Notre Dame Elementary School Student/Family Handbook

General Contact Information

- **School Website:** notredameutica.org
- **Main Office:**
  - **Phone:** 315-732-4374
  - **Mail:** 11 Barton Ave Utica, NY 13502
- **Principal:**
  - Mrs. Mary Rossi
  - **Phone:** 315-732-4374
  - **Email:** mrossi@syrdiocese.org
- **Assistant Principal:**
  - Mrs. Carol Polito
  - **Phone:** 315-732-4374
  - **Email:** cpolito@syrdiocese.org
- **Nurse's Office:**
  - Mrs. Suzanne Dienhoffer
  - **Phone:** 315-732-4374 ext. 3
  - **Email:** sdienhoffer@syrdiocese.org
- **Before/After-School Child Care:**
  - Mrs. Bridget Wenner
  - **Phone:** 315-732-4374
  - **Email:** bwenner@syrdiocese.org

Family Portal

Our **Family Portal** is your go-to resource for important information. To access it:

1. Go to www.factsmgt.com.
2. Select **Parent Log In** from the menu bar and then **FACTS Family Portal** from the drop-down menu.
3. Enter the district code **NDU-NY**.
4. Type in your username and password. If you've forgotten them, please click the provided link.

Diocesan Mission Statement

Inspired by the evangelizing mission of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Syracuse partner with families, communities, and parishes to nurture academic excellence rooted in Gospel values. We empower students to develop a strong moral conscience informed by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church,

and to live their faith with compassion, integrity, and respect for all life. Preparing them for a diverse world, we cultivate lifelong learners who are witnesses to Christ's love through service to others.

Most Rev. Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse
August 14, 2024

Diocesan Belief Statements

Spiritual

We believe that...

- Jesus is the Master Teacher, serving as the role model for all educators, parents, and students.
- Parents are the primary educators of their children, and Catholic schools partner with them to pass on our Catholic faith and values.
- Teachers in our schools are evangelizers, bringing the Good News of God's love and salvation to all within our communities.
- Catholic schools share in the educational and evangelical mission of the Roman Catholic Church and seek to develop and nurture relationships with parishes.
- Schools within the system embrace the common mission of Catholic schools in our diocese; our Catholic Identity is the foundation of a Catholic school education.

Academic

We believe that...

- Christ-centered environments support the healthy growth of the whole person: physically, emotionally, spiritually, and academically.
- Students learn at different rates and in different ways; each is unique, made in the image and likeness of God.
- Academic excellence is an essential and achievable goal.
- Quality athletic, fine arts, and extracurricular programs are essential components of a comprehensive educational program.
- Our teachers are educators called to be lifelong learners who are active in collaborative professional learning communities. They seek out professional development that fosters their spiritual and professional growth.
- Our school cultures should promote the continuous development of individual programs.

- Schools within the system should be aligned with educational programs while adhering to national, state, and diocesan standards.

Stewardship

We believe that...

- Our students develop leadership skills that enable them to be responsible and educated citizens who serve others, especially those in need.
- Our Catholic schools teach students to be stewards of the gifts and talents God has given them.
- Students have a sense of responsibility for caring for the environment and all of God's creation.
- Our schools practice sound fiscal and responsible stewardship.

Social

We believe that...

- Our schools are called to follow the example of Jesus Christ by teaching students to actively care for the world and serve their communities, especially those in need.
- Our students are taught to view all people as members of the family of God; we value and respect diversity within our schools.
- School communities, in partnership with parents, foster the growth of caring, compassionate individuals with strong moral consciences who follow God's command to love one another.

