



**Honoring Excellence
Celebrating Intelligence
Rewarding Creativity**

PARENT / STUDENT HANDBOOK

2026 - 2027 EDITION

This handbook contains information about day-to-day life at Steppingstone School. It is not intended to nor does it create a contract. It is a summary of school policies and practices that are statements of position at the time of publication but are to be considered works in progress. They are occasionally subject to change since faculty and administration are constantly striving to improve and to meet the special and/or changing needs of the individuals who are part of our Steppingstone Family. Although this handbook is generally revised yearly and calendars are supplemented as need arises, Steppingstone School reserves the right to amend this handbook at any time and for any reason. (Rev. 08/27/26)

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STEPPINGSTONE

Honoring Excellence. Celebrating Intelligence. Rewarding Creativity.

MISSION

At Steppingstone School, we are committed to the development of the whole child by providing an environment that supports the academic, intellectual, social, physical, and emotional growth of gifted learners.

VISION

At Steppingstone School for Gifted Education, our vision is to unlock the full potential of underserved gifted children.

We nurture their intellectual and personal growth to become compassionate and responsible global citizens. We strive to provide accessible education for all gifted students regardless of their background. Our ultimate goal is to create positive change in society by empowering gifted children to realize their potential and make a positive impact in their communities and the world.

PURPOSE

Our purpose is to provide a satisfying, challenging, and joyful learning experience for gifted children by providing the opportunity to unlock the gifts that were trapped by the limitations of the traditional educational structure.

We will present gifted children with the opportunity to discover their passions, set purpose and goals in pursuit of those passions, develop the personal, academic and intellectual skills that will allow them to keep open options, realize the successful achievement of their goals, and do this with integrity and consideration for the good of society and the world.

SCHOOL HOURS AND INFORMATION

Extended Morning Program hours (additional charge applies)	8:00 to 9:00 a.m.
Class hours	9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Office hours	8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Extended Afternoon Program hours (additional charge applies)	4:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Web page: www.steppingstoneschool.org
Email: info@steppingstoneschool.org

SCHOOL CLOSING DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER

Cancellation of school for inclement weather will be decided by and will correspond to that of the Plymouth School District. It will be announced on the radio and TV. If you do not live in the Plymouth School District and your weather is more severe, you should use your own discretion about driving.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Michelle Belt, President
Donna Coffin, Vice-President
TBD, Secretary
Rich Niemisto, Treasurer
Jorge Contreras
Joyce Li
Yong Hwa Son

David Liou, Head of School, *ex-officio*
Kiyo A. Morse, Founder, Emeritus Head of School, *ex officio*

BOARD STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Michelle Belt, Executive & RDF
Yong Hwa Son, Facilities
Rich Niemisto, Finance & Budget
Jorge Contreras, Public Relations
Donna Coffin, Trusteeship

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

David Liou, Head of School
Kiyo A. Morse, Director of Admissions
Dr. Reef Morse, SMART Center Director
Jason Roder, General Assistant, IT Specialist
JoAnn Munson, Bookkeeper

FACULTY

Ananya Pattanaik, Faculty Chair
Shari Dudek, Early EI Classroom Instructor
Joshua Gill, Upper EI Classroom/Music/Japanese Instructor
David Liou, Mandarin Instructor/ISACS Rep
Jason Roder, Computer Programming Instructor
Katra Stubblefield, Art Instructor
Donna Coffin, Volunteer Asst/AIMS Rep

ORGANIZATION

Steppingstone is an independent accredited, non-profit, 501(c)(3), co-educational elementary day school (young K - Gr-8) for gifted students. All aspects from admissions to hiring are independent of race, color, creed, gender/orientation, religion, or national or ethnic origin.

As a not-for-profit educational institution, Steppingstone receives revenues from tuition, fees, endowment, fund-raising efforts, and voluntary contributions. It is not governed by or subsidized by other organized entities such as a church.

Steppingstone is governed and its policies are determined by the Board of Trustees that meets regularly on a monthly basis. The following are the Board's standing committees: Development & Fund Raising; Executive; Facilities; Finance & Budget; Marketing, Recruitment & Public Relations; and Trusteeship. Trustees are nominated and accepted on the board for three-year terms.

The program is guided by all members of the faculty and staff through weekly meetings and additional input from part-time staff, parents, and other professionals.

CREDENTIALS

Steppingstone has been educating gifted students since 1981. Steppingstone is accredited by the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) and approved by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). Steppingstone is a member of the Association of Independent Michigan Schools (AIMS), Independent Schools Management (ISM), the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Children (MAGC), and the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC).

Minimum curriculum requirements determined by the State of Michigan are followed as well as state requirements for building construction, health and safety, fire hazards, and federal disabilities guidelines.

Classroom teachers are typically certified by the State of Michigan and update their skills through coursework or by annually participating in teaching workshops. All faculty members regularly attend workshops organized by MAGC, AIMS, and/or ISACS and also take advantage of local teacher in-service opportunities.

The teaching faculty is supplemented by artists-in-residence, research scientists, field placement students, and occasionally, volunteer teachers and mentors who may be alumni.

STAFF AND SCHOOL SELECTION

Faculty appointments in private as well as public schools usually are not confirmed until late summer although they may be offered and accepted much earlier. Even after contracts have been signed, unexpected illnesses and/or personal situations cannot be predicted. Therefore, we urge parents to select schools based on:

1. The curriculum and prevailing philosophies of the administration since they usually seek teachers who can implement their educational perspectives.
2. The ability of the administration to evaluate student-learning needs and to develop the faculty to meet those needs.

3. The general student and faculty attitudes as well as the school atmosphere, both of which are good measures of (1) and (2) and should reflect mutual respect and consideration.

All staff members are qualified through professional preparation and/or experience. All classroom teachers are selected based on compatible philosophies, the demonstrated ability to implement those philosophies, and sensitivity to the social-emotional needs essential for teaching gifted students. Certification is the norm but not a requirement.

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Many schools are unable to provide appropriate instruction for the gifted child, who often requires more rapid and/or greater in-depth learning situations and much broader foundations of academic and non-academic experiences as well as the environment in which to develop creativity in a productive manner. Steppingstone provides a curriculum designed to meet these needs of the gifted child as well as an opportunity to develop personal and social responsibilities and leadership skills.

Our particular philosophy focuses on the development of the total child which is based on the idea that the evenly-developed child is the most satisfied and productive child, provided that appropriate personal characteristics and special interests are not suppressed in the process. In addition, there is an emphasis on cooperative learning as opposed to competitive learning.

- **ACADEMICALLY** – students are provided basic foundation studies at a challenge level in response to their skills, interests, and rapidity of learning. In addition, they are provided with a broad spectrum of enrichment studies such as art, music, foreign language, and computer science. Project-based learning is employed in social studies and science.
- **INTELLECTUALLY** – we assist individuals to develop the abilities to integrate and apply his/her skills and knowledge in a logical manner and to synthesize solutions to problems and questions creatively.
- **PHYSICALLY** – our physical education program focuses on health, fitness, and recreational sports that we hope students will incorporate into a healthy living style. Team sports are also taught and played at recess and at outdoor sports sessions.
- **SOCIALLY-EMOTIONALLY** – our purpose is to help children develop coping and problem-solving skills with the goal of cultivating a person of strong self-esteem that is balanced with tolerance for the human frailties of others and comfortable in either a team member or a leadership position.

