

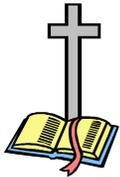


Parent-Student Handbook
Saint Thomas the Apostle Elementary School

129 West Penn Street
Bedford, PA 15522
School Phone: (814) 623-8873
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Website: <http://stthomasbedford.com>

Dear Friends and Families,

Welcome to Saint Thomas the Apostle Elementary School! This handbook is intended to be a helpful resource for all needed policies, procedures, and information.



Philosophy

Saint Thomas the Apostle Elementary School focuses on the educational mission of the Church by providing students with a Christian environment in which God is loved, humanity is served, and community is formed. Parents, faculty, and administration work cooperatively with the diocesan, parish, and local community to develop each student into a respectful, confident, responsible individual in a warm and caring atmosphere.

The academic program contributes to the development of the whole student by meeting his/her physical, social, cultural, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs within each appropriate stage of development. The administration and faculty recognize and respect the uniqueness of each student and provide an environment conducive to varying capabilities and diverse styles of learning. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others."

Code of Conduct

In all areas of learning, discipline is considered part of the whole child growth and learning processes. Our Code of Conduct is based on the Gospel message of Jesus. Growth, love, and respect of all peoples is encouraged by the Code of Conduct. To achieve these ends, parents, faculty, and students work together to create the optimal learning environment. Saint Thomas students, staff, and visitors:

1. will be respectful, honest and courteous
2. will refrain from bullying of any kind
3. will comply with the technology and internet use policy
4. will adhere to the school dress code guidelines
5. will not bring to school nor possess on school grounds any real or toy weapons (i.e. guns, arrows, swords, knives, etc.)
6. will not chew gum on school property
7. will at all times conduct themselves at school and in the community in a manner reflecting the values and principles of the school's teachings
8. will complete all assignments and participate fully in class

The school observes this Code of Conduct because it is built on fundamental Catholic social teachings. The role of the principal/administration, staff, and faculty is to work with the students and parents to assist the students in developing a strong Christian attitude toward life.



Schedule

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Morning Care Begins | 7:00 a.m. |
| Drop Off Begins | 8:00 a.m. |
| Start of School (K-5) | 8:20 a.m. |
| Start of School (PreK3&4) | 8:30 a.m. |
| Lunch (PreK3&4) | 11:20-11:50 a.m. (Recess 11:50 a.m.-12:10 p.m.) |
| Lunch (K- 5) | 11:50 a.m.-12:10 p.m. (Recess 12:10-12:30 p.m.) |
| C. Ridge Bus Dismissal | 2:20 p.m. |
| Dismissal (PreK3&4) | 2:30 p.m. |
| Dismissal (K-5) | 2:40 p.m. |
| After Care Ends | 5:15 p.m. |



Admissions:

K: Saint Thomas School requires that students have reached five years of age before September 1st to enroll in Kindergarten. Each Kindergarten student must present a birth & baptismal certificate, Social Security card, and documentation of the following immunizations: diphtheria, tetanus, type 1, 2, and 4 poliomyelitis, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B and chicken pox.

PreK 3 & 4: Children applying for admission to the PreK program must be three or four years of age respectively before September 1st in order to attend. Any PreK student who is five by the following September 1st may continue on to the Kindergarten program. Children who are not of age but would like to be considered for admission, will be screened and evaluated for readiness by classroom teacher and principal. Admission will be based on screening and class openings. Child will stay in that room for 2 years.

** Readiness testing is required before the start of the school year for PreK3, PreK4, and K. Students transferring from another school will be evaluated for readiness at the time of their admission.*

Attendance



Regular and punctual attendance is expected of all students. In order to receive maximum instructional benefits, students must attend school regularly and arrive on time.

Compulsory attendance as defined in 1326 of the Pennsylvania School Code begins when a student enters school, or at the age of 8 years, until the age of 17. Please note, according to a 2013 Commonwealth Court ruling, any student who is younger than 8 years old and begins schooling will also be held to Pennsylvania Compulsory Attendance. During that time students must attend regularly.