Diocesan Profile of a Graduate

Graduates of the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Syracuse will:

- **Live their faith by:**
  - Knowing, understanding, and promoting the principles of the Catholic faith.
  - Protecting and nurturing human life at all stages.
  - Exhibiting behavior and making decisions that reflect high moral character and values of our faith: integrity, honesty, self-control, and concern for others.
  - Serving God through service to others in society and the Church.
  - Respecting the dignity of others, including people of other cultures and traditions, as modeled by Jesus by extending acceptance, empathy, compassion, and love toward others.
  - Being responsible stewards of all of God's gifts.
  - Continuing to devote attention to their own ongoing faith formation and

evangelization.
    - Providing leadership enhanced by moral considerations to the Church, local communities, their families, and future generations.
- **Use their educational experiences by:**
    - Mastering a rigorous academic program with conscientious work habits and study skills.
    - Continuing to build on a strong academic foundation provided in Catholic schools as principled lifelong learners dedicated to academic excellence.
    - Being effective communicators orally, in written form, and in the use of technology.
    - Using technology in an ethical manner to create, access, and share information.
    - Demonstrating the acquisition of life skills that promote collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, self-reflection, and problem-solving in a variety of settings.
    - Taking active roles as responsible community leaders in order to make significant positive contributions.
    - Demonstrating an understanding and appreciation for the development of the whole person — spiritually, academically, physically, emotionally, and socially.

Notre Dame Elementary School Mission Statement

Notre Dame Schools provide Catholic co-educational programs in a diverse and nurturing environment where critical thinking and academic excellence are cultivated. Welcoming families of all faiths, Notre Dame is dedicated to developing each student's individual academic, spiritual, and personal gifts so they may become responsible church and community leaders whose lives are rooted in Christian values.

Notre Dame Elementary School Belief Statements

Spiritual:

We believe that....

- Jesus is the Master Teacher and role model for educators.
- Students, as children of God, formed in the image and likeness of God, should be treated with love and respect.
- Teachers in our schools are prophets; they bring the Good News of God's love and salvation as well as creating an atmosphere that will foster a student's positive relationship with Jesus Christ.

- Parents are the primary educators of their children; Catholic schools work in partnership with parents to transmit our faith and values.
- All members of the Catholic school community should move beyond service to oneself to the service of others. Especially, to those at the margins of society.
- Catholic schools carry out the educational mission of the Church and maintain healthy relationships with parishes.
- Schools within the system are aware of and focused on the common mission of Catholic schools in our diocese; the Catholic Identity of our schools provides the added dimension of a Catholic school education.
- As a faith community, all members are called upon to support, nurture, and mentor each other as well as assisting in the enhancement of one's unique talents.
- As a faith community, all members are called upon to support acceptance of diverse faiths with primary focus on the mission of the Catholic Church.

Academics:

We believe that....

- Christ-centered environments support the healthy growth of the whole person: physically, emotionally, spiritually, and academically.
- An effective educational experience must involve the collaboration of faculty, parents, and students. Highlighting the strengths and experience of each.
- Children learn at different rates and in different ways; each is a unique child of God.
- Peer tutoring allows the strengths of our students to be shared with other students in achieving their greatest potential.
- Academic excellence is a worthwhile and attainable goal.
- Quality athletic and extracurricular programs are important components of a comprehensive educational program.
- Our teachers are immersed in collaborative professional learning communities that foster growth in all areas of responsibility.
- Our school culture promotes continuous improvement of individuals and programs.
- Schools within the diocese are aligned with regard to curriculum and educational programs while adhering to National, State, and Diocesan standards.

Stewardship:

We believe that....

- Our schools practice sound fiscal and responsible stewardship practices.
- Our students develop leadership skills that enable them to be responsible citizens who serve others.
- Catholic schools teach students to be stewards of the gifts and talents God has given them.
- Our students have a sense of responsibility for the environment and all of God's gifts.

Social:

We believe that....

- Our students are taught to view all people as the family of God; appreciation and respect for diversity is necessary for Christian behavior.
- Our school communities foster the growth of caring, compassionate, and morally sound individuals who follow God's command to love one another.

Summary Statement of Relationship Parents, Students and Catholic Schools of the Diocese's Syracuse, New York

The following sets forth the nature, dynamics and character of the relationship between the School and its students and their parents. It will allow both students and parents to clearly understand their rights and obligations while attending the School and minimize the potential for misunderstanding in this regard. It is understood that by seeking enrollment in and attend the School, the applicant- student and his/her parents/guardians understand and agree to the following statements regarding the rights and obligations of students and parents, and this statement is an integral part of the School's enrollment contract.

