



# **Taconic Hills Elementary School Student & Parent Handbook**

*THES: Building a strong foundation for the future.*



## **General Information From A to Z**

### **Absences**

We are using a computerized program to call parents with a prerecorded message telling them that their child is absent. We are required by educational law to notify parents when a student is not in attendance at school and this is our method to meet this requirement. If you contact the school when your son/daughter is absent prior to our programming this service you will not receive the recorded message. If you have any questions please call the elementary office at 325-2820.

### **Academic Intervention Services (AIS)/Response to Intervention (RTI)**

The purpose of AIS/RTI is to build the skills of elementary students in reading and math who have not or are at risk of not meeting the state standards. Beginning in Kindergarten, students are provided additional support services based on teacher, administration and in some cases parental recommendation. State tests also determine students who need AIS services. These exams are considered check points that measure the student's achievement and indicate which students may need additional instructional support on the road to graduation. Exiting the program is likely based on the above criteria; state test results, and teacher recommendation.

Intervention Specialists work closely with the classroom teachers to provide the best program that will meet the student's individual needs. This is done through weekly and monthly meetings.

### **Accident Insurance**

Taconic Hills CSD carries student accident insurance on its students, however, this is not health insurance, rather, it is supplemental coverage. It does not provide basic hospital, basic medical, or major medical insurance as defined by the NYS Insurance Department. For more information, please call 325-0318 or toll free at (877) 350-5393.

### **Assemblies**

Assemblies are held at various times throughout the school year. Assemblies are held for a variety of educational, cultural, and social purposes. Students are expected to be courteous to the performers and guests.

### **Attendance**

Students are required to attend school every day unless they have an excused absence. If a student misses a day(s) of school, he or she is to provide a written explanation from a parent or guardian on the first day back and give it to the teacher. This written explanation should include the date(s) and the reason for the absence. The absence will be considered "unexcused" regardless of the reason, until the student has brought an absence note to school. In addition to absences due to illness, parents may request that their child be excused from school for all or part of the day for some of the following reasons:

- Medical, dental or similar appointments
- Family emergency requiring the student's presence
- Impassable roads
- Death in the immediate family

- Certain religious holidays

*Please Note: Whenever possible, medical and dental appointments should be scheduled when school is not in session. This is to ensure that your child is provided with the maximum amount of instructional time possible.*

Students should **not** be absent from school for the following reasons:

- Family trips or vacations (including relative visits)
- Employment (including babysitting and paper routes)
- Shopping
- Hunting and Fishing trips
- School truancy
- Any activity that provides recreation during the school day that is not school sponsored.

### **Before and After School Activity Program**

The Taconic Hills Before and After School Activity Program offers recreation and entertainment for children in grades K – 6 before and after school. There is a fee charged for participation. For more information and registration materials go to the district website.

### **Behavioral Expectations**

It is vital that our students feel safe while at school so that optimal learning can take place. Because safety is a priority at school we expect certain behaviors from our students while they are in school or being transported to/from school grounds. The behavior expectations for our school include the following:

- Students will come to school with the required supplies
- Students will come to school ready to learn and participate to the best of their ability.
- Students will speak to each other and adults with respect
- Students will follow the individual expectations for each classroom
- Students will keep their hands, feet and other objects to themselves
- Students will request adult assistance if they feel that their safety or another person's safety is at risk
- Students will not bring in any items to school that could cause harm to another person (see Code of Conduct)
- Students will treat the building and all materials in the building with respect and care
- Students are expected to walk in the hallways and on the sidewalks where the buses pull in.

(\*\*The District's Code of Conduct, available on our website, outlines the District's expectations and elaborates in more detail on the above expectations.)

### **Bulletin Boards and Signs**

Posting of materials on bulletin boards throughout the school must be pre-approved by the principal and consistent with BOE policy.

## **Bullying**

Bullying is a violation of the Taconic Hills Central School Core values and will not be tolerated. Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has a hard time defending him or herself. It involves an aggressive behavior that is typically repeated over time and based on an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying is peer abuse. Students and parents should make district staff aware of any situation that may be bullying. For more information concerning bullying please refer to our Code of Conduct.

