment until such documentation is provided. If you are in the United States on a work visa or other immigration status that has an expiration date, you will be required to provide updated documentation that shows renewal and continuation of your work authorization status. Provision of falsified or stolen documentation is a felony and is grounds for dismissal as well as reporting to Immigration Control authorities.

### Teacher Supervision and Evaluations

Merrimac Heights Academy has written procedures for supervising and evaluating the performance of all staff members.

* + The first 3 months for a new non-academic employee’s employment are considered an evaluation period. During this period, his/her supervisor will assess the employee’s overall performance. At the end of this period, the supervisor will meet with the employee to evaluate job performance and will complete an evaluation form. Continued employment may be determined based on a review of this performance evaluation.
	+ Members of the professional staff will be evaluated by their supervisors in accordance with the Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation
	+ Evaluations will include classroom observations and pre- and post-discussions of evaluative material.
	+ Less formalized observations and evaluations will take place at the discretion of the administrator or

the instructor on an as-needed basis.

* + The Executive Director will be evaluated by the Board of Directors based on previously discussed goals.

##### Discipline and Dismissal

When an issue concerning staff performance arises, despite support given through regular supervision, the following Review Process will be implemented.

##### Determining When Someone Should Go on Review

Any employee engaged in the direct supervision of another may initiate the Review Process*.* Causes for initiating this process can be disciplinary issues or inadequate performance in any aspect of job responsibility. This process should be initiated only after all reasonable attempts have been made to improve performance through reasonable supervision.

##### Step One: Issue Definition with the Review Team

Once a supervisor recommends a staff member be put on Review, the Review Team will meet to define the issue(s) and determine if there is consensus that the Review Process is appropriate. The Chairperson of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director will chair this team. Its members may also include supervisors of the staff member, representatives from the residential program, and/or, when appropriate, representatives from the non-academic support departments.

During this meeting, criteria for performance should be determined and goals/actions set for what the staff member is expected to address while on review. Possibilities include, but are not limited to:

Weekly/daily meetings with supervisor. Lesson plans are handed in each week/day. Suspension for any number of days.

Probation.

Dismissal (immediate or at end of term/year).

During this initial meeting, the team also determines the duration of the Review Process for the staff member. A date for reconvening at the end of that period is established.

##### Step Two: Communication with the Staff Member

Soon after the initial team has convened, a meeting is held with the staff member to inform him/her of the outcome of the team meeting. This meeting may include the entire team or any representative(s) it may choose as a group.

The following must be shared in writing to the staff member during this meeting: The seriousness of being placed On Review.

An explanation of why this process was initiated (defining the issues and reviewing what routine supervisory steps were tried without success).

A review of expectations during this Review Process and final goals to be met. The dates on which this process is to end, and a reevaluation is to take place. The possible consequences should expectations not be met.

The staff should be informed that copies of this documentation would be included in his/her personnel file.

##### Step Three: Reevaluation

As the date approaches for evaluating the progress of the staff member during the Review Process, the team should reconvene to determine what course of action should be taken. The choices may include, but not be limited to, those options listed in Step One.

Within three days of the evaluation, the team decision should be conveyed to the staff member by the entire team or representative(s) of the team.

This decision should be documented in writing. A copy should be given to the staff member and a copy placed in the personnel file.

It is possible that if some progress has been noted, but there is still a problem with performance, the team

may decide to continue the Review Process with the same or additional goals, expectations, and consequences.

### Supervision Plan for Supervisors and Direct Care Staff

Effective training and supervision are essential to the satisfactory performance of direct care workers. In order to best promote staff’s mastery, retention and use of trained skills and competencies. Merrimac Heights Academy has developed a plan for Supervisors and Direct Care Staff to review ongoing case logs and to share information relative to the needs of individual students.

Direct Care Supervisors are provided with a planning period of 30 minutes weekly within which to meet with each direct care staff member. Additional time is provided for and covered when requested based on individual case log needs.