Absences: After an absence, the student must give his/her teacher a written excuse signed by the parent. This excuse must state the date(s) absent and the reason for the absence. If a signed excuse does not come to school within three days, the teacher will notify parents of absence and ask for a written excuse. Failure to submit the excuse within three days will result in the days being deemed illegally absent. After 10 days of excused absences, each additional absence must be accompanied by a doctor's excuse or it will be considered unlawful. After 10 days of absences, which are not excused by a doctor, parents will be advised that all subsequent absences will be considered unlawful. After the third unlawful absence, we are required to file a record with the magistrate.

Absences will be considered legal absences if the excuse is for one of the following reasons:

- Illness
- Death in the Family
- Religious Holiday
- Quarantine
- Impassable Roads
- Suspension
- Educational Field Trips
- Required Court Appearances
- Recovery From Accident

1/2 Day Absences

Students who attend school for only ½ the day need to provide an excuse.

Students who do not arrive to school before 11:30 a.m., will be considered absent ½ day.

Students who leave before 11:30 a.m. and do not return one hour before dismissal time, will be considered absent ½ day.

Educational Trips:

A formal educational opportunity outside the school will be given consideration for an excused status and **should be submitted in writing for approval at least (10) days before departure. The student will be excused for 5 days.** All missed work must be made up within a week upon student's return to school.

Tardiness:

School begins promptly at 8:20 a.m. If a student is tardy, the parent/guardian **must** bring the student to the school office with a written excuse. Without a written excuse, the tardy will be unexcused. If a student is tardy on 5 occasions without an excuse, he/she will be marked absent for ½ day. Students are not considered tardy if their bus is late or if they have a doctors note from appointments upon arrival.

Early Dismissal:

No pupil may leave the school before dismissal time at 2:40 p.m. or be dismissed without the written permission of the parent or guardian. If a child must leave the school grounds during the school day, the parent is to send a written excuse to the teacher. Parents are urged not to schedule doctor or dentist appointments during school hours unless absolutely necessary.

Emergency School Closings:

Whenever it is necessary to close school for an emergency or inclement weather, Saint Thomas School will follow the Bedford Area School District as announced on the local radio and TV stations. Sometimes schools have late openings or early dismissals due to weather conditions. On these occasions we will also follow the Bedford Area School District. ***After Care will not be offered on days with early dismissals.**



Behavior & Discipline

Classroom:

Teachers are encouraged to handle their own discipline as much as possible. When all techniques including counseling, revoking privileges, and conferences have failed, teachers will consult with the principal as to the next course of action. It is to the teacher's advantage to notify parents or guardians of behavior problems as soon as possible.

Detention may be given by a teacher or the principal to students in grades 1-5 who misbehave, hinder others from learning, are disrespectful, engage in bullying, or who fail to do assigned class work or homework. Parents must be given at least twenty-four (24) hours notice of after school detention. Students who are given detention and who travel home on a school bus will be obliged to make other travel arrangements for the day of detention.

Playground:

All incidents involving the playground are handled individually because of the varying degrees of activity and involvement in this setting. Most often, the child will be given a warning or time-out during recess. Certain activities such as hitting, kicking, and fighting will be dealt with more sternly, thus ensuring safety of all students.

Suspension Guidelines:

The length of suspension will be determined by the severity of the behavior and is at the discretion of the principal. Students will be readmitted to school at the end of the suspension period and after a conference between the parents and principal. Suspension may be in-school or out-of school at the discretion of the principal.

The following behavior may warrant suspension:

- Repeated Swearing
- Disrespect for teachers
- Vandalism to school property
- Fighting
- Use of drugs, alcohol, and/or tobacco
- Continued bullying

Expulsion Policy & Guidelines:

The principal and pastor will meet with the child and the parents to attempt to resolve the problem. The counselor will be asked to work with the child and the family. A student may be expelled from Saint Thomas the Apostle School if the pastor and principal are in agreement that all possible attempts to resolve the problem have failed. The family will receive a letter of expulsion and a notation will be placed in the child's permanent record.

The following behavior may warrant expulsion:

- Repeat vandalism
- Bodily injury to another individual
- Disrespect for Catholic and moral values/bullying
- Repeated use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco on school property
- Incompatibility between parents and school policy



Birthday Celebrations:

Birthdays may be celebrated during snack time at Saint Thomas: cupcakes, cookies, drinks, etc. may be brought to school for the student’s special day. We celebrate summer birthdays during the beginning of the school year or at the end.