Because the gifted child at Steppingstone is with many other children of similar interests, abilities, and learning styles, there is often a stronger basis for inter-personal communication and the development of peer relationships than might be found in the typical classroom. Attention is given to the integration of physical and social-emotional growth issues with the acquisition of academic and intellectual skills. The "whole" child is developed.

CURRICULUM

At Steppingstone, students follow a basic curriculum sequence with appropriate adjustments and additions to meet or exceed the local school district guidelines and performance objectives for certified elementary schools as published by the Michigan Department of Education, Lansing, Michigan.

In general, instruction is delivered to the whole class with differentiated assignments (e.g., social studies and science) or in small ability-based groups (e.g., math and spelling) at specific times. The annual curriculum for any student is individualized to meet that child's specific needs. Therefore, a student assigned to the first grade may be assigned to a third grade spelling instructional level and second grade math instructional level *or vice versa*. More specific curriculum details can be obtained upon request.

CLASS PLACEMENT

Students are placed in multi-age classrooms dependent on their developmental levels. In general, this is based on the individual student's needs for teacher-directed studies as opposed to self-directed studies.

Grade placements are generally based on age reached by September 1 of any school year. This is used at Steppingstone for tracking purposes only. Students are not placed in instructional groups based on grade. Classrooms are assigned based on the personal development of the student rather than academic expertise. At the same time, academic learning is at a challenge level independent of grade assignment. This practice ensures that a young student is not expected to be more responsible or carry a heavier load of work to complete at home than is developmentally appropriate; it also ensures a closer social development match.

THE HEAD'S PREROGATIVE

Notwithstanding any provision of the handbook, in all matters that relate to the health, safety, and welfare of any student or employee of Steppingstone School, the good name and reputation of the school, the security of the school, or such other matters affecting the interests of Steppingstone School, the Head of Steppingstone School reserves the right to take any action s/he deems appropriate to preserve and protect the best interests of the Steppingstone School Family.

PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Parents are encouraged to be parents – it is their primary responsibility. If parents assume their responsibilities consistently, our faculty will be able to optimize learning for our students.

Most of the following parent expectations are common sense items but are stated in the hopes of reaffirming and reinforcing behaviors that encourage student growth and development.

Providing the following five basic items goes a long way toward helping your child's efforts to attain educational and emotional independence and success:

1. A routine bedtime which allows 10+ hours of sleep
2. Adequate breakfast, snacks (fresh fruit or vegetable only), and lunch (i.e., high protein, low sugar)
3. Prompt arrival (at 8:45 a.m.)

4. Quiet homework space and time as well as a consistent after-school routine
5. Limited structured after-school activities (i.e., make room for homework, sleep, and creative thought)

Other important actions that reinforce the important home-school connection:

- Reserve dates in your family calendars and personal planners so that you can attend
 - Student events
 - Parent conferences (these are for parents only – both parents, if possible)
 - Annual Benefit Auction
 - School community service events, such as Rouge River Water Quality testing with and for Friends of the Rouge (FOTR)
- Take your child to the library weekly – or more often, if needed
- Avoid violent and/or sexually inappropriate movies, books, and video games
- Monitor Internet usage closely and limit video games
- Provide weather-appropriate attire daily
- Read the weekly newsletter online
- Read and sign planners daily
- Immediately communicate concerns to administration, faculty, and staff; do not wait until you are frustrated.
- Support school policy and decisions
- Participate, volunteer, and donate – as able
- Pay bills promptly
- Volunteer to drive on an occasional field trip (or donate funds for a bus) and help with the Annual Benefit Auction

ANNUAL BENEFIT AUCTION

This is Steppingstone's major fund-raiser and provides approximately 10% of our annual revenues. Independent schools depend on non-tuition fund-raisers in order to improve and develop new programs. All parents are asked to volunteer, donate, and/or acquire auction items to support this function.

Please help to “Make a Difference” in your child’s educational experience: obtain auction items or donate a similar amount in cash or in-kind goods or services. The benefits include:

- Improvement of existing programs and development of new programs
- Maintenance and improvement of facilities and teaching/learning materials
- Excellence of faculty through support of competitive salaries
- An evening of adult-only fun with friends and families
- A tax deduction as allowable by law (check with your CPA)

ANNUAL GIVING: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Development and Fund Raising Committee of the board is dedicated to creating ways of giving that will provide choices for each family.

1. WHAT IS ANNUAL GIVING? Annual Giving is a form of fund-raising that supplements tuition to fund the growth and development of the school. Other sources of supplemental revenues are the Annual Benefit Auction, investment income, and grants.
2. WHY DO WE NEED ANNUAL GIVING? While tuition covers basic expenses, tuition will not cover the entire cost of developing and maintaining the new programs and

improvements necessary for sustaining our status as an outstanding educational environment. This is true for all independent schools that are not subsidized by government or church dollars.

3. **HOW ARE OUR ANNUAL GIVING DOLLARS ALLOCATED?** At this time, Steppingstone invests donor dollars in equity and building funds, development of financial aid, and the improvements and expansions in programs that will increase tuition revenues to support our campus.
4. **WHAT HAPPENS DURING ANNUAL GIVING?** In the fall, Steppingstone will mail an appeal for Annual Giving. Volunteers will write personal notes requesting participation. Those who have not responded by the end of the year will receive solicitation calls by volunteers who will be prepared to answer any additional questions.
5. **WHO CONTRIBUTES TO ANNUAL GIVING?** Anyone who has been involved with Steppingstone will be asked to contribute. This includes parents, alumni, grandparents (and/or other relatives), faculty, staff, trustees, and other friends.
6. **WHAT IS THIS YEAR'S GOAL?** There is no dollar amount, but we do wish to achieve 100% participation by parents, faculty, staff, and trustees.
7. **WHAT GIFT AMOUNT IS REQUIRED?** There is no required level of giving. A gift that is proportional to one's ability to give would be the appropriate amount. Gifts to Annual Giving are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law (check with your CPA). Ways of giving will be shared in an information packet later in the school year.
8. **I'D LIKE TO BE AS GENEROUS AS POSSIBLE, BUT I CAN'T PAY ALL AT ONCE. CAN I PAY OVER TIME?** The answer is: YES! If you indicate with your pledge that you prefer to contribute over time, the business office will send reminders according to the schedule you request and will invoice it on your school account. Gifts received after June 30 of the current school year will be credited to the next year's campaign.

PARENT AND STUDENT GUIDELINES – AN ALPHABETICAL LISTING

APPAREL AND GROOMING

Generally, we rely on parents' good taste and judgment to guide children in selecting appropriate school apparel; however, we have some specifics.

Parents, if you suspect that something might be inappropriate, please exercise your parental prerogative and do not let your child wear it. Children who come to school inappropriately attired will be asked to change into clothing from our surplus. In all cases concerning attire, the faculty and administration reserve the right of final determination concerning proper student attire and overall appearance.