### Disciplinary Action

MHA’s discipline policy is designed to help employees remedy work performance or conduct that has become unsatisfactory. There are several bases for discipline or dismissal for MHA employees, including but not limited to:

1. Falsification of resume, application, or credentials
2. Failure to maintain the required license, certification, or registration.
3. Engaging in criminal, violent, or illegal activity on the premises
4. Harassment, neglect, or any inappropriate conduct with students at any time, on or off premises
5. Failure to appear for work within three days
6. Consistent absences, tardiness, or early departures
7. Unsatisfactory work performance, the requirements of which are detailed in:
	* the employee’s contract
	* the MHA employee job description
	* MHA teaching model
	* the individual professional development plan

The success of our program and our students hinges on our ability to meet our job responsibilities. Failure to adhere to these descriptions and to promote MHA programs is considered a breach of the MHA employer/employee agreement. This breach will be progressively addressed during your bi-weekly meeting with the Education Director or other supervisory staff. If performance does not improve, a written warning will be issued. If the problem persists, further disciplinary action, up to dismissal, may be taken, depending on the nature of the issue. Ongoing minor difficulties will affect pay rates and advancement.

Disciplinary action for unacceptable personal conduct need not be progressive. Depending on the severity of the misconduct, an employee may be warned, suspended, dismissed, or otherwise disciplined without prior warning.

### Grievance Procedure

At MHA, every effort is made to keep staff members informed and to treat employees fairly. If you feel that an action taken by an MHA employee or administrator has been unfair, and if you have made a good faith effort to resolve the issue with the party who initiated the unfair action, you may notify the Executive Director, in writing, of the grievance. If your grievance is with the Executive Director, submit your grievance to the Education Director/Director of Student Services. Include all pertinent information and evidence that supports the grievance. The Executive Director or Director of Student Services will schedule a meeting with you to attempt to informally resolve the issue. The informal process in this grievance procedure shall be deemed complete when the Executive Director or Director of Student Services informs you, in writing, of the final action or resolution.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the informal process, you must present your grievance, in writing, along with pertinent information, to the Board of Directors within fifteen (15) days of the conclusion of the informal resolution process. The Board may, at their discretion, conduct an investigation of the grievance, or, based on the descriptions provided, choose to support the decision of the Administrative Team and/or the Executive Director. The Board will inform you, in writing, of the final action or resolution.

### Reassignment or Reallocation of Staff

The Board and the Executive Director continuously monitor MHA’s long and short-term staffing needs. The Executive Director may assign, transfer, change hours of work, or recommend to the Board of Directors the termination of employees, as the need arises. If any changes must be made in your current assignment or position, MHA will offer as much notice as possible.

### Terminating Employment

MHA requests that non-exempt employees give a two-week notice and exempt staff give a three-week notice when resigning. Resignations should be submitted, in writing, to the Executive Director. All MHA property must be returned by the employee’s last day. Departing staff will sign a statement reminding them of the continuing confidentiality and intellectual property requirements. The final paycheck, minus any outstanding payroll reconciliations, will be available within 72 hours for employees who resign and will be paid on the final date of work for all employer-led dismissals.

Any request for a reference for a former employee shall only be provided when accompanied by an authorized release signed by the former employee. Without that, references will be limited to dates of employment, position title, description of duties and eligibility for rehire. Only the Executive Director (or the Education

Director in consultation with the Executive Director) may provide official MHA letters of reference. Letters of reference written by a colleague will be considered personal references and must be written on personal stationery.

Employees may be eligible for unemployment if they have met the conditions of the Massachusetts Unemployment Insurance (UI) review. If you become unemployed through no fault of your own, you may be eligible to collect temporary unemployment benefits, and we encourage you to file promptly if you find yourself in this situation. Unemployment benefits are not available during summer break periods, per Massachusetts law.

### PAY, TIME AND HOURS

### Employment Categories

Merrimac Heights Academy employees fall within three primary employment classifications and these categories are defined by Federal Law.

* + **Hourly, non-exempt employees:** are subject to all provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 and are paid overtime at a rate of time-and-one-half for all hours worked past 40 hours per week. All overtime must be approved and continued submission of non-authorized overtime is grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Please refer to the Overtime section for details on Overtime policy and submission of hours.
	+ **Salaried, exempt employees:** are exempt from the provisions of the FLSA based on their inclusion in several categories of occupations. For example, executives, teachers, professional employees, and certain employees in administrative positions are typically exempt. Salaried employees will be paid a set bi-weekly rate and are not eligible for overtime compensation. Inclusion in the salaried category is based on a strict test of the amount of autonomy and discretion within a job, is subject to salary minimums and is subject to Federal Law.
	+ **Independent Contractors:** are not employees of a company but are individuals providing services on behalf of a company based on a written contract with that company. Independent contractors are subject to various IRS provisions that require them to be materially independent of the hiring company. These contractors receive a schedule 1099 document, rather than a W2, are not subject to the At-Will policy and are not paid on a salaried or hourly basis but rather at a contractual rate as stipulated in their agreement.
	+ **Note:** Upon your hire, you will be notified of your job’s classification by the Executive Director.