To ensure a safe and appropriate educational environment, the student and his/her parents understand that students must obey the School's Code of Conduct, observe its rules and regulations, and perform the required academic work to result in appropriate academic progress while attending the School. It is also understood and agreed that the School's students attend the School at the School's invitation, and not pursuant to any right possessed by a student or the student's parent(s). Admission and continued enrollment at the School require students to behave consistent with the Code of Conduct, all of the School's other rules and regulations, and in a manner befitting a student of a Catholic institution. These responsibilities exist both inside and outside of the classroom and during all school functions, and relative to any off-campus behavior that negatively effects the School's operations or educational environment.

To protect its standards of academics, discipline and character, the School reserves the right to require a student's withdrawal at any time, for any reason deemed sufficient in the sole discretion of the School's administrators. Through their application to and enrollment in the School, all students and their parents/guardians acknowledge, agree, and concede that the School has this right. Moreover, by a student's enrollment in the School, he/she and his/her parents acknowledge the

important obligations and restrictions contained in the School's Parent-Student Handbook and agree to be bound by its terms.

Students attending the School and their parents understand and agree that they do not possess the same rights they might possess if attending a public school. For example, a student's freedom of speech is limited in many important respects at the School. Any speech, written or oral, that is contrary to the Roman Catholic faith, the teachings of the Church, the directives of the Bishop or Ordinary of the Diocese of Syracuse or contrary to the School's Code of Conduct are prohibited. Likewise, speech that is contrary or disruptive to the philosophy and purpose of the School is prohibited. Participating in prohibited speech at the School may be the basis for disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or expulsion.

Students also acknowledge and agree that School officials have the right to search their person or property if they reasonably believe that the student may have violated a School rule, the School's Code of Conduct, or the law and the search may . The School's students and their parents understand and agree that it is within the sole discretion of the School's administrators to determine whether such a reasonable belief exists. They further understand and agree that the School has the unfettered right to examine, search or inventory a student's desk, locker, or other space provided to the student for use at School. It is further understood and agreed that these areas may be searched by the School at any time and for any reason. Moreover, if the School permits on-campus parking, students and their parents understand and agree that the School has the unfettered right to search any automobile parked upon its premises. Students have no reasonable expectation of privacy relative to any of these areas (e.g., desks, hallway lockers, locker room lockers, automobiles parked on School grounds, etc.)

Additionally, it is understood and agreed by students, and/or their parents or guardians, that they waive and relinquish any right they may have to sue the School, any parish, the Diocese of Syracuse, and/or any individual acting on the half of the School, a parish or the Diocese, such as administrators, teachers, staff, volunteers or any of their agents relative to any matter directly or indirectly concerning academic or disciplinary decisions or matters covered within the Student Handbook.

Each student and his or her parents or guardian, by their acceptance of enrollment at the School, agree they may not bring any civil action in any local state or federal court or in any administrative agency or body to challenge any school decision relative to academics or disciplinary matters, including any decision relating to the rules, regulations, procedures or programs covered within this handbook. Students and their parents or guardians agree that any challenge to any school academic or disciplinary action, any enrollment decision, any suspension or expulsion, or any decision relating to the rules, regulations, procedures or programs covered in the Student Handbook may only be challenged or appealed within the hierarchy of the School and/or

Diocese, subject to the limitations and processes contained within the Student handbook.

While any students or parent or guardian of a student may consult with legal counsel relative to any decision made by the School or Diocese concerning the student, the School emphasizes and reiterates that students and parents or guardians are not permitted to have legal counsel present during any meetings or hearing or to otherwise participate in any disciplinary process or any other proceeding or process administered by the School or Diocese. It is understood and agreed that school administrators are not obligated to meet with attorneys or advocates of any sort, at any time.

The Student Handbook contains the School's Code of Conduct and the parameters of student discipline. However, it should be noted that any listing of prohibited conduct in the Handbook is only by way of illustration and example, and it is not intended or expected to be an exhaustive or exclusive list of prohibited conduct or conduct that may result in disciplinary action.

The School is pleased to welcome you to the School community and looks forward to your participation in its academics and activities.