Cleanliness and neatness should be the primary criteria; any clothing in a state of disrepair is not appropriate. Because the children do play in the fields, trees, sand, and snow, durability would minimize parental frustrations. Art days are not the best days for white or long-sleeved tops.

Non-distracting, practical apparel and accessories are requested. Unnatural hair colors, facial hair, and non-traditional jewelry (e.g., body piercings) are very distracting to fellow students and are often distracting to the wearer as well. For example, high heels and long, dangling pierced earrings can be unsafe as well as restrictive to movement and balance; utilitarian shoes and posts for pierced ears are more appropriate. T-shirts that display sex, drugs, violence, illegal, intolerant, or unethical issues are not allowed.

- Non-revealing clothing is required. Length of shorts and skirts must not be more than two inches from floor when kneeling (including when worn with leggings). If leggings or form-fitting slacks are worn, tops should extend to 4 inches above the knee. Not allowed are spaghetti-strap tanks (i.e., straps of tank tops must be a minimum of three finger-widths wide), tube tops, bare midriffs, low-cut blouses, transparent clothing, skin-tight Spandex apparel, or low-riding pants. Skirts and shorts should be long enough that underwear is not exposed if the student bends from the waist to touch the floor. Roomy tops are most appropriate; clothing that is exceedingly tight or exceedingly loose may not be worn.

We do not allow head coverings in school unless they are part of a documented, organized religious belief.

Moderately applied make-up is sometimes appropriate for teen-age girls only. Please use parental discretion; we will too.

Outerwear needs to be adequate and each item clearly labeled. We go outside every day unless it is raining because it helps students settle in to the afternoon's work. The following items will ensure comfort for the student even on cold and/or snowy days:

- Waterproof mittens or gloves
- Hat and/or scarf to cover the ears – hoods are often inadequate
- Insulated, waterproof boots
- Insulated, waterproof jacket and snow pants – especially for girls who wear skirts (alternatively, an extra pair of sweatpants to wear over clothes)
- Tennis shoes or slippers to replace boots when indoors

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Establish a value for punctuality and bring your child to school on time (between 8:45 and 8:50) and pick him/her up when s/he expects you. The life-long value for and practice of being timely is established in these developmental years by your leadership. It will be of great benefit to your child when s/he leaves adolescence, enters young adulthood, and accepts responsibility for his/her personal, college, and/or professional life. Your child will benefit now by experiencing a complete school day and by receiving the gratitude of faculty and other students for his/her good manners and consideration.

To avoid Extended Morning Program charges, your child should enter no earlier than 8:45 a.m. Students who arrive early will be billed accordingly.

To avoid being tardy, your child must be in the classroom before 9:00 a.m. To be an excellent student (and to be eligible for the monthly High Stepper award), s/he must be in his/her seat with all homework complete by 9:00 a.m.

Tardy children miss instruction. Each late entry results in the teacher spending at least 15 minutes repeating instructions (i.e., 15 minutes per day results in 1 hour and 15 minutes per week, 5 hours per month, and 45 hours [or 9 school days] per year).

Your child will miss the least amount of important instruction (as well as maintain her/his eligibility for the monthly High Stepper award) by scheduling doctors' appointments so s/he is absent between 12:00 noon and 1:30 p.m. or after 4:00 p.m. We suggest that orthodontic braces be started at the end of June so that the initial and painful months of treatment do not interfere with the enjoyment of learning and are done during summer when your child does not have as many responsibilities. If s/he must leave school before 4:00 p.m., please write a note to the teacher in the planner, which will be read each morning. This is the most reliable form of communication.

Your child will be dismissed directly to your waiting car starting at 4:00 p.m. After school, enter the parking lot and form a line facing the street and leading to the direct exit. Do not drive around cars in front of you if their child is slower to get into or out of the car than yours. Please be prompt since staff members often have other obligations after school and need time to reorganize and clean before leaving. Students who have not departed by 4:15 p.m. will be placed in the Extended Afternoon Program and billed accordingly.

Teachers are available from 8:00 to 8:30 a.m. for emergencies and short phone calls only. Please, do not try to confer with teachers between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Students need all our attention as classes start and end, and we would rather schedule discussions when we are free of the responsibilities of student supervision and can devote full attention to your inquiry or concern. In an emergency or for short notice communications, please call the office.

ATTENDANCE CODES

Tardy Arrival (TA) – For the purpose of attendance, a student is considered a Tardy Arrival if s/he walks into the classroom after 9:00 a.m. From time to time, administration will waive tardy arrivals due to massive traffic jams, unexpectedly heavy snowfall, or other situations outside the driver's control.

Early Departure (ED) – This refers to the times a student must leave school before 4 pm
Excused (XA) vs. Unexcused Absences (A) – An absence is excused if the student is ill, has a doctor's appointment, or is absent due to a family emergency, such as a death.

ATTENDANCE – GENERAL

Ensure optimal learning for your child as well as optimal teaching conditions for faculty and schedule vacations for days when there is no school and when there are no parent conferences. While we urge you not to send your child to school when s/he is ill, it is still very important that s/he otherwise attend in a timely and regular manner.

It will be difficult for your child to grasp and master concepts if s/he has missed instruction and it will be difficult for your child to achieve academic or intellectual excellence if s/he has missed the enriched, interactive learning experiences that are among the reasons you have enrolled your child at Steppingstone.

It is also difficult to justify grade promotions when a student has missed more than two weeks of school (i.e., 10 instructional days in total). Related to the issue of promotion, a doctor's note is

also required to accompany your child's return if s/he will be absent due to illness for more than three days.

However, a sick child has difficulty grasping concepts, requires special attention (which takes staff away from teaching others), sometimes creates disturbances, and often spreads infection to other children and staff. In these cases, your child should be kept at home. Children need to be vomit and fever free for 24 hours before returning to school.

Please call if your child will be absent for any reason, but especially if s/he is ill. We must report communicable diseases to the Wayne County Health Department, and this is another reason we require a doctor's note regarding the nature of the illness. Your support in this matter will be greatly appreciated.

Special events are part of the regular curriculum and contain specific learning experiences for your child, who is expected to be on time and present. Make every effort to help your child attend Special Events. Students who do not attend Special Events may be given an alternative assignment at the teacher's discretion. If your child cannot attend due to other important family obligations or emergencies, please let us know immediately so that we can rearrange our preparations and outlines and so that your child's absence does not create stress for other students.

This is particularly important for performing arts events, which typically are held in December and May. For these events, we ask that parents check calendars and let the staff know in October and February (when roles are assigned) if the student cannot attend. Please expect students to be given an independent study assignment to do while others are in rehearsals. In addition, keep in mind that it can be very stressful to other students to have to perform with last minute changes and/or additional responsibilities that they have had to assume because a classmate is unexpectedly absent. On the other hand, sometimes absences are not predictable (e.g., due to illness), and in these cases, the staff and students would just appreciate being informed as promptly as possible.

CARPOOLS

The Michigan child passenger safety law covers children up through age 15. Children from birth through age 8 must be in a child safety seat or booster seat, unless 4'9" tall. Children who are 8 years old but less than sixteen years old must use a safety belt in all seating positions.