## **Bussing/Dismissal**

Students are expected to behave properly on the buses specifically upon entering the bus, students should:

- Take their seats promptly and remain seated until they disembark
- Practice safe hands and feet
- Keep the aisle clear of backpacks, lunch boxes, etc.
- Avoid loud, boisterous talk and making noises which might distract the driver and annoy others
- Observe all bus rules and obey the driver's instructions

Parents must provide a note to the school if their child is going to ride a different bus or if their child is to get off the regular bus at a different place. Please include a telephone number on all such notes in the event that the school needs to verify the information. **All changes to your child's dismissal plans must be communicated to the ES office prior to 1:30 pm on that day.**

## **Cafeteria**

Our Food Service Department offers tasty and healthy meals on all school days. Should there be a delay due to weather, breakfast will not be served. The price of breakfast for an elementary student is \$1.60. Lunch is \$2.75 for all students.

Parents have the option of prepaying in a few ways. They can send in a check or cash in an envelope with their child to give to his/her teacher. Please make sure to put your child's first and last name on the envelope and on the check. Parents may also use MySchoolBucks, which is an online payment system that makes it possible for parents to pay with a credit or debit card. Prepayments can cover one day, one week, one month, etc.

Should a student forget their lunch or lunch money, they will not go hungry. A student will still receive the school meal of their choice. Parents will be notified of any meal charges on a weekly basis via email or a phone call, so payment can be sent in. No student will be harassed or singled out for not having lunch money.

Ice cream is sold only on Fridays. Students must have money with them or on their account in order to purchase ice cream. Ala carte items may not be "charged".

Applications for Free and Reduced Priced meals are sent home in the beginning of the school year. They can also be picked up in any one of the offices. If requested, applications may also be mailed home at any time during the school year.

Families that qualify for SNAP or Medicaid will automatically receive free meals. There will be no need for these families to send in an application. Taconic Hills CSD has this information and it is kept confidential at all times.

If you have any questions, please contact Pam Strompf at [518-325-2885](tel:518-325-2885) or [pstrompf@taconichills.k12.ny.us](mailto:pstrompf@taconichills.k12.ny.us).

### **Child Protective Services (CPS)**

Consistent with the District's commitment to keep students safe from harm and the obligation of school officials to report to Child Protective Services when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a student has been abused or maltreated (including neglect), the District will cooperate with local child protective service workers who wish to conduct interviews of students on school property relating to allegations of suspected child abuse and/or neglect or custody investigations.

### **Instructional Team Meetings**

Teachers and other staff meet on an as-needed basis to assist classroom teachers and parents in developing strategies and plans to address a struggling student's academic, social, or behavioral functioning. Teachers and parents may request a meeting for children, however, before doing so, it is expected that the parent and teacher will have previously tried to resolve the student's issues.

### **Classroom Placements**

Near the end of each school year teachers meet as teams to recommend students' placements for the following school year. Our practice is to assign a student to a teacher that will best meet his/her individual learning needs. If a parent has ideas to share and/or concerns regarding their child's placement, they should contact their child's current teacher and put such concerns/recommendation in writing to the principal by the end of April.

### **Cleanliness on School Campus**

Maintaining a clean school is directly related to school pride. Everyone is encouraged to pick up litter anywhere it is found on our campus. Students are responsible to help keep our campus clean and litter free.

### **Closed Campus**

All students are to stay on campus during school hours to ensure that they are properly supervised by District personnel. While school is in session, no student shall be permitted to leave the campus without the permission of a parent or legal guardian. Students are not allowed to leave the campus during lunch periods. Visitors shall only be allowed on school grounds during school hours with the express permission of District Administrators. Students are not permitted to bring visitors to school; however, parents of prospective students may arrange a visit for their child to observe the school in operation.

## **Computer Use**

The school district works hard to ensure that all students have access to computers for educational purposes. All students in grades 3 – 6 will be assigned individual laptops. Both the student and his/her parent/guardian must sign a District Laptop Contract. This contract provides guidelines for proper use and care of the laptop and stipulates that the user is financially responsible in the event that the laptop is damaged or lost.

Students in grade 6 may take their laptops home while students in grades 3 – 5 will utilize their laptops in school only.

## **Early Arrivals**

We recognize that parent schedules do not always coincide with our bus schedules and some parents will choose to drive their children. To avoid unsupervised time at school, early arrivals are discouraged. Elementary School students should not arrive to school prior to 8:00 am. We request that parents notify the school if their personal schedules prohibit their child from riding the bus daily. We thank you for your cooperation in our effort to ensure your child's safety. For a fee, parents may utilize the Before and After School Activity Program to supervise their children before school begins and after school ends.