Building Peacemakers

We believe in Building Peacemakers, hence bullying will not be tolerated during the school day nor during any school sponsored activities on or off the school grounds. Bullying and intimidation are actions that are contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. This behavior is against the fundamental tenet of "Love your neighbor as yourself", and destroys respect for the dignity of the student, undermines the Christian atmosphere of the school, and deprives the student a safe and caring learning environment. Reports and complaints of bullying are taken very seriously and will be documented in every incident.



Busing

Bus transportation to Saint Thomas School can be arranged through your local school district. Please contact your district’s transportation office for more information and to arrange for transportation.

| | |
|----------------|----------|
| Bedford Area | 623-4223 |
| Chestnut Ridge | 839-4195 |
| Everett Area | 652-9114 |

If your child needs a different mode of transportation at any time, you must send in a note in the morning or call the school before 2:00 p.m.



Cafeteria

The School Lunch Program provides nutritious lunches for our students. The children may choose to purchase these meals and/or choice of milk at a minimum price each month. Each child should pack his/her lunch on the days they have not purchased school lunch.



Calendar & Family Folders

The official school calendar is issued at the beginning of the school year and is available on our website. Written communications from the school will be sent home in a monthly family folder. The contents of the folder should be removed and reviewed promptly. The family folder should then be returned to the school with a family signature and any required paperwork completed and included. *Please note: classroom folders are separate from family folders. Information will also be sent to parents via email as announcements arise.*



Care of School Property

Students are to care for school property in a respectful manner. Students who deface or damage school property or the property of others will make financial restitution. If library books are not returned by year end, students will be assessed an amount equal to the value of the book or its replacement, whichever is greater, as determined by the principal/administration.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices

Students are **not** permitted to use cell phones, or any other personally owned electronic devices during school hours (including lunch/recess) except with permission of the principal. If these items are visible or used during school hours, they will be confiscated. Disciplinary action may be taken under the heading of "Unacceptable Behavior".



Classroom Helper Opportunities

We encourage parental involvement as much as you would like and are able in your child's education. Many helper opportunities exist at Saint Thomas School including, but not limited to, lunch/recess monitor, room parents, field trip chaperones, book fair helpers, and more! The Diocese does require a one time, online Youth Protection Program completion before volunteering at our school in addition to the state required Criminal Background Check, Child Abuse History Clearance, and online Mandated Reporting course. Information on completing these clearances may be found on our school website (stthomasbedford.com). You may also call the school office if you need help.

Communication

We believe that respecting each other is essential to maintain a Christian environment and a successful educational experience. Parents/guardians may not always agree with every decision/action made by our faculty, staff, or administrators, but they must always disagree respectfully, whether in public or in private communications. Our verbal and electronic communication will be responsible and productive. We expect parents/guardians to do the same. If communication becomes abusive or harassing, the proper steps will be initiated to discuss the appropriateness of our school for you and your child.



Conferences & Communication

Parent-teacher conferences are held twice a year. Please understand, no report cards will be issued at those times without a conference. The conference purposes are:

- To inform the parents of the student's progress
- To make the parents aware of the student's capacities and abilities
- To discuss ways parent and teachers can work together to help the student
- To help foster a positive relationship between teacher and parents
- To discuss concerns and possibility of retention

Conferences may be requested at any time during the school year by writing the teacher, via email, or by telephoning the school office. Conferences may also be held with the school principal at any time by request via email or telephone. All email messages and telephone calls are to be returned by faculty and staff within 24 hours of receipt during the school week. Parent communications received over the weekend will be answered on the following Monday.



Curriculum

Saint Thomas the Apostle School follows the recommended curriculum of the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese in all subject areas according to the Common Core Standards. Curriculum encompasses the sequentially ordered learning experiences which the school provides for its students. The total curriculum includes the development of Catholic values and attitudes, as well as the attainment of knowledge and skills necessary for the student's spiritual, moral, intellectual, social and physical development. Each subject is taught along a continual series of concepts, skills, or topics.

Religion:

The religious curriculum is of primary importance and permeates the day; it is not only a subject taught but also a way to live. All students participate in a variety of prayer services and liturgies, reach out to others in service, and participate in all aspects of the religion program.

Guidance:

IU8, in conjunction with the Diocesan Education Department, provides guidance services for kindergarten through 5th grade. The guidance counselor comes one day a week.