Carpools are neither encouraged nor discouraged by Steppingstone. Each parent should decide for him/herself whether or not a carpool with any other parent or adult would be appropriate, and Steppingstone cannot take responsibility for any difficulty or accident that might arise from these parental decisions and/or arrangements.

Steppingstone does advise, however, that it is wise for drivers to establish mutually consistent, very clear structures, guidelines, and consequences for inappropriate or unsafe behavior. Structures might include:

- Driver-assigned seats – students who have difficulty controlling their behavior appreciate sitting next to the driver or alone (small/young children should not sit in the front passenger seat)
- Clarification of acceptable behavior
 - o Always use seatbelts
 - o Keep hands, feet, and other body parts to yourself

- o Use quiet voices
 - o Discuss appropriate subjects – define if necessary
- Consequences for misbehavior should be prearranged with parents of passengers

Remember that if children are stressed before walking into the school, they begin the day handicapped. The ride needs to be structured so that it can be pleasant.

Also, please send a note, fax, or email to the school as well as to the other driver/s whenever the following applies to your child:

- Must arrive late or leave early from the event
- Is ill and/or will be absent and unable to attend school
- Will ride with someone else or will have alternate driving arrangements for any reason whatsoever will require a written note, fax, or email

Of course, always be sure children are in the building or in their homes with an adult before leaving them.

COMMUNICATION

If you have a question, please do not hesitate to ask. It is unnecessary to suffer any confusion, anxiety, or frustration. If something seems illogical, unreasonable, or inappropriate, please ask us about it. There may be a simple explanation or a miscommunication at the root of the issue.

Alternatively, if we have made an error, caused confusion, or missed an important perspective in our decision-making, we want to correct the situation. We depend on your communication to make that possible. We cannot solve problems if we do not know they exist.

We prefer that you communicate directly and immediately so we can address issues promptly.

CONFERENCES AND ORIENTATION

The Parent Orientation and the twice-yearly parent-teacher conferences are very important. The parent conferences are particularly important because grades and traditional report cards inadequately measure your child's progress and are not issued. These conferences keep parents informed and aware of student educational and developmental progress. It is also your opportunity to share insights and/or suggestions with your child's teachers.

In addition, your child is excited and motivated when you show your interest in the products of his/her hard work. We ask that at least one parent attend and would like to remind both parents that your presence and interest is very much appreciated by your child as well as the staff.

We publish conference dates before school starts so parents may plan around them. Out of consideration for working parents, we also have some evening appointments. Parents are asked to be considerate of teachers as well and arrange your calendars so that you can attend on the dates scheduled. If you miss a conference, make-up dates will be scheduled for 7:00 a.m. the following week.

Emergency conferences, on the other hand, are willingly scheduled for the teacher's first available moment. We also urge parents to contact teachers or the Head of School through the school's office about any questions or concerns immediately – do not wait! We cannot clarify

events or philosophies or initiate changes if we are unaware of your questions or concerns. (see: COMMUNICATION and MUTUAL SUPPORT)

We also caution parents (as we caution staff) to use discretion and refrain from discussing concerns within hearing of your children. Parents' discomforts and conflicts are extremely stressful to children unless the student is acknowledged, present, and participating in constructive and objective discussions of difficulties that involve them. Overhearing concerns usually results in the child experiencing exclusion and stress rather than support and nurturing.

Conference format: There are no written report cards issued during the school year. However, teachers maintain a record of the students' work. At the fall conference, teachers will share samples of all the students' work and review teaching materials, philosophies, goals, student skills, progress, and expectations for the remainder of the school year. In the spring, teachers will review IOWA test results (where applicable), a Personal Development Checklist, and review specific accomplishments and/or needs.

**Thanks in advance for turning cell phone ringers OFF
during conferences and all other school events.**

DISCIPLINE

Discipline policies are designed to help students accept educational, personal, and social responsibilities. Our aim is not just to halt the inappropriate behavior of the moment, but to help the child understand the consequences of his/her behavior and to establish methods of developing appropriate behavior in the future.

Teachers, staff, and parents are urged to:

1. Help the child to clearly state expectations and identify appropriate behavior for self as well as others.
2. Provide consistently enforced logical and natural consequences for any inappropriate behavior.
3. Help the child develop techniques for appropriate behavior and appropriately assertive methods of resolving issues.

In order to accomplish our purposes, the instructor may employ a number of means that require the child's recognition of responsibility ranging from verbal redirection to doing some "thinking" at the office. The office is not regarded as a place for punishment, but rather a place to problem-solve and resolve issues.

For example, a student who is talking so loudly that s/he becomes a disruption to the class may control and lower his/her voice when asked; another may correct him/herself if taken aside by the teacher for a few moments; a third may need to spend some time in the office "thinking." Consequences depend to some degree on the frequency of the inappropriate behavior as well as the student's response to the redirection.

The office will be presented as a place to think about appropriate behavior as well as a place to develop methods of achieving it. The office will not be presented as a punishment or as a place to make children feel badly about themselves. New students may need to have this idea reinforced by parents and/or staff in order to counteract anxiety if this was not the philosophy in previous schools.

In all cases, teachers and other staff are urged to intervene early to prevent inappropriate behavior in the first place and to conference with parents within a week of any prolonged resistance or inability to respond to redirection. This policy was developed over many years of observation, experience, research, and consultation with psychologists. It is based on our experiences that:

- If a student cannot be easily redirected in class or repeatedly behaves in an inappropriate manner, s/he will not be able to reflect in-depth on his/her behavior until s/he has been separated from the distractions of the class.
- Long discussions in class are usually ineffective. They can result in student defensiveness, peer pressure, power struggles, and denial of responsibility. This prevents students from personally accepting responsibility for inappropriate behavior and consequently does not result in long-term behavioral changes, but in recurrences instead. This also engenders teacher frustration and authoritarian methods (e.g., shouting, ordering, threatening) which provide only very short-term compliance. Therefore, it does little to prevent recurrence and usually is accompanied by a lowering of the student's self-esteem.
- Since the teacher needs to maintain the educational progress of the rest of the class, when a detailed and logical discussion is needed by the gifted child, these ends can best be accomplished privately by a third party in the office. In order for time spent thinking at the office to be productive time, students are always directed to search for answers to the following self-directed questions:
 - o Why was I asked to go to the office?
 - o How will I prevent the recurrence of this behavior?
- The answer to the second question should contain a concrete action and should not be a statement like, "I won't do it anymore." An acceptable preventive answer might be, "I will ask Henry to stop teasing me once, and if he doesn't stop, I will ask the teacher for help instead of hitting him."

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

In the event a student would require First Aid or Emergency treatment, the staff will call 911 or transport the student to the nearest Emergency Care Center.

EVENTS

While school events may sometimes seem like "no big deal," be assured that they are a *very big deal* to your child. Children look forward to them with anticipation, sometimes a little apprehension (e.g., the Science Fair), pleasure (yes, even the Science Fair), and a sense of accomplishment at the end (especially the Science Fair). The social experiences at these events are of inestimable value to personal development and cannot be duplicated in class or on play dates; so please schedule work, vacations, and other obligations for other times. Check the school calendar, record them on your family calendars and personal planners, and commit to attend.

