



# HELPFUL GUIDE TO AMERICAN SCHOOLS

The following guide is designed to assist families new to the American School System.

Community Resource Group 2015

In the United States, all children ages 5 to 21 are entitled to a free public education regardless of their immigration status. It is considered a right and a privilege. All children ages 5 to 16 are **legally required** to be enrolled in and attend school. Parents/guardians are considered an important part of a student's education team therefore your involvement in your child's school is extremely important. Each school has its own written policies and procedures (it is referred to as a "handbook" and/or a "code of conduct"). Please ask for this information when you register your child. In addition, it is likely that there is information available on each school's website. Here are some general guidelines:

## **ACADEMICS**

- Each school has specific starting and ending times. Please contact your child's school for this information.
- Students are required to bring certain supplies to school (i.e.: paper, notebooks, pens, pencils). Your child's teacher or school will provide the list of needed items. Putnam Community Action Program (CAP) has a School Supplies Program you can access if you are in need of assistance with purchasing supplies. For more information please call (845) 278-8021. Textbooks will be provided by the school.
- To ensure their academic success, students should always have a good night's sleep.
- Students are expected to complete all homework assignments given by their teachers. Homework accounts for a big percentage of that grade.
- Students will receive report cards 3-4 times a year to show how they are progressing. Some schools send the reports cards home with students, others require parents/guardians to go online to access the information.
- In elementary and middle school, students must be successful in one grade in order to move on to the next. High school students must accumulate 22 credits and pass state exams to graduate.
- If a student is having difficulty passing tests or classes, there are many ways the school can help. Speak with the student's teacher to request extra help, or to request Special Education Services.
- Homework help is available for free at most public town libraries.

## **ATTENDANCE**

- Students are expected to come to school every day. In the United States students that are 16 years old and under are mandated to attend school. If students that are 16 and under do not attend school, the school is obligated to call Child Protective Services.
- Students are expected to arrive on time. The school can provide you with the time that classes begin.
- Try to schedule all doctor and dentist appointments for after school hours.
- If a student is sick you must contact the attendance office in your child's school to advise that he/she will be absent that day. In addition to calling, make sure you send a note with your child when he/she returns to school advising of the day(s) he/she was absent.
- If your child was sick and went to the doctor, please ask the doctor to write a note for the school to excuse the absence.
- When a student is absent he/she still has to complete all missed homework assignments and tests (even if the absence is excused).
- An extended vacation to visit relatives is considered an "unexcused" absence. Repeated unexcused absences can also result in the school contacting Child Protective Services.
- Excessive absences can also prevent your child from graduating on time, or moving up to the next grade.

## **BEHAVIOR**

- Each school has both written and "unwritten" rules.
- Make yourself familiar with your child's school code of conduct. Every building has their own code of conduct and consequences.
- If you are in disagreement with the code of conduct or have questions about it, please contact the principal in your student's school. If you need further assistance please contact the School Social Worker or Psychologist for further information and support.
- Make yourself familiar with the New York State Dignity For All Students Act (DASA). This is a new law that seeks to provide the State's students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property or on school bus and/or at a school function. All bullying should be reported to your child's school.
- Make yourself familiar with your child's school alcohol/drugs policy. In the United States, alcohol and drug use before or during school is prohibited and will result in severe consequences.

- Each school has its own policy regarding cell phone use. Familiarize yourself with the school's policy.
- Please be aware that many schools have police officers and/or security officers in the building daily. They are there to ensure the safety of all staff, students, parents and visitors.

## **COMMUNICATION**

- Parents are expected to be involved in their child's education. Teachers and school officials want and welcome communication from parents/guardians.
- Teachers call home often for both good reasons and because they have specific concerns they want to discuss with you. If you receive a message from your child's school, please return the call.
- Please let school know if there are issues going on outside of school that might be affecting your student, such as: illness, deaths, divorce or immigration issues (please note schools will NOT report any information to Immigration Services)
- Parent/Teacher conferences are generally offered two times a year and it gives you an opportunity to meet with your child's teachers to discuss their progress in school. Contact your child's school to find out the dates for Parent/Teacher conferences. If you do not speak English, you should ask the school for an interpreter or bring an English-speaking friend or family member with you to ensure your understanding.
- Generally most schools have a webpage with teacher's contact information. Check with your student's school to find out more information.
- Every school has generally a Principal, an Assistant Principal and/or a Dean of students. Contact your child's school to find out more information on their administration chain of command.
- If you have any problems with your child and feel that you and/or our child could benefit from speaking with a helping professional, please contact your child's teacher, Assistant Principal or Dean of Students or support staff (Social Workers, Psychologists and Guidance Counselors), or school Principal.
- Some schools mail a calendar of events or give you electronic access to the calendar through each school's website. Please note that sometimes some events need to be rescheduled, and you will be notified of their cancellation and/or the new date via telephone, email or through the school website.
- If a parent/guardian needs to go to the school for any reason, photo identification may be required for entry.