Exploratory:

PreK3-5th grade students will take exploratory classes including gym, art, library, theatre arts and music to ensure a well-rounded academic and social experience. We also provide weekly STREAM activities for all students.

Special Topics:

Special topics of social concern such as no bullying, drug abuse, and safety lessons are integrated into the curriculum throughout all grade levels. Other extended curriculum opportunities are offered through special programs, projects, and contests during the school year.

Pre K 3& 4:

The prekindergarten program is structured to foster learning through discovery and guided activities. Our program focuses on development in the areas of: art, music, computer awareness, reading and math readiness, psychomotor skills, emotional well being, and social interaction. Your child will have the opportunity to learn about various cultures and languages. Emphasis is also placed on character development. Our programs adhere to the Early Learning Standards and utilize the Handwriting Without Tears and Incredible Years Program.

Foreign Language:

Students have the opportunity to learn Spanish starting in PreK4. Our foreign language curriculum encompasses formalized language education as well as global awareness and diversity exposure.



Dress Code

PreK 3 & 4: Students are to be dressed seasonally appropriate when attending school. We ask that a change of clothes be labeled and stored in the classroom in case of an accident. Closed toed shoes (sneakers are excellent!) are recommended for play and exploration safety. Due to the needs of the children, teachers will not be changing clothes and shoes for recess.

K-5th Grade: The uniform dress code provides a modest standard for our students. Please refer to the Uniform Code in the appendix for specific requirements.



Education School Council

Saint Thomas the Apostle School has an Education Council composed of members selected from the school and parish. The council serves as a consulting body to set up policies for the academic and financial future of the school. Dates for council meetings are the fourth Thursday of every month.



Emergency Forms

Emergency forms are sent home at the start of the school year. These forms should be completed and returned to the school office before the first day of school and/or the child's first day of attendance. It is essential that these forms be updated if student information changes! If there is an emergency, we will act and contact you according to the form information provided.

Evacuation Meeting Area

If the students need to evacuate the building for any reason, our primary evacuation location is the County Commissioners Board Room on the 1st floor of the Bedford County Courthouse. If there is an evacuation and the officials think we will not be able to go back into the building, parents will be notified by email and then phone calls will be made.

It is extremely important that anyone picking up a child follows these rules, no exceptions:

1. The person picking up the child must be listed as an Emergency Pick Up Person on the Emergency Form.
3. Everyone must enter the door to the Courthouse on Penn Street.
4. School staff will be inside the door to direct you. While you sign the child out, a staff member will go to the waiting area and get the child for you.

Our secondary evacuation location is Trinity Lutheran Church (Trinity Hall on the 1st floor).



Family Responsibilities

Parents must be the first to foster a loving and disciplined atmosphere at home. The school provides a setting for training, but can only operate effectively with the cooperation of the family. To achieve this, parents are expected to:

- Provide for the physical, mental, and spiritual development of the child.
- Be supportive toward the school, education, and the church.
- Help the child develop into a positive, productive member of society and the church.
- Know and cooperate with and respect school policies and school personnel.
- Be responsible for any financial obligations incurred by the child in school.
- Follow the guidelines of the Parish Memorandum of Understanding.
- Follow the Fundraising Policy Guidelines.

Fire & Other Drills



According to state regulations, fire drills should be held once a month. It is the policy of the school to abide by this regulation, weather permitting.

Emergency crisis drills will be practiced according to our crisis plan, which includes any danger that may happen in the building, on the block, or in the town. We believe in hoping for the best but planning for the worst to keep all of our students as safe and prepared as possible.



Home & School Association

The Home & School Association is the parent-led organization that is an integral part of the school community by helping to raise funds and organize school functions such as: field trips, family fun nights, and Catholic Schools Week. Families are encouraged to participate, hold leadership roles as officers, and attend the five annual HSA meetings. The HSA is led by four positions: president, vice-president, secretary, and voting member at large. The principal and treasurer attend board meetings and guide in decision making but do not have a vote. Positions are elected to one-year terms.