- WELCOME BACK POTLUCK provides an important opportunity to develop closer relationships with classmates, parents, and school staff. It follows our FIELD DAY that includes field events, hiking, biking, and horseback riding. This potluck is especially important for meeting new parents and students and is an important social event. Alumni are always welcome to attend this event (as well as the Year-End Potluck), and we urge all families to attend since these are valuable opportunities for getting to know each other. Details will be included in the newsletter.

- SPIRIT DAYS are held each month (check calendar for dates), and participants are encouraged to wear gold and black. Family members and/or special friends may arrive at 12:30 p.m. to have lunch in the classrooms with students. At 1:00 p.m., special recognition will be given (e.g., In the Spotlight, Writer of the Month, Computer Programming, High Steppers [see: HONORS OR SPECIAL RECOGNITION], and Artist of the Month) and other honors or awards will be recognized. Occasionally, other activities may be shared with visitors (e.g., performances, workshops, celebrations).
- LITERARY CHARACTER DAY is held at the end of October. Students dress to depict one of the characters in their Power Reading novel, which covers a specific genre each month (see separate calendar in folder pocket). Students are allowed to ask questions which have “yes” or “no” answers in an attempt to gather enough information to guess the character. The afternoon is usually reserved for a P.E. field trip (e.g. bowling).
- SOCIAL STUDIES EXPO is an opportunity for students to learn how to research and write a paper using a particular aspect of social studies as his/her topic. They also prepare a hands-on project, presentation board, and a short oral presentation of what they learned. In addition, this event is an opportunity for us to celebrate the cultural diversity within our student body with stations for ethnic foods and artifacts. It is an opportunity for parents to respond supportively to long-term research efforts.
- WINTERFEST is typically a performance event that is structured around a variety show. All students participate with their classmates for some portions of the program. Other individual participation is voluntary, and these students should initiate practice, a proposed entry piece at home, experience an audition and selection process, and rehearse at school. Variety Show Proposal forms are sent home sometime after Halloween in the student's planner.
- STUDENT PRE-AUCTION PARTY is a morning for students to get a preview of the items that will be available at the adults' benefit auction. This is also an opportunity for students to play games, have some party food, apply estimation skills, and spend their earned pre-auction dollars at their own auction.
- ROUGE RIVER TESTING involves hands-on, on-site measurement of water quality by students and the entering of our data into a collective database. We are one of many schools throughout the state of Michigan that participates in this volunteer environmental protection project. It is our primary community service.
- SCIENCE FAIR is an opportunity for students to research a topic and design an experiment using the scientific method of investigation. Display boards are used for short presentations at which time students will present their methods, results, and conclusions to an audience.
- FINE ARTS FAIR showcases the students' visual art portfolios and is a collaborative and musically-based performance opportunity. It draws together all that they have learned in individual skill areas as well as the opportunity to integrate those skills.

- YEAR-END POTLUCK is followed by SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS AND AWARDS CEREMONY and GRADUATION of our 8th grade students. This last day of school is especially important for providing positive closure to the school year. The Special Recognitions and Awards and Graduation at the end of the evening give us time to acknowledge all the positive accomplishments of the students and parents as well as those of the faculty. Each staff member makes every attempt to attend this event, and it is hoped that parents will make this a priority as well. Greater details become available as the event approaches and/or upon request.

EXPULSION

Students are rarely dismissed or expelled without the full cooperation and mutual understanding of the parents. Every attempt is made to identify accurately the academic, behavioral, social, emotional, physical, and/or physiological limitations of students and to inform parents appropriately. The parents' perspectives and expertise are sought and included in the process of evaluating their student's needs, implementing changes, supplementing instruction, and/or changing schools.

However, a student must be dropped from enrollment when any payment has lapsed more than 30 days unless other mutually agreeable arrangements have been made. This policy was considered out of fairness to students on waiting lists and staff and creditors who ought to be paid regularly as well as to families who regularly meet their financial obligations.

Whenever a school change is necessary, the staff will work with parents to provide positive closure and transition in a manner that will be most considerate and supportive of the student's self-esteem regardless of the reasons for the decision.

EXTENDED DAY PROGRAMS

Extended Morning and Afternoon Programs are offered by pre-arrangement. Hours are 8:00 – 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. Details are in the Registration Packet. **Reminder: Early Arrival starts at 8:00 a.m. Do not drop your children off before that time. Late Departure ends at 5:00 p.m. A late fee of \$2.00/min will be assessed after this time.**

Pick up for After School and Special Programs is when the class ends. Students whose parents are not present at the end of class will be placed in Extended Day and charged accordingly. There is no 15-minute grace period out of respect for the teacher's time.

FIELD TRIPS

The Michigan child passenger safety law covers children up through age 15 (see Carpools). Children from birth to age 8 must be in a child safety seat or booster seat, unless 4'9" tall. Children who are 8 years old but less than sixteen years old must use a safety belt in all seating positions. Helmets are required for biking, ice-skating, and horseback riding.

Students will not be allowed to attend field trips if they have not completed all assignments and homework in time for their teacher to check it before his/her teacher needs to begin field trip duties. Students who still have work to complete or correct at that time will remain at school to complete their responsibilities and may Power Read when finished. Please bring planners and completed homework to all off-site events.

Parent drivers and chaperones are present to help supervise – not to socialize. Please follow all teacher directions and schedules, intervene with children as necessary, and do not buy food or gifts for children. Children with food allergies are at risk for anaphylactic shock, which is a life-threatening situation.

FOOD

Children should get enough sleep that they awaken easily in time to eat a well-balanced, protein-rich breakfast. It is very difficult for children to be attentive and grasp instruction easily when hungry. Please help your child maximize learning and make sure that s/he eats a nutritious breakfast.

- **SNACKS:** The mid-morning/afternoon snacks may be **FRESH** fruits or vegetables first, followed by a protein choice. Also include an extra snack(s) (e.g., granola bar, fruit, extra sandwich) if your child participates in an Extended Morning or Afternoon Program.
- **BEVERAGES:** Plain bottled water (please provide a spill-proof container) and milk are the preferred beverages. Carbonated beverages and juices are not allowed.
- **LUNCHESES:** Children should pack lunches daily.

For housekeeping reasons, we request that liquid yogurt or yogurt in tubes not be included in lunches. Faculty members prefer not to spend their time cleaning floors and children when these items are spilled or squirted.

**Do not send candy - if it looks like candy or tastes like candy,
please do not include it in lunches or snacks.**

We will send uneaten lunch food home so that you can better evaluate the appropriate quantities and types of foods to pack for your child. If you have a young adolescent, please pack much more food than you would normally eat yourself.

Parents, please review the following policy with your children: **We ask that children not share lunches or exchange food.** This policy helps discourage the sharing of illnesses, especially during the flu season. It also discourages the exchange of unbalanced meals for balanced ones (e.g., trading fruit for cookies). Most importantly, it makes it much less likely that children with severe food allergies will need to visit the emergency room for treatment of anaphylactic shock.

Food allergies sometimes result in our asking that specific items not be included in any child's lunch (e.g., peanut butter). This differs from year to year, and you should check your newsletters for notices.