For hourly and exempt employees, you may be classified as one of the following types of employees, for MHA purposes. The benefits to which an employee is entitled are determined by his or her MHA classification.

The categories of employment are as follows:

#### Staff working within the educational program

Full-time, exempt employees are expected to work 182 days, which includes the 180-school calendar and two days before the student school year. Full-time teachers are expected to be generally available between the hours of 7:50 and 3:10, and occasionally stay later for scheduled staff meetings.

Part-time, exempt employees work for less than 182 days as determined by the needs of the MHA program and the Executive Director. Part-time faculty receives all legally mandated benefits (such as

Social Security, Earned Sick Time, and Workers’ Compensation Insurance), but are ineligible for the

entire benefit program.

Non-exempt employees submit hours on a bi-weekly basis.

#### Administrators

Administrative staff may be exempt or non-exempt employees and are expected to be available for work on a year-round basis; time during July and August is dependent on the need of the program and may be part-time. Time away may be taken outside of scheduled school vacations. Administrative staff is expected to be generally available between the hours of 8:00 and 4:00. These positions include the Executive and Education Director, and the Executive Assistant.

#### Temporary Employees and Volunteers

Temporary employees, including but not limited to, substitute teachers and summer employees, are hired to supplement the workforce temporarily or to assist in the completion of a specific project. Temporary employees receive all legally mandated benefits (such as Social Security, Earned Sick Time, and Workers’ Compensation Insurance), but are ineligible for all of MHA’s other benefits. Volunteers are utilized at Merrimac Heights Academy for special projects at the discretion of the Executive Director. Volunteers are not eligible for remuneration or benefits. All temporary employees and volunteers will undergo the same criminal records, background and fingerprinting checks that are mandated for employees.

### Reporting Absences

All employees must report any absence and the reason to the Executive Director or Executive Assistant before 8:00am. You must complete the Leave Time Form for all absences immediately upon you return to work.

### Salaries

The Executive Director will allocate for salary increases as are deemed by the Board to be supported by the budget. Salary increases will be awarded to employees for completion of advanced degrees or attainment of additional certifications.

MHA does not employ a rigid salary scale. The OSD rate set process determines our tuition, which may then impact the level of compensation increase. Individual details (including salaries, status, raises, etc.) are considered confidential. The Executive Director is always willing to discuss individual concerns.

### Professional Development

The complex needs of our students, and the rapid pace of research in brain function and learning disabilities, create a continuously evolving environment. New findings and methodologies constantly emerge. It is imperative for the welfare of our students that we each stay current and use methodologies proven effective.

To accomplish this, MHA will try to have a vigorous plan of professional development. It calls for the regular evaluation of students’ needs, continuous evaluation of our ability to meet those needs, and the planning of professional development activities to bridge the two. This is planned by the Education Director and is implemented through monthly training days and weekly curriculum, assessment, and planning meetings. All teachers, related services staff and administrators are part of these meetings. The role of this team is to address the students’ and organization’s needs through the planning evaluation and development of curriculum and interventions, assessment, and professional training events.

In addition to these meetings, teachers attend professional development workshops facilitated by MHA staff, or outside agencies, or perform organization-based tasks, as allowed by the MA DESE.

All certified staff must develop a 3-year Individual Professional Development Plan in cooperation with the Education Director. This 3-year plan addresses the overarching intent and goals of the MHA plan. It must also address the needs of individual teachers. The plan should be developed and turned into the Education Director within 3 months of the completion of the certification cycle.

### Personnel Files and Records

Personnel files are maintained in the Executive Director’s office. These files include resumes, other hiring- related documents, performance evaluations, information on other employment-related actions (promotions, training course participation, disciplinary steps), salary calculation or adjustment sheets, emergency contacts information, contracts, benefit coverage information, and other relevant job-related information, or documents deemed essential by the school. Essential records of current and former workers will be kept indefinitely.