Keyless Entry

For the safety of the children and staff, all doors that lead into the building will be kept locked at all times. To enter the school, please use the door on the blacktop side of the building. There is a buzzer to the right of the door that will allow staff to unlock the door for your entry. When arriving at school, **ALL VISITORS** must come to the office to obtain a visitor's tag and/or sign in and/or out. Your cooperation ensures the children's safety and will be greatly appreciated in this matter.



Medicine & Health

We need a parent note **and** a doctor note to administer **any** and **all** medications to your child. All children enrolled at Saint Thomas must be up to date on their immunizations. A copy of your child's immunization record is adequate. We cannot provide care for sick children. With your help, we can reduce the illnesses our children pass along to each other by following these guidelines:

PLEASE KEEP YOUR CHILD AT HOME IF HE/SHE

- Has a fever over 99 degrees
- Has been on an antibiotic for **less than 24 hours**
- Has a heavy/yellow nasal discharge, is sneezing and/or coughing frequently
- Has recurring diarrhea or vomiting
- Has signs of contagious childhood ailments, such as pink eye, or chicken pox

We will require you to take your child home, if in our opinion, his/her attendance might endanger the health of other children and staff. The child will be made comfortable in the office until someone arrives.



Morning and After Care

Morning Care:

Our Morning Care program is designed to provide a supervised, safe place for those children who need to arrive early at school. Students pre registered may arrive at 7:00 a.m. and are released into the regular school program at 8:00 a.m. The cost for this program is \$5 per day, per student. Students may eat breakfast items sent in by parents (nothing that has to be heated), read, or participate in light recreational activities. Students need to register for this at least 2 days in advance.

After Care:

Our After Care program is designed to meet each student's needs for afternoon activities and afford families the peace of mind knowing that their child(ren) is/are safe and having fun with his or her school friends in an enriching environment. It is offered from the time students are dismissed until 5:15 p.m. The cost of this program is \$4 per hour, per student if at least 2 days

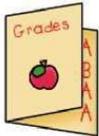
notice is given, and \$6 per hour, per student if less than 2 days notice is given. Students will be provided with snack, time to complete homework, engaging activities, and fun and creative experiences. Families may pick up their child(ren) at any point between regular school day dismissal and 5:15 p.m. They are required to sign their child out and initial the time they picked up using the school clock. There will be a late fee of \$15 per child if picked up after 5:15 p.m.

Photos & Media



Throughout the school year, various forms of media, press releases, photographs, and social media are utilized in the academic process and marketing of the school. The Media Release form is to be filled out and returned before the first day of the school year to allow/prohibit your child's name and image to be used. It will be kept on file for the duration of the school year.

Report Cards



Report Cards

Report Cards and Progress Portfolios are given throughout each school year to monitor and share student growth. Each must be signed and returned to the classroom teacher.

Progress Portfolios will follow our earliest students from PreK3 to PreK4 to Kindergarten.

Report Cards will include grades for subject areas as follows:

| | | |
|---|--------|-------------------------|
| A | 100-93 | Excellent Level Work |
| B | 92-83 | Good Level Work |
| C | 82-73 | Satisfactory Level Work |
| D | 72-65 | Below Level Work |
| F | <64 | Unsatisfactory/Failing |

*Grades for exploratory classes are given as:

O – Outstanding

S – Satisfactory

N - Needs improvement

Retention



In cases where the principal and/or teacher feels a child needs to repeat a grade, the parents will be informed at least two months prior to the end of the school year. A decision will be made after a careful study of the child's work and a conference involving parents, teacher, and principal. The final decision will be made by the principal and teacher keeping in mind all the extenuating circumstances and what seems to be best for the development and welfare of the child.

School Visitors



All visitors to Saint Thomas School must sign in at the school office immediately upon entering school grounds, sign-in, and wear an identification badge while at the school. It is essential for the safety of the students that all school visitors, including parents, regular guests, and volunteers, check in with the school office before proceeding anywhere in the building.

Technology Usage



There is no expectation or right to privacy or right to freedom of speech when using the school's computer/technology resources. Any use of the school's computers and internet access must be in support of education and research and be consistent with the educational objectives of Saint Thomas School. This policy is in place to keep students safe from inappropriate material and subject matter.



Testing

The school's testing program is intended to assist teachers and administration in a systematic evaluation of the academic and religion programs, to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses, and to aid in revision of the curriculum and planning of instruction. Our assessments include DIBELS, IOWA, and screenings before school to aid with placement.