Food should not be provided by drivers or chaperones on field trips because of food allergies.

Special treats for birthdays and other special events and refreshments for parent-student events: We reiterate, please do not send candy. We would also appreciate the avoidance of artificial food coloring, especially FD & C yellow #5 (e.g., in Kool-Aid, cupcake icing, Jell-O, drinks) and excessive sugar in any item since many of our children are noticeably activated by its consumption. Thanks!

Some suggestions are:	Fruit or vegetable platters	Cheeses or dips
	Crackers or breads	Chips
	Limited sweet pastries	Ethnic foods

When sending birthday treats, please make them simple to serve so that the student can distribute them to him/herself. Please avoid items (e.g., ice cream) that need to be sliced or scooped, or are messy if dropped.

If your child has food allergies, you should maintain a “special treats” container from which your child can select a substitute when children bring birthday or special occasion treats to share with classmates at school.

HOMEWORK

When your child has been absent, you may ask for assignment sheets to be emailed between 9:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. if you have all the work materials (e.g., texts, spirals, folders, etc.) at home. If you do not have all the work materials, the teacher will need to collect them, and they can be ready for pick up between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m. Please call to let us know what time you will pick up within the above parameters.

Please note that everyone will have at least one At-Home assignment each day. In the younger classrooms, they are intended to stimulate learning for the sake of learning alone and would demonstrate one or more of the following characteristics:

- Hands-on (i.e., books and/or reference resources are not necessary)
- At home and not necessary to go anywhere (e.g., to library)
- Stand-alone (i.e., not dependent on any other knowledge or information)

Other At-Home assignments might include preparation of Social Studies Expo presentation boards, practice of a Fine Arts Fair role, practice work to enhance development in areas of special, individual need, and/or any task that could benefit from parental assistance. These assignments are minimal in the younger classrooms.

Older students may have more extensive homework, which consists of any assignments not completed from the planner sheet.

In general the expected homework times are:

- 5 to 15 minutes Young K through Grade 1
- 15 to 30 minutes Grades 2 and 3
- 1/2 to 1 hour Grades 4 and 5
- 1 to 2 hours Grades 6 through 8

Please note – students who seem to have excessive amounts of homework should be brought to the attention of the teacher so s/he can assess the cause. Some of these may include not managing time, not listening to instructions, not asking questions when instructions are unclear, socializing instead of working, being too tired by the end of the day to focus, etc. Parents – please do not wait to communicate a concern; teachers cannot address an issue if you do not inform us.

Unless otherwise instructed, all incomplete classroom assignments should be completed at home and are due at 9:00 a.m. the following morning. Students may not enter the classroom until all assignments have been completed but may create a study hall to finish them. **Students will be called back to class for any new instruction and will not miss lessons necessary for advancement.**

If homework has been completed but left at home, the student will have to complete it before s/he can enter the classroom. Usually, even the most conscientious and responsible student will have to do this at least once during his/her educational period with us. Generally, this means s/he repeats the work outside of his/her immediate classroom, sometimes at the office. Our purpose is to promote in each student (not the parent) the following:

- Being responsible for doing his/her homework and for bringing it to school.
- Being well-prepared for class.
- Experiencing the consequences of either forgetting to do or forgetting to bring to school the assigned homework.

Parents can assist with these tasks by:

- Providing a regular time and an undisturbed environment to do the homework after a short break (e.g., half an hour) upon returning home.
- Not allowing audio-visual entertainment (i.e., TV, radio, stereo, CD, computer, video games), phone calls, recreation, book reading for entertainment, or social activities until homework is completed.
- Not being overly helpful or doing the homework. If the student truly does not remember the teacher's instructions, s/he needs an extra presentation from the teacher, a different style of instruction, more concentration on the initial explanations, or more questions to be asked at the time of instruction. If parents provide too much instructional assistance, the teacher will think the student's instructional needs were met. The child should be asked to call the teacher immediately. **Please note: Calls to the teacher regarding class work or homework should be made prior to 7:30 p.m. and only by the student (discussions can be on speakerphone so that parents can hear).** If you have a concern that requires addressing, please call the office and schedule a conference.
- Providing totes (for supplies, lunches, homework, etc.) and helping students to pack it routinely in the evening as soon as assignments are completed so that it becomes a ritual. Ultimately, the student needs to be responsible for remembering his/her own homework and supplies and to realize that coming to class unprepared results in a loss of valuable time to complete assignments. In general, students will not be allowed to inconvenience parents by calling for a delivery of an item s/he has forgotten. It is our policy to allow phone calls only for emergencies (see: PHONE USE) and instead help the student find an in-school solution for him/herself.
- Having the child stop and go to bed at his/her regular bedtime regardless of whether or not s/he has finished the homework. If the child does not sleep an adequate number of hours, s/he will be cranky and/or non-functional the next day and may fall even farther behind. If s/he does not finish at home, arrangements will be provided when s/he arrives for him/her to finish the assignments. Please do not keep your child at home to finish, as this causes them to miss crucial instruction & may compound the problem.
- Signing the planners, checking for communication from the teacher, and initialing each item of completed homework after you have checked it for completeness. All students are provided a planner containing a computerized printout of each day's assignments, guidelines for use, and an agreement for accountability. This is a communications tool for parents and teachers to work together as a team.

Help your child develop routines concerning homework assignments. In order to obtain maximum benefit from our program (especially at the upper levels), it is important that routines be developed so that homework is completed by the normal bedtime, preferably, and certainly by the time the child walks through the Steppingstone doors. If you have an ADD/ADHD

student, you should help him/her until using a written checklist becomes habitual. A suggestion is to post the checklist above the spot where the tote bag or backpack is kept and that this can be a single, consistent location. The planner and assignment sheet should also be used to make sure that all items have been packed. It is often helpful to pack in the evening so things are not forgotten in the morning rush. If necessary, put the bag in the car as soon as it is packed so nobody removes items before the morning departure.

If your student comes to school without homework assignments completed, s/he will not be able to attend field trips so you may want to be very alert to these calendar events. S/he may have the opportunity to complete the assignments prior to the field trip, but if there is insufficient time to do this before the scheduled departure time, s/he will have to remain at school to complete this responsibility. It is sometimes a hard lesson to learn, but once a student is held accountable in this way, the oversight is unlikely to recur. Your support is greatly appreciated and is very important to the development of responsibility, so please do not keep your child at home if you know s/he has not finished his work. Let it be his/her responsibility at this point, and let it be his/her consequence to experience at school. Finally, do not worry; it is the school's philosophy to have empathy for the student and to help him/her to meet these expectations.

Schoolwork for non-school-scheduled vacation time is expected to be complete upon her/his return. Please call three to five days in advance so that the classroom teacher can have the student's assignments prepared. Requests made one day prior cannot be guaranteed since the teacher will be busy teaching. Despite these precautions, there may be changes that occur to the Planner sheet while you are on vacation. For these reasons, it is best to plan vacations for scheduled school breaks.