Employees and former employees have the right to inspect and copy information contained in their files or records. Former employees will be given access to their files only in the presence of a management official or designee, at a mutually convenient time and place. The school reserves the right to remove certain sensitive information, including third-party references, confidential management documents, or plans, and items related to ongoing security or criminal investigations, before granting access to a file.

Internal access to an individual’s file is limited to the Executive Director, and other officials who have legitimate, verifiable need to know specific information about the employee.

No information in a personnel file will be disclosed to anyone outside the school without signed consent from the employee or former employee, specifically authorizing the release of the information. The school reserves the right, however, to verify basic information such as employment status and job title, without notification to the individual involved, and to cooperate with municipal, state, or federal regulatory, law enforcements, public safety, or medical officials who have a valid need to ascertain limited, specific information about an individual.

Individuals who question the accuracy or completeness of information contained in their files should bring such matters to the attention of the Executive Director. The school will consider the employee’s objections and correct or remove erroneous or improper information. If the school decides to retain the disputed information in the file, the employee is entitled to place a brief statement in the record identifying the alleged errors or inaccuracies.

The employee is responsible for seeing that his/her file is kept current and accurate. Any changes in credentials

or qualifications should be documented in a timely fashion.

### Paychecks

MHA issues paychecks on a biweekly basis (every two weeks) on Friday. Full time and part time employees’ checks are allocated in 21 paychecks (26 paychecks for year-round employees). Contracted employees will receive a paycheck for hours worked at the end of the pay period during which they have worked. All employees must participate in direct deposit into one, or more than one account.

### BENEFITS

Benefits vary according to the employee’s role in the organization, and may be different from the following outline, as per individual contractual arrangements. For the purpose of benefit eligibility, full time employees are defined as any employee scheduled for thirty-two (32) or more hours per week.

### Health Insurance

Health and Dental insurance is currently offered to all eligible employees (see above) and the employee’s spouse and/or children (eligible dependents) with an employee co-pay. The insurance company and policy’s specific coverage may change on an annual basis, or as provided for by state law, but the basic coverage will include major medical and will have a deductible and co-payment. Eligible employees may sign up for benefits with no waiting period.

### Massachusetts Mini-COBRA

The Massachusetts small group continuation of coverage law (Mini-COBRA) requires small group carriers to provide for the continuation of health benefits to employees of small businesses with 2-19 employees. The Mini-COBRA law (G.L. c. 176J, § 9) was enacted in August 1996 and amended the Massachusetts small group health insurance law to require small group health carriers to provide continuation of coverage benefits which are similar to those required by the federal Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986 (COBRA). Mini-COBRA allows employees and their family members to continue coverage on their small group health benefit plan and pay group rates for certain time periods under circumstances where they previously would have lost coverage.

Mini-COBRA provides continuation of coverage to eligible employees when small group coverage for you and your covered dependents would otherwise end due to certain circumstances, including but not limited to a change in your employment status, your death or eligibility for Medicare.

For further information, please contact the Medical Insurance Provider or <http://www.mass.gov/ocabr/insurance/health-insurance/consumer-guides/minicobra.html>

### 401 (K) Retirement Account

All employees may choose to make contributions to our company retirement plan, a 401(K)plan, without a 90- day waiting period. The 401(K) allows employees to save pre-tax dollars towards retirement and is subject to all IRS provisions for such a plan. Please contact the Executive Director to enroll in our company plan.

**AFLAC**

Supplemental insurance offering an added layer of financial protection, helping to support employees in covering not only out-of-pocket (OOP) health care expenses not covered by major medical plans, but also everyday expenses linked to their health care needs.

### Training

Reimbursement and paid time off for training is variously available as detailed in the Professional Development Plan, and at the discretion of the Executive Director.

### TIME AWAY FROM WORK

### Sick Time

MHA recognizes that inability to work because of illness or injury may cause economic hardship. MHA also recognizes that employees may be required to secure necessary treatment for disabilities. For these reasons, we provide paid sick days as follows:

* All teaching staff are entitled to five (5) paid sick days per year, in compliance with the Massachusetts Earned Sick Time (EST) laws.
* All administrative staff are entitled to ten (10) paid sick days per year.
* Part-time seasonal employees and temporary employees will accrue sick time consistent with the Massachusetts Earned Sick Time (EST) Laws, which provide for accrual of one (1) hour of earned sick time per every thirty (30) hours worked, up to a maximum of 40 hours per school year (September to June). Employees may carry over up to 40 hours of sick time into the next year but will not continue to accrue more sick time until they start using accrued hours (i.e., no employee may have more than 40 hours of sick time at any time).