## **DRESS CODE**

- Students are expected to wear appropriate clothing to attend school. Every school has a dress code policy. Familiarize yourself with your school's dress code policy. The dress code is especially important during the months of May and June when boys and girls wear inappropriate clothing due to the warmer weather, and during winter months when students may be going outside for recess.

## **EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (Sports, Clubs & Other Activities)**

- Students are encouraged to become involved in areas of their interest
- Most schools offer extra-curricular activities, especially in the Middle Schools and High Schools. Familiarize yourself with your student's school and after school offerings like sports, music, clubs, after school academic help, etc.
- Most schools offer late bus transportation for students who stay in school for after school activities. Please contact your child's school to inquire about availability.
- To participate in a sport, a physical examination needs to be completed and a specific form must be signed by your child's doctor. Certain high schools may provide these examinations for free. Please speak to the school Nurse about this.

## **HEALTH/HYGIENE**

- Annual medical/dental checkups are encouraged for all students.
- **New York State** mandates routine physical examinations and immunizations at different grade levels or upon entering your school district for the first time. The school will provide you with the specific form that must be completed by your student's doctor.
- The school nurse screens every student for hearing, vision and scoliosis at various times. These screenings are not considered a complete physical exam.
- If your student takes medication regularly please check with your school's nurse regarding the proper administration of medication on school grounds. Students are not allowed to carry their own medication with them. The nurse has to have a doctor's note in order to provide your student with his /her medication.
- If your child becomes sick at school, the nurse will contact you so it is important that you keep the school informed of a phone number where you can be reached.
- You will be asked to fill out an emergency contact form every year. Please be sure the information is accurate, and contact the school if the information changes.
- All students must be properly bathed and groomed, this will help your child avoid social isolation

- Schools may have a specific health/nutrition policy. Familiarize yourself with your school's nutrition policy.

## **HOMEWORK**

- Homework is important at any grade level.
- Establish a good routine for homework completion every day.
- Expect that your child will spend a minimum of 30 minutes on homework every day. Higher grades require more time for homework.
- Always review your child's finished work; however please do not complete it for him/her as this prevents his/her teacher from knowing areas in which he/she may need additional help.
- Homework for middle and high school often requires use of a computer with internet access. The local public library in your town has computers with internet access that can be used for free.

## **SCHOOL MEALS**

- It is important that children eat in healthy way
- Breakfast and Lunch are offered every day in your child's school. There is a fee if your child wishes to purchase breakfast or lunch.
- Your child may qualify for a federal program to receive free or reduced cost lunch. Check with the school's Social Worker for more information and to receive an application for this program. A social security number is not required to be eligible.
- Students are also permitted to bring a packed lunch from home. Schools prefer that you do not send your student to school with candy, soda, high salt items or foods that require refrigeration.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES**

- If you suspect that your child has a learning problem or is in need of extra academic support due to a learning disability or a medical diagnosis, please contact your school's Special Education Department. You can also contact your child's teacher or support staff.

## **SPECIAL SITUATIONS:**

- In addition to teachers, principals and other administrative staff, most schools have personnel who are there to help students be successful.
- Guidance Counselors provide information on course planning and vocational or college choices
- Social Workers are links between students, families and school & community resources.
- Psychologists help identify students' academic strengths and challenges.
- All staff members are trained to work with students and families to identify problems and ways to overcome challenges.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

- Every school provides free transportation to and from school. In some districts if you live closer than a mile away, you may not qualify for transportation to and from school. Check with your child's school regarding transportation policy.
- Every student is assigned a bus stop (a place to wait for or be picked up from the bus). Your child is not allowed to go to another bus stop and board another school bus. All bus stops are assigned after you register your child in school. Ask your transportation department for your child's bus stop.
- You must inform the transportation department if your address or telephone number change. A change in address may result in a change in your child's assigned bus stop.
- If your child attends Elementary School there has to be an adult meeting him/her at the bus stop after school. Ask your school for more information regarding this requirement.
- Please have your child at his/her bus stop on time. The bus will not wait for late students.
- Please pick your child up on time from the bus stop otherwise he/she may be returned to the school if no one is there to meet him/her.
- If your child is experiencing problems on the bus, please contact the Transportation Department.
- If you will be dropping off and/or picking up your child from school, please speak to the school about procedures for doing so. Your child will only be released from school to a parent/guardian or an adult listed as an emergency contact.