HONORS OR SPECIAL RECOGNITION

1. High Stepper – This is an award for students who have no tardies, early departures, or unexcused absences, have all assignments completed, and are in their seats, ready to work at 9:00 a.m. for four sequential weeks. (if a student arrives late to school because of a traffic jam, unexpectedly icy roads, trains, or some other issue outside of their control, s/he would not be considered late for the purpose of the High Stepper award).
2. In the Spotlight (criteria for selection) – This recognition is given to a student who has achieved an exceptional and memorable accomplishment such as being an exceptional role model for other students, mastering a difficult skill after persistent and unusual effort, or demonstrating outstanding talent in music, art, or athletics.
3. Writer of the Month – selected by faculty and staff
4. Artist of the Month – selected by art instructor
5. Programmer of the Month – selected by computer programming instructor

ILLNESS

If your child is sick, please keep him/her at home until s/he is feeling better. Please, do not medicate your child and send him/her to school, and do not send your child to school with a request for the teacher to call if s/he is not feeling well. Following these guidelines will help prevent the spread of colds and other illnesses to the rest of the school's population (including our teachers).

If your child has a fever or has clear physical symptoms of illness (e.g., vomiting or continuous, deep coughing) at school, you will be called and asked to come and pick up your child as soon as possible. Please do not send the child back to school until he or she has not vomited or had a fever for 24 hours. This needs to occur when the child is well enough to reach this state without the aid of medications.

Homework for children who are sick can be picked up after school. If the child is well enough to do homework, please call the office to alert your child's classroom teacher to have it prepared for you by 4:30 p.m.

Sick Days: Students have as many days as they were ill to make up work but not beyond the weekend immediately following the return to school. Examples: If a student misses three days for the flu, s/he will have three days to complete the missed assignments, or until the Monday following the next immediate weekend. If a student were to miss Monday through Wednesday – three days – s/he would have until the following Monday, since the make-up time spans a weekend. If your child is ill through the weekend, s/he will have as many school days missed to complete assignments if a doctor's note is provided.

If your child is too ill to attend school, please do not worry about the homework; we would prefer you spend your time helping your child to get well. (see: HOMEWORK)

If your child has special needs, such as the need to stay indoors during recess during the very cold winter weather because s/he is just recovering from a serious respiratory illness, please provide a document from his/her pediatrician stating the cause and duration of the special need. Your understanding and handling of this will be greatly appreciated.

LIBRARY VISITS

Please help your child be a successful student and schedule **REGULAR LIBRARY TRIPS** – once a week. Allowing your children to select their own Power Reading books after reading the first few pages and/or looking at the illustrations in a variety of books will give them 1) the opportunity to acquire new information while browsing and exploring, 2) practice in using library resources, and 3) the personal enjoyment of sharing the moment with you. These are prime motivating factors for learning. Please label the books with your child's name prior to sending them to school – blue painter's tape works well and does not leave a residue when you pull it off. This will help your child keep track of his/her books at school.

Parents, your participation in your child's education in this way also saves you the tuition increase that would result if we duplicated this very expensive resource, which your tax dollar already provides. (see: POWER READING)

LIFE AFTER STEPPINGSTONE

At spring conferences, parents of seventh grade students should discuss their child's educational needs for the ninth grade. If this was not discussed at that time, parents of graduating eighth grade students should request a special conference in September or early October to discuss potential schools for their child's needs. Applications for admissions to private high schools should be made in the fall since the admissions processes often require testing prior to acceptance, and scholarships and financial aid are often awarded in January or February.

Parents are reminded to consider the prior section of this handbook (see: p.5, STAFF AND SCHOOL SELECTION) when researching and selecting the appropriate high school for their child.

MUTUAL SUPPORT

Read and understand the issues discussed in this handbook. If you question any of them, please discuss them with us. If there has been an error or an important perspective to be considered, we will address the issue with you.

You are encouraged not to make comments in the presence of your child that s/he might interpret as being conflictual in nature since this would stress him/her. Support the school in its educational decisions regarding your child, and we will do the same for your parental decisions regarding your child. If there is a question regarding our decisions, please ask us in private and not in front of your child. We will extend the same courtesy if we have questions about your parental decisions.

In either situation, there may be a simple answer that had not been considered. In any case, your child's best interests would not be served by what your child may interpret as conflict between us.

NEWSLETTERS

Look for our weekly newsletter in your email or on our website. It often contains valuable information about curriculum and school activities (i.e., news, additions, changes, reminders). It is suggested that you file the academic calendar and all other school communications for easy reference throughout the school year in this folder.

PARTY INVITATIONS

If all the classmates of a student are being invited to a party, the invitations may be distributed at dismissal by a teacher. If not, we ask that invitations be labeled with the students' names who are being invited, stamped, and marked with return addresses. The office will then attach mailing labels and mail the invitations. This will help avoid the public omission of uninvited students.

PAY BILLS ON TIME

Help us spend money on educating your child and not on bookkeeping, accounting, and collection of late payments. In extreme cases, the consequence for non-payment of invoices includes expulsion (see: EXPULSION).

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXCELLENCE

As a school, we are dedicated to personal development and appropriate excellence. Students will participate in self-assessment exercises throughout the year. Please praise your child's successes, but do not overdo it. They know when they have done something commendable and are confused when you over-praise mediocrity. Celebrate outstanding achievements, but do not engage in reward systems. Students need to work for the joy and satisfaction of learning and of

excellence in performance. If they work only for a reward, they will stop working when they become bored with the reward – which often happens within weeks.

PHONE USE

Students may use the office phone only for emergencies. In our school, an emergency is something that cannot wait until after school or until tomorrow (e.g., illness). Forgotten lunches and/or homework do not constitute an emergency. Student cell phones are not allowed.

PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

We have a no tolerance policy towards physical aggression which is approached as described under DISCIPLINE; it would also include one or both of the following consequences:

1. An in-school suspension for the remainder of the school day.
2. An at-home suspension for the following day; additional days may be added if a student should repeat the behavior.

It is felt that it is very important to draw a firm line prohibiting physical aggression and/or violence in any form. Students who have behaved with physical aggression and/or violence are immediately suspended in school for the remainder of the day. This means that they are not permitted to return to the classroom. Parents will be contacted and appropriate follow-through at home will be discussed.

Depending on the circumstances, the student may also be suspended at home for an additional day or more. Upon return to school, the student will need to discuss with the Head of School the reasons for the suspension as well as more appropriate alternatives to physical violence and/or aggression. It is felt that strong and immediate consequences are necessary for the safety and well-being of all students and staff.

The trustees, faculty, and staff agree that there must be no question about the inappropriateness of this type of behavior at Steppingstone. The message is most clear when parents assist and support this school policy by reinforcing the need for thought and alternatives. No other activity or entertainment would be advisable during the at-home suspension, and parents would be asked to discuss the following with their child at the end of the suspension period:

1. What behavior resulted in your being asked to stay home for a day?
2. What did you need to think about for this day of suspension?
3. What might be a more appropriate way to handle a situation like the one that resulted in the day of suspension?

The student may also be asked to write responses to these questions and will be asked to have a similar discussion with the Head of School before returning to class.

POWER READING

A silent sustained reading period is scheduled each day after lunch. Students must read at least one book from the genre of the month, after which, they may read a novel of their choice. A short book report will be written for the first Power Reading book completed each month within the genre specified. Students who do not have a book to read at school each day will be assigned a book as well as an additional book report.