### Use

The Massachusetts Earned Sick Time (EST) law provides five primary purposes for which sick time may be used: to care for your own physical or mental illness, injury or medical condition; to care for a close family member with such a condition; to attend medical or dental appointments; to address the effects of domestic violence; and to travel to and from an appointment, a pharmacy, or other location related to the purpose for which time was taken. Employees who are away from work more than three (3) consecutive days are required to furnish a doctor’s verification. Any employee found to be willfully abusing sick leave through a clear pattern of absenteeism may be subject to discipline or discharge.

**Please note:** The EST laws include several provisions concerning how employees may use EST:

\*EST cannot be invoked as an excuse to be late for work without an authorized purpose.

\*An employee may not accept a specific shift assignment with the intention of calling out sick for all or part of the shift.

\*EST time is not paid out upon termination.

\*MHA can require you to provide a fitness-for-duty certification if there are reasonable safety concerns regarding your ability to perform your duties following a usage of sick time.

\*The smallest increment of sick time you can use is 1 hour.

### Holidays

Teaching staff is required to work the specified 182 days per year. Holidays and vacations are detailed in the academic calendar. Administrative and support staff are entitled to the following twelve (12) paid holidays a year:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Labor Day | Thanksgiving | New Year’s Day | Memorial Day |
| Columbus Day | Day after Thanksgiving | ML King Day | Patriot’s Day |
| Veteran’s Day | Christmas | President’s Day | Fourth of July |

**Vacation Time**

Office based staff and administration are entitled to vacation time according to the following schedule:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Years of Service** | **Annual Vacation** |
| 6 months- 1 year | 5 days |
| 1 -2 years | 10 days |
| 2+ years | 15 days |

School vacations, if taken, are counted towards vacation time (unless otherwise agreed to with Executive Director)

Teachers are not entitled to additional vacation beyond their time away from school and in the summer months.

### Personal Holidays

All employees are entitled to three (3) personal holidays per year. Personal time is prorated for part-time employees based on the number of hours worked.

### Massachusetts Parental Leave

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires that MHA allows all regular full-time and regular part-time employees (both male and female) who have been employed for a minimum of three (3) months to take up to eight (8) weeks of unpaid leave for the purpose of:

* Giving birth/the birth of a child to their spouse;
* Adopting a child under the age of 18; or
* Adopting a child under the age of 23 if the child is mentally or physically disabled.

Employees must give SLC at least two weeks’ notice of the anticipated date of departure and of their intention

to return.

Any two employees of the same employer shall only be entitled to a combined 8 weeks of unpaid parental leave for the birth or adoption of the same child.

Under Massachusetts’s law, employees cannot be required to use paid time off for leaves that fall under the Mass Parental Leave Act, but employees may voluntarily choose to use their accrued sick, personal or vacation time to pay for time covered by this leave.

Posters placed in the common area can provide employees with further details regarding their rights and responsibilities under MPLA. Additional information can also be obtained by contacting the Executive Director.

To request time off, an employee must submit a Time Off and Leave Request Form and obtain approval in writing from the Executive Director at least 30 days in advance for childbirth and at least two weeks in advance for adoption (when possible).

### Military Leave

An employee is entitled to time away for certain types of active or inactive duty in the National Guard or as a Reserve of the Armed forces. MHA complies with federal guidelines for this leave.

### Leave of Absence

Employees who desire an unpaid leave of absence are welcome to make this request to the Executive Director in person, but these requests will be handled on an individual basis. Employees should not assume outcomes for these requests and await a decision to make any personal plans. Depending on the details of the situation, leaves of absence can often put MHA in a difficulty position in terms of hiring and delivering the best possible program for its students. It may not be possible to grant leave in a particular year, and all leave is granted at the discretion of the Executive Director in consultation with the Board of Directors. Consideration for granting approval includes length of service, length of leave requested, reason for leave, commitment to return to work at the end of the leave, and the impact the leave will have on the school. Leaves of absence can only be granted in extraordinary circumstances that meet the needs of the individual while offering long-term benefits to Merrimac Heights Academy as well.