Family Covenant

The philosophy of the **Notre Dame Catholic School** community is to proclaim the Gospel message of Jesus, educate the total child, guide students in the love and service of God and others, fit the uniqueness of each student so that they grow in a nurturing and loving environment, and integrate Catholic virtues (love, faith, hope, courage, reconciliation, and justice) into the curriculum.

By registering your child(ren) at **Notre Dame Elementary**, parents/guardians become members of a school community — students, faculty, and staff — that recognizes its mission to build a Christ-like presence in our neighborhoods by instilling Christian values in our young men and women who will shape our future.

This membership obligates all of us to share in the responsibilities for the education of **Notre Dame Elementary** children by agreeing to the following:

- I (We) fully understand the importance of guiding my (our) children's faith development, acting as a good Christian role model, actively participating in church membership, and attending weekly Mass or church services.
- I (We) fully understand the importance of attending Parent Teacher Conferences at the teacher's request, cooperating with school staff, and being present at other school events to support my child(ren).

- I (We) understand the importance of reviewing my child(ren)'s homework daily.
- I (We) support and work with the staff to ensure a good learning environment.
- I (We) agree to consider volunteering for a specific event(s)/project(s) within the school year.

This covenant is designed to implement the blessings of the Church-Family-School relationship. A successful Catholic school relies on a partnership between parents and the school. There is an expectation that parents are active participants in the education of **Notre Dame Elementary** students. The Catholic school fosters a faithful atmosphere through the interaction of students, parents, teachers, and support staff.

Superintendent's Message

Dear Students & Families,

It is with great pride and joy that we welcome you to our school community! The Diocese of Syracuse has a long and proud history of faith-centered, academically excellent education that truly forms the entire child. We are proud to partner with you, the primary educators of your child, in working together to foster growth and learning. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the leadership of this school, or our office, if you need support at any time.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in his 2008 address to Catholic leaders, "Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth" (cf Spe Salvi, 4).

Amy Sansone. EdD
Superintendent of Schools

Principal's Message

Dear Students and Families,

On behalf of the faculty and staff of Notre Dame Elementary School, I welcome you to this school year. I commend and thank you for your continued support of Catholic Education. For those of you who are new to our school community, I welcome you and assure you that we will make every effort to meet your child's educational needs.

We make a firm commitment through our Mission Statement to provide an environment where each child's faith is nourished, high standards are modeled, and academic excellence is encouraged. With over one hundred years of Catholic education in the Greater Utica area, we are blessed with a competent and dedicated

staff that looks to parents as partners in their child's education. By practicing what we preach, our children not only learn about God, but personally come to know Him in their daily lives. It is our mission to "teach as Jesus did."

We thank you for the opportunity to work with you and your child this year. We thank you for your commitment to offer a Catholic Education to your child regardless of the personal sacrifices.

Please take some time to review this parent handbook. It is to serve as a guide for you and your child.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Mary Rossi
Principal

The policies and procedures included in this **Notre Dame Elementary** handbook are intended to create a safe school environment that promotes spirituality, academic success, respect for others, and order. By registering at **Notre Dame Elementary,** students and their families agree to abide by this handbook, and parents agree to assist their children in following the school's policies and procedures.

This handbook is available on the school website, and parents can obtain a print copy in the Main Office. The Principal reserves the right to make changes to this handbook. Any changes will be communicated through the Principal's Newsletter, the school website, and subsequent editions of the handbook.

School History

http://www.notredameutica.org/about/history

Admissions Policy

Application Process Parents and legal guardians of prospective students must complete our online application through the FACTS Family Portal. Once your application is submitted, our admissions department will contact your student's current school to request their academic records, attendance history, and disciplinary records. The guidance office will then review these records and may contact the View document current school for clarification. If your student has an IEP or a 504 plan, our Director of Special Education Services will review it to ensure that our school can provide the necessary level of support for your student to be successful. After the

records are reviewed, an admissions committee will make a final decision. You may call the admissions office to schedule a campus tour at any time during this process at 315-732-4374.

Additional Requirements and Information:

- Placement Testing: All