## **Emergency School Closings**

It may become necessary to close school before the normal dismissal times due to inclement weather or any other emergency situation. Parents are required to complete an Early Student Dismissal form at the beginning of the school year. If any parents have not filled out this form, they should contact the elementary office. It is impossible to call all parents in the event of an emergency closing. Completion of these forms is necessary to ensure all of our children have a safe emergency evacuation plan in place.

If parents have any further questions regarding emergency closings, they should contact the elementary office at 325-2820. If parents have concerns regarding the weather, please refer to our school website, Facebook page and/or tune in to the local TV/radio stations. A complete listing of stations that carry our school's emergency closing information is listed on our website.

## **Mid-Quarter Reports:**

Student progress is also communicated through a mid quarter report. These reports are mailed home about 5-6 weeks into the marking period. They provide important information to the parents that identify strengths and weaknesses that their child is demonstrating with the skills being taught. Every student receives a mid-quarter report for the first marking period. Thereafter, teachers will only send mid-quarter reports home for students whose performance/grades have dropped off significantly.

## **Homework**

Our school recognizes that homework is an important activity that reinforces lessons taught during the school day. It is a means to review and practice skills that they have already worked on.

Homework helps students to develop better work and study habits. It also promotes responsibility and accountability in our students.

Assignments given by the teachers should be considered valuable and important. Projects are included in homework assignments at times. Below is a chart that outlines the approximate amount of time homework should take to be completed at the various grade levels:

Grade 1 – 10 minutes  
Grade 2 – 20 minutes  
Grade 3 – 30 minutes  
Grade 4 – 40 minutes  
Grade 5 – 50 minutes  
Grade 6 – 60 minutes

Parental involvement in a student's homework is important in making homework an integral part of the educational program. Parents should encourage and monitor homework assignments if possible to the point of completion. It is important that students are able to work in a quiet space at home to complete their assignments. Since most homework assignments involve drill and practice of previously taught material, concepts, and skills, students should be able to complete most of the assignment with minimal assistance from the parent. Homework is an excellent way for parents to see what skills are being taught, the expectations of the grade and how their child is managing with the work that is expected.

### **Leaving School Early**

No student may leave school for any reason during the school day unless the student has:

- A permission slip from the principal or school nurse;
- A written request, signed by a parent or guardian, which has been presented at the elementary office at the beginning of the school day.

### **Library/Media Center**

In addition to scheduled library use by classroom teachers, the library is open after school for student use with prior approval of the classroom teacher and the librarian.

### **Looping**

Looping, also known as “teacher-student progression” and “multi-year grouping,” is the practice of teachers moving with their students to the next grade, rather than sending students to another teacher at the end of the school year. Some loops are two consecutive years with the same group, while others may be three or more.

### **Lost & Found**

Articles found in and around the school should be returned to the elementary office where the owners may claim them. We suggest that all personal items worn and used in school be labeled with the student's name. Parents are encouraged to periodically sort through our lost & found items displayed in the atrium to reclaim their children's articles.

## **Nurse**

The school nurse provides a variety of health services to students. Among other things, the school nurse assists students who become ill or are injured at school, screens students for vision and hearing problems, scoliosis and blood pressure problems, and periodically records student height and weight. The nurse maintains medical records such as immunization histories for students and can assist families in obtaining health insurance for children.

## **Parent Communication**

The elementary school recognizes the importance of developing and maintaining positive parental involvement in a child's educational program. We are committed to building this relationship with each child's family. Our students' academic needs can be met most effectively when parents and teachers establish a partnership that enhances the educational experience.

Our school supports an open door policy where communication between parent, teacher and administration can be easily accomplished through person to person conferences, telephone, letters or email.

If a parent seeks information about their child, they should first contact the teacher. In cases where the parent's concerns are not resolved through a parent/teacher conference, the parent should contact the principal. The principal will work cooperatively with the parent and teacher to create a plan of action that will best help the student.

Formal parent/teacher conferences are held in November, however, if a parent feels it necessary to meet prior to this time, or at any other time during the year, they may schedule an appointment with the teacher or principal.