***Note:*** Merrimac Heights Academy employs less than 50 staff and is thus not covered by the federal FMLA laws.

### Funeral Leave

All full-time and regular part-time employees are allowed up to three (3) day of leave, which means three consecutive working days with pay, in the event of a death of an immediate family member. The term “immediate family member” is defined as spouse, domestic partner, parent, child, sibling, parent-in-law, grandparent, grandchild, stepsibling, and stepchild. For other relatives, Merrimac Heights Academy will grant a one-day leave. Employees may, with the approval of the Executive Director, use any available paid leave as additional time off as necessary.

### Jury Duty Leave

Merrimac Heights Academy provides leave for employees who are called to serve as jurors. Employees will be paid their regular salary for the first three days (3), per Massachusetts law. If a jury summons lasts longer than three days, the Commonwealth of Mass will begin to provide a jury stipend to compensate the employee.

Employees called for jury duty are required to notify the Executive Director when an official summons is received. A copy of the summons should be forwarded to the Executive Director. Jury Duty Leave will continue for as long as required by the court. It is expected that if dismissed early (before noon) on any given day from jury duty, the employee will return to work for the rest of that day. When the employee’s jury duty obligation has been completed, the employee must provide a court document verifying the time spent in court.

**SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

Merrimac Heights Academy understands the importance of training and drills. Training will include drills and functional exercises to ensure all staff and students are aware of the procedures.

* Two drills will be conducted per calendar school year.
* Details of each drill will be reviewed with staff and students. Students will be reminded that staff will be leading them during the emergency and students will be informed of expectations in terms of leaving, walking through the school, staying together, and gathering in the designated area.
* In the event of a fire pull a red fire alert pull station located through0ut the buildings that directly connects to the Fire Department. Also, make a 911 back up call to the fire department. Sprinkler systems are also located throughout the buildings.
* In the event the school needs to evacuate the building an air horn will sound. All people are to immediately evacuate the building by the nearest exit posted inside of each room (only if this is the safest route.)

**Students with Disabilities and/or Mobility Impairments**

* Students with mobility impairments are those who cannot comfortably or safely access and use the standard resources offered in safety and emergency drills whether their disability is chronic or temporary.
* Students with mobility impairments who are self-sufficient under normal circumstances may have to rely on others in an emergency. They may require additional assistance during and after an incident in functional areas, including, but not limited to: communication, supervision, medical care, and reestablishing independence.
* MHA identifies students/staff that may require special assistance and/or support in the event of an emergency. Staff will accommodate students with evacuation and only staff members will use emergency equipment if practical until fire equipment arrives. Staff are trained in the use of emergency equipment (i.e., chair lift, blankets, fire extinguishers, etc.)
* No students or staff are allowed to re-enter the building until cleared by the Executive Director and/or Emergency Services Personnel.

#### BUILDING EVACUATION

In case of fire or other emergency requiring the evacuation of the building, follow this process:

* Teachers
	+ Know the locations of primary exits, evacuation techniques and locations and operations of emergency equipment (fire extinguisher, etc. )
	+ Have students exit the building following the directions posted in each room (if this is the safest route.)
	+ Instruct students to gather on the lower parking lot or other designated area as determined by Administration.
	+ Shut off classroom lights.
	+ Close windows and doors.
	+ Follow students out of the classroom and onto the lower parking lot or other designated area as determined by Administration.
* Office Staff
	+ Bring clipboard with full roster and current day’s attendance (administrative assistant has primary

responsibility, executive director has secondary, assistant director has third)

* + Take attendance as soon as possible.
	+ Report anyone missing to the executive director and to the fire department immediately.
	+ Communicate with parents/guardians as needed.
* Students
	+ Evacuate in an orderly fashion, quietly and single file.
	+ As you arrive on the lower lot or other designated area as determined by Administration.

remain in single file lines with the rest of the students.

To prepare for this type of emergency, we will conduct drills complying with state regulations. Everybody must evacuate the building during a drill or an actual emergency.