Each child should maintain a supply of Power Reading books at school at all times so that the time spent each day for Power Reading is productive (see: LIBRARY VISITS). Novels should be quality literature and age-appropriate. Picture books are appropriate for non-readers and early readers. Adolescent romance and excessively violent texts are not appropriate for the school environment. Also excluded are “choose your own ending,” informational, adaptations, and cartoon/graphic novels. Approval of any book is at the teacher’s discretion.

It is strongly recommended that students visit their public libraries to sample the books within any given genre.

PROMOTING READING AT HOME

Reading at home needs to be fun. We offer the following guidelines for different levels of readers to promote this goal:

- NON-READERS can benefit from having parents read aloud to the child for 10 to 15 minutes each evening at a regular time (e.g., bedtime – before lights are out). Simple books with phonetic words should be followed with the finger so children can begin to associate the printed word with the spoken word. Do not make this a lesson unless your child asks for it; let it just be fun.
- BEGINNING READERS can benefit from reading aloud to parents for 10 to 15 minutes each evening at a regular time. The child should point to each word as s/he reads it and/or use a card or ruler to underline a line at a time; sometimes a slotted card is more useful to help focus on a line at a time. During the reading, corrections or assistance should not be given unless the child has requested it for a particular word, in which case the parent should speak the word immediately. Otherwise, let the child read whatever he wants even if it is wrong. This needs to be a pleasure, not a chore.
- FLUENT READERS may benefit from discussion of plots, characters, interpretations, etc. with a parent. Do ask questions and offer points of view but do not criticize answers or argue. Children need to have their opinions respected.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES

In general, the school provides texts and school supplies; students do bring in art supplies and TENNIS SHOES WITH TREADS (not court shoes) and CUSHIONING since the kids run laps, as well as “indoor” shoes that are only for indoor use.

Faculty cannot take responsibility for special, one-of-a-kind items that are lost so they should be left at home.

Calculators, eReaders, watches, cell phones, iPods/iPads, and other electronic items are not allowed in school or at school functions and will be put in storage until the end of the year, when they will be returned.

SLEEP

The following is quoted from material from Better Sleep Council, P.O. Box 13, Washington, D.C. 20044.

“Children need adequate sleep in order to function optimally at school. Research shows that better quality rest is received earlier in the evening that sleep is begun. In

other words, a person will be more rested if s/he sleeps from 8:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. the next morning than if s/he sleeps from 10:00 p.m. till 8:00 a.m. even though s/he receives 10 hours of sleep in either case. Younger children may still need 11 or 12 hours a night; TEENS ACTUALLY NEED MORE SLEEP, not less, and generally still need 10 hours of sleep per night. These young people can be incredibly cranky and argumentative when they have not received adequate sleep.”

Parents, please save your child the stress of having to deal with the consequences of being unable to learn efficiently and behaving in a cranky manner at school. Also, save yourselves and the staff the stress of having to deal with sleep-deprived students by calculating the appropriate bedtime and enforcing it consistently. Do not be distracted by the amount of light outdoors or the fact that you just got home. For instance, if you do the math, children who come to the Extended Morning Program and must get up at 6:00 a.m. need to get to bed by 8:00 p.m. in order to get 10 hours of sleep.

If your child needs to be awakened by prompting in the morning or is taking naps, s/he probably needs more nighttime sleep. S/he might benefit if bedtime could be backed up in 15 minutes per night intervals until adequate rest is assured. Regular sleeping hours also insure better quality rest than the same number of hours slept at irregular intervals. A very late night typically takes two days for recovery so if you are going to let your child stay up late one night a week, it should be on a Friday night.

It is often thought that gifted children need less sleep. However, it has been our experience that it is more likely that gifted children have difficulty stopping their thought processes long enough to go to sleep. They also have a tendency to start thinking again and wake themselves with ideas when they have cycled into a light-sleep stage. These children are helped by:

- Sleep rituals (e.g., bath, brush teeth, and a short story)
- Light exercise in the late afternoons or early evenings to tire the body so it will let the brain rest (e.g., a jog around the block after school)
- A regular 10- to 15-minute time for parents to listen without being interrupted by siblings, phone, etc. (e.g., a 10 minute parent-listening time after lights out)
- Techniques to assist in falling asleep or going back to sleep if awakened so the brain will let the body rest (e.g., rhythmic, deep breathing)

Parents should be aware that the stimulant caffeine is present in chocolate and cola soft drinks as well as in tea and coffee. Children should avoid those items as after-school and/or evening snacks. Parents should also be aware that AD/HD symptoms are very similar to symptoms exhibited by sleep-deprived, gifted children. Help your child achieve adequate sleep before considering medications.

STEPPINGSTONE PARENT ADVOCACY RESOURCE COALITION (SPARC)

MISSION: The mission of the Steppingstone Parent Advocacy Resource Coalition (SPARC) is for parents, administration, faculty, and staff to work together to achieve an optimal educational and developmental experience for Steppingstone students.

GOALS:

- Include all Steppingstone parents, administration, faculty, and staff as members of the SPARC.

- Provide a context for parents, administration, faculty, and staff to work as a team on implementing programs, events, or activities with the best interests of the Steppingstone students in mind.
- Provide avenues for open and flowing communication between parents, administration, faculty, and staff.
- Act as a steering committee for all Steppingstone committees, clubs, informational, and other organized activities.
- Encourage parents to express their perspectives and suggest positive changes under the umbrella of the philosophy and mission of Steppingstone School.
- Promote ongoing parent volunteerism as SPARC officers or through involvement in the planning and implementation of the school's campaigns, fund-raisers, activities, and events.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer opportunities will be mentioned in the weekly newsletters. We hope you will volunteer whenever able. Independent schools depend on your assistance. It is especially important for you to volunteer for field trips. If you save one vacation day each year to participate, it will make a huge difference in how your child values the experience.

It is understood that parents will volunteer as able. For instance, some drive/chaperone field trips, others might prefer to provide refreshments for school events. Parents with full-time careers outside the home may choose to donate cash rather than time; others love working actively on the Annual Benefit Auction. (see: ANNUAL BENEFIT AUCTION)

Parents are not expected to volunteer for everything. Nonetheless, it is hoped that all parents will find some way to give services, in-kind donations, and/or financial support so that faculty, staff, and trustees can continue to develop and maintain educational excellence for your gifted child. You will also have greater confidence in the program by being an active and contributing member of the Steppingstone community. Whatever the option selected (time, items, or cash), your contribution will be greatly appreciated.

Parent Mentors are returning parents who are willing to make occasional phone calls to ask for volunteers (e.g., auction assistance), distribute information of an immediate nature, and to offer to answer questions from other parents, especially those who are new to the school.

Other volunteer opportunities (e.g., for the Annual Benefit Auction or for special classroom projects) will be described in other publications.

Steppingstone is an independent, accredited, state-approved, non-profit 501(c)(3) co-educational elementary day school (K-8) for gifted students and does not discriminate based on race, color, creed, gender/orientation, religion, or national or ethnic origin in the administration of any school policy or program.