## **Parent Teacher Conferences:**

Parent-teacher conferences play an important role in reporting student progress to parents. Parents are encouraged to take advantage of scheduled parent conference opportunities as posted on our school calendar. In addition, parents may initiate a conference by calling the school office and making an appointment with the teacher and/or principal. When a parent requests a conference with a teacher, the teacher will make every effort to arrange a mutually convenient time. Such conferences will be planned so as to not interfere with class time. If a parent cannot attend a scheduled conference, he/she should notify the teacher as far in advance as possible so that another conference time may be arranged.

## **Parking**

Parents and guests are to park in designated parking spaces only. Parents should not park in the drive-through lane or in unmarked areas. If parents are not parked in a designated space, they may be ticketed. During events when parking becomes limited, parents and guests should park in the additional parking lots, not on the grass. If necessary, a shuttle bus will be provided to transport our visitors to and from the distant parking lots. Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated.

## **Picking up a Student Before Dismissal**

When you pick up your child, please report to the elementary office. It is the school's responsibility to dismiss your child from the office. Please do not go directly to your child's classroom. Avoid



picking up your child before dismissal time unless it is absolutely necessary. The end of the school day is a very busy time in the classroom.

### **Programming**

The Elementary School offers Universal Prekindergarten classes (UPK), and grades K – 6. We utilize a balanced literacy program that focuses on shared, independent, and guided reading. Our literacy block includes both whole group, and differentiated small group, instruction. Reading instruction focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, read aloud sessions, decoding strategies and fluency. Writing instruction may include journals, reading logs, story writing, letter writing, poetry, drama and other age appropriate projects.

Mathematics and Science classes include a full range of learning experiences from hands-on-learning techniques, projects (home and in-school) and experiments that use maps, calendars, graphs etc.

Social Studies units vary according to grade level. Common themes in our Social Studies program include family and communities along with local and state history.

At times, field trips are scheduled that will reinforce a concept in one of the academic areas. Students also experience classes in physical education, music and art that often support concepts taught in the classroom. Our elementary school values the arts. Concerts and exhibits are held at certain times during the year.

At present, beginning in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, students may choose to participate in instrumental music study and performance (band).

### **PTO**

The Elementary School Parent-Teacher Organization meets monthly per the school calendar in the ES Library/Media Center. New members are always welcome and the meetings are open to the public. The PTO organizes a number of activities and events to support our students. While fundraising continues to be a focus, the PTO also seeks to keep parents informed regarding school programs and services.

### **Recess**

Please plan on students participating in an outside recess program daily, unless it is raining or bitter cold. Children have a tendency to become very excited about playing outside. We request that our parents and teachers remind children about the rules and expectations while at recess. Many school injuries happen on the playground and they usually occur because someone was not being cautious or careful. Please take time to review the rules listed below with your child and discuss how to be safe. We want recess to be fun for all at all times.

1. Students should dress appropriately for the weather. If a student doesn't have hat, coat, mittens, boots, etc., when needed, he or she will have to stay in.
2. The throwing of any inappropriate object (snow, stones, sand, toys, etc.) will result in loss of recess for a period of time.
3. Ball playing in designated areas only. No hard balls and no football games are allowed.

4. Students must walk to and from the playground so as not to disturb classes.
5. No tag games on the equipment.
6. Jumping off swings or playground equipment is not permitted.
7. Children are encouraged to Slide down slides feet first, one person at a time, sitting only. Climbing up the slide is not permitted.
8. Children are not encouraged to hang from knees on the monkey bars or other climbing or playground equipment. Students should wear proper shoes, boots, or sneakers on the playground. Sandals and dress shoes are not permitted on the equipment.
9. Children will not be permitted on climbing equipment if it is icy or wet.
10. Wrestling, pushing or shoving is not permitted.

## **Report Cards**

At the conclusion of every 10 week marking period, report cards are sent home reporting how the student is mastering the standards and skills expected at their grade level. The report card identifies the level of effort and achievement demonstrated by the student. Achievement level is scored based on a 1 – 4 scale. The report card also reflects a student’s work habits and social attitudes in the school setting.

### Mid-Quarter Reports:

Student progress is also communicated through a mid quarter report. These reports are sent home about 5-6 weeks into the marking period. They provide important information to the parents that identify strengths and weaknesses that their child is demonstrating with the skills being taught. Every student receives a mid-quarter report for the first marking period. Thereafter, teachers will only send mid-quarter reports home for students whose performance have dropped off significantly.