In the event the disaster requires evacuation of the area around the campus, we will follow the building evacuation procedure steps above, then follow the Seabrook Nuclear Plant’s evacuation and will meet as a group at a place designated by the Merrimac Police Department

#### REVERSE EVACUATION

In the event of ***dangerous people in the area or dangerous fumes*,** we will:

* + Use an air horn to notify any student and/or staff who are outside the building to return.
	+ Attendance will be taken to ensure that all students and staff are inside.
	+ Each classroom locks all doors and windows and turns off the lights. The administrative staff will lock the front door.
	+ Teachers will bring both students and staff to the basement.
	+ The executive director or administrative assistant will contact 911.
	+ Take attendance as soon as possible!

#### Report anyone missing to the Executive Director and to the fire department.

In the event of ***dangerous fumes***, the custodian and administrative assistant will:

* + Close and seal with duct tape the door to the basement, the door to the kitchen, the exterior doors, and windows if possible.
	+ Any windows with an air conditioner will be covered with clear plastic.

In the event of an ***unknown intruder***:

* The first person to encounter the intruder should get to the phone and notify the Executive Director and/or staff members to "LOCK DOWN". If they are not able to reach a phone, they should ask someone else to phone or text Executive Director and/or staff members that we are in “LOCK DOWN.”
	+ Each classroom will lock all doors and windows, close all blinds, and turn off the lights.
	+ Teachers will move everyone away from the doors; keeping everyone out of sight until the risk is gone.
	+ Teachers will be notified to resume class with a phone call or text stating "ALL CLEAR".

Staff/students will be debriefed and discuss evaluation and effectiveness of the plan.

For any issues involving people within the MHA community, a letter of understanding will be formulated and annually agreed to with the Merrimac Police Department and the administration. The letter will outline who the contact is in the department and detail what types of incidents should be communicated to the department.

#### MEDICAL AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

### Medical

* + For minor scrapes, cuts, and bruises, a first aid kit is maintained in the nurse's office. Teachers, when possible, should send students to the person designated by the nurse for first aid.
	+ If the injury is more serious, the Executive Director should be consulted. If the injury is very serious, the Merrimac Ambulance Department should be contacted via a call to 911.
	+ Routine prescription medication is stored in a locked cabinet and dispensed according to the doctor's orders by our nurse or another designated staff member. This procedure is in compliance with state regulations.

### Other National Tragedies or Disasters

We will attempt to keep the students informed based on the understanding and the capability to cope with the information. Depending on magnitude of the event and its direct impact on the staff (to be decided by the administrative team), we will take one of three courses of action:

* + Keep the students in their class and inform them at a convenient time.
	+ Suspend classes to inform students and process/discuss the information returning to class sometime later.
	+ Cancel classes, inform parents, and bus companies that they will be an early release.

### Other

A letter of understanding will be formulated and annually agreed to with the Merrimac Police Department and the Executive director. The letter will try to anticipate potential risks and appropriate contact people for various events.

### Procedure for Training and Reporting Abuse and Neglect

Merrimac Heights Academy policy is aimed at helping staff recognize, report, and resolve any cases of child abuse or neglect, and to protect the student in an expeditious, sensitive, and confidential manner, pursuant to all regulations.

All faculty and direct contact staff are mandated reporters under the Massachusetts General Laws Child Protection Act. Therefore, any staff member who suspects abuse or neglect of a child for whatever reason, is REQUIRED to report this suspicion orally and immediately to MHA’s Executive Director. The director and the staff member then jointly call the MA Division of Child and Family Services. This report must be followed by a written report to the director.

If a student comes to school with obvious evidence of physical or sexual abuse, that evidence should be immediately documented with a photograph. If the student appears to be seriously physically harmed or in danger, the student will be taken to the nearest emergency room, by the Executive Director, for a complete examination.

It is the policy at Merrimac Heights Academy to cooperate with the MA Division of Child and Family Services, child protection social workers, and law enforcement agencies, in the course of investigations into alleged child abuse or neglect.

Periodic faculty training sessions heighten awareness; help us identify, and appropriately intervene in cases of suspected abuse or neglect; and help staff feel more comfortable with possible interventions. Merrimac

Heights Academy’s mental health professionals periodically give presentations and distribute literature to

faculty.