Transfers

A student may be transferred to and from Saint Thomas the Apostle School at the request of the parent. Parents must register their child in another school before records will be released. All transfers should be completed by the end of June so records may be sent to the new school. Any parent who wishes to transfer his/her child into Saint Thomas the Apostle School during the school year should make an appointment with the principal to discuss admittance.



Transportation

Students will not be permitted to leave the school grounds with any person other than a parent/guardian unless permission is provided by calling the school or writing a note. If any child has to alter his/her regular transportation from school, the teacher must be notified, and a written note must be sent for record to the office.



Tuition

The commitment of the Saint Thomas parish is to provide the opportunity for a quality Catholic education. This requires a like commitment from those individuals desiring such an education.

- If a family is having unexpected difficulties in paying their tuition in a timely manner, they should talk with the principal or pastor.
- The church and school offices will send tuition bills once a month.
- Prek3&4 tuition may be paid in the school office.
- Tuition for kindergarten and up should be delivered to the rectory office or placed in the collection plate at Mass
- At the end of the school year, report cards will be held and required action will take place if tuition is not paid.

The parishioners of Saint Thomas Church help to subsidize the cost of educating children from Saint Thomas Church and feeder parishes; any member of those parishes who desires a Catholic education for their children shall receive one. If subsidy is needed, the Saint Thomas parish pastor, with input from the principal, shall determine on an individual basis the amount of the subsidy.

Prekindergarten Tuition & Scheduling: Please understand that you will be billed for the days that you contract for enrollment. If any changes are to be made to the days of attendance in the PreK rooms, we must be notified in writing at least 3 days before the change is to occur.



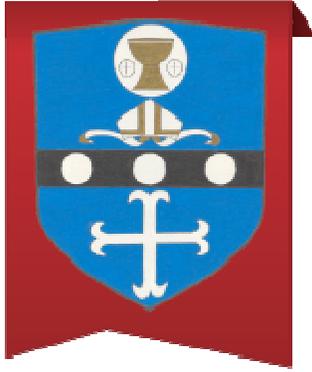
Handbook School, Family, and Student Agreement

We have read, understand, and agree to the school policies, procedures, and details as outlined in the Saint Thomas the Apostle School parent-Student Handbook. We understand that the requirements, due dates, and policies listed are in place to help the school run efficiently and effectively and agree to abide by the payment guidelines. I agree to return my Memorandum of Understanding before the first day of school and will send written changes or updates to my child's records throughout the year or when requested.

Student Name _____

Parent Signature _____

Date _____



Student Use of the Internet in School

The Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown (DAJ) is fortunate to have a connection to the internet to supplement the other educational resources already available to staff and students. Through the Internet, your child will have the entire world at his or her fingertips and be able to explore it.

This wonderful resource brings with it additional responsibility. As internet users, we must be aware of the many issues that surround the internet. There are many valuable resources available on the internet that may not be found elsewhere. There are also many sites that can be considered inappropriate for students and serve no educational value. It is the responsibility of all users, staff and students alike, to ensure that, at all times while in a Diocesan School, the internet is being used only for educational purposes. When using the Internet, students will be supervised by Diocesan school staff. However, due to the nature of the internet and evolving technology, even with supervision, students may get to an inappropriate site. It is the student's responsibility to report any inappropriate site to the teacher and return to the educational topic assigned.

As part of our internet safety policy, schools will educate minors about appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms, and cyberbullying awareness and response. This is required by the Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act.

The following Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) should be read carefully and understood by all internet users. As parents/guardians, you should review it in detail with your children before they begin using the internet in their school. The Acceptable Use Policy was developed to ensure the safety of all users.

The DAJ uses a filtering system designed to prevent access to educationally inappropriate sites. However, it is important to understand that no solution is perfect, and we cannot guarantee that students will not have access to inappropriate sites.

Parents should be aware that DAJ educators can request that a specific site be blocked or un-blocked. Such decisions will be made by those responsible for monitoring the filtering service within the DAJ.

It is important that you and your children understand that any violation of the AUP may result in the loss of internet and e-mail privileges or other disciplinary action. We ask that you work with your children in reinforcing the behaviors associated with the AUP and the attached student contract. Please also note that our filtering system allows us to track and monitor all computer use on the network.