## **School Closings/Delayed Openings**

In the event school is closed or running with a delayed opening, this information will be posted on a number of TV and radio stations. In addition, the school district will send a school closing or delay notification via phone, email and text. This information will also be available on our school website and Facebook page.

## **Shared Decision Making Committee**

The Elementary School Shared Decision Making Committee meets monthly per the school calendar. This committee comprised of teachers, parents, community members, and the school principal meets to plan for school improvement and support student academic success. All members of the community are welcome to attend meetings and speak during the public forum portion of the meeting.

## **Single Point of Entry**

In an effort to increase security and provide the highest level of safety for Taconic Hills students and staff the District utilizes a Single Point of Entry (SPoE) system for both the elementary and high

school. All students, staff, and visitors will be required to enter and exit the building at either the high school main entrance or elementary main entrance with the following exceptions:

- The before and after school program will continue to utilize the entrance by the PAC for pick up and drop off.
- Parents of students being picked up at the elementary library after school will continue to enter at the side entrance in the PAC courtyard area.
- The pool will still operate as normal with parking in the rear of the building and entry at the main pool entrance. The doors leading to the main building from the pool area will be secured during pool operating hours.

We ask that all parents and visitors sign in at the main office, and wear visitor passes throughout their visits.

More information about security measures at Taconic Hills can be found on the [School Safety & Security](#) section of our website.

### **Special Education Services**

There are times when AIS/RtI services and/or additional program strategies given by the classroom teachers are not sufficient for the student's academic growth. If that becomes the case, following a set protocol, students may qualify for additional services from our Special Education Department. Parents are involved with this process from the beginning.

Students that receive Special Education Services receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with specific goals that outline the educational program that will help the student become successful in school. The special education teachers also work closely with any teachers that are involved in the student's education. Together this team plans, strategizes, and monitors the student's progress.

Speech and Language services are among many services available to those students who qualify. Such services may include individual, small group, and co-teaching models.

### **Social Worker Services**

Our school social worker is dedicated to providing the necessary services to students in order for them to have a successful educational experience. The social worker works closely with teachers and families to best understand the student's needs in the school setting and provide supports for their success.

### **Supplies, Textbooks and Materials**

Textbook and other school materials are loaned to the students. Lost or damaged materials become the financial obligation of the student.

### **Tardiness**

Students who are late for school must report directly to the office where they will be given a pass to present to their teacher. Repeated tardiness will result in parents being notified and requested to visit the school for a conference.

### **Testing and State Assessments**

At the completion of a unit of study in most subject areas a test may be administered by the classroom teacher. Students may also take quizzes throughout a given unit.

In addition to in-school testing, NYS requires that elementary school students take state assessments beginning in grade 3.

The NYS Assessment Program for elementary school students is as follows:

- Grades 3 - 6 English Language Arts (ELA)
- Grades 3 - 6 Mathematics
- Grade 4 Science Performance Test
- Grade 4 Science Written Test

### **Truancy**

Truancy is an absence without parent or school consent for all or part of the day. It is an illegal absence. Repeated illegal absences will result in the student being referred to the Department of Social Services or Family Court.

### **Telephone Use**

We will not call your child to the office to accept personal telephone messages unless it is an emergency. If you must communicate to your child, we will be glad to take your call and pass the message along. We request, however, that parents and children confirm their plans with one another before school. If a student wishes to use the school phone, he or she must first get permission from the teacher. It is the responsibility of the teacher to determine if the situation warrants a telephone call and to provide a pass to the office where the student will place the call.

### **Visitors to School**

Upon entering the building, visitors are to check-in at the reception window and follow sign-in procedures. Visitors must provide a valid picture ID such as a driver's license or State ID Card. Visitor passes must be displayed prominently on the visitor's person while the visitor remains in the building. Visitor passes must be returned to the reception desk upon departure of the visitor. Students are not permitted to bring visitors to school; however, parents of prospective students may arrange for a visit with their child to observe the school in operation.

Visitors are welcome; however, reasonable precautions must be taken to insure the safety of students and to avoid interruptions to the instructional program. As stated in our Code of Conduct, "Visitors, including parents and legal guardians, must make every effort to inform District administration of their desire to visit the school building and/or their child at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to their arrival, absent extenuating circumstances."