### Worker’s Compensation

On the job injuries are covered by our Workers’ Compensation policy, which is provided at no cost to you. State law requires that MHA provide insurance benefits for employees should they become injured or disabled due to accidents incurred while at work. If you suffer illness or injury on the job- no matter how minor- either at our MHA facilities, or while working with students in the community, you should report the incident immediately to the Executive Director as soon as you are safe and have attended to the injury. If injured while working off- site, you may be required to report the incident to a safety officer for that location, as well. Consistent with applicable state law, failure to report an injury within a reasonable time period could jeopardize your claim and may affect a payment of benefits or cause a possible denial of liability. Worker’s Compensation benefits, once established, may pay a weekly amount for the duration of the employee’s absence from work, plus employee medical costs. Benefits amounts are determined by law. Please alert the Executive Director or HR Consultant of record to any workplace condition that seems unsafe and/or could lead to or contribute to an accident.

### Workplace Violence and Weapons

The Merrimac Heights Academy is committed to providing a safe and secure working environment for our employees and our students. Any acts or threats of physical harm, including intimidation, harassment, and/or coercion, which involve or affect the Academy or any of its employees, which occur on Academy property or are related to the workplace, will not be allowed.

Examples of conduct which may be considered threatening or potentially violent include, but are not limited to the following:

 Threatening physical or aggressive contact directed toward another individual, including blocking passage;  Threatening an individual or his/her family, friends, associates, or property with physical harm;

 The destruction or threat of destruction of Merrimac Heights Academy property or property of an employee or other person affiliated with Merrimac Heights Academy;

 Harassing or threatening phone calls;  Surveillance or stalking;

 Repeated unexplained and unwelcome visits to the home of an employee or other persons related to Merrimac Heights Academy;

 Insinuating physical harm or intimidation.

The Merrimac Heights Academy will make the sole determination of whether, and to what extent, threats or acts of violence will be acted upon by the Agency. Merrimac Heights Academy will make a judgment as to what action is appropriate, including corrective or disciplinary action up to and including dismissal and/or reporting to legal authorities. To the extent permitted by applicable law, employees are prohibited from bringing onto MHA’s premises any firearms, weapons, explosives, incendiary devices, or similar materials at any time. To the extent permitted by applicable law, this policy includes a prohibition against having firearms or other prohibited material in your vehicle while stored in or parked on MHA’s property. Employees who have licenses to carry weapons must also comply with this policy at all times. Violation of this policy may result in immediate discharge.

You are required to report any violation of this policy, including any incidents involving actual or threatened violence. MHA prohibits retaliation in connection with a good faith complaint regarding actual or threatened violence. If an outside individual (not an employee or student) appears on the property and is threatening harm or violence to any employee or student, you must call 911 and then notify the Executive Director immediately.

### Inclement Weather or Other School Closings

There may be times when MHA will cancel school in advance of the school day due to weather related or other conditions. This cancellation will be announced on local TV stations. The Executive Director makes a decision by 5:00 AM local time and the closing will also be reported via Facebook and to teachers via Text message. If there is a 2-hour delay reported, staff should attend at their discretion when safe to do so.

If school must be closed during the school day, staff must stay until all students have been released to their parent, caregivers, or bus. Exceptions to this may be granted by the Executive Director if there are personal extenuating circumstances for an employee.

### Security Camera Policy

As you are aware, MHA may utilize security cameras both for the safety and protection of our employees and students and as a deterrent to theft and loss. Please be aware that your movements in certain areas of the property- not including dressing rooms and bathrooms- may be monitored and footage may be used to as supporting evidence in case of civil or criminal charges or disciplinary action.



**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT**

I, ,

 **Employee Name**

certify that I have received a copy of the staff handbook and understand that I must comply with the policies of Merrimac Heights Academy as long as I remain employed here. I understand that I may raise any questions that I may have about the stated policies or procedures with my supervisor or the Executive Director.

The information in this manual is for use as a guideline only and it is not meant to be considered as a

contract of any kind. This information can be changed with the exception of the “at will” employment policy. Owing to limitations of space and periodic changes in applicable Federal and State laws, the information in this manual cannot be a complete or final statement as to Academy policy. Therefore, employees may refer to their supervisor for information regarding the applicability of the guidelines in this manual to any particular situation.

I understand that as a matter of Merrimac Heights Academy policy that employees without separate signed employment contracts are subject to employment is at-will which means that either the employee or the employer terminate the relationship at any time, with or without cause or notice.

 Signature of Staff Member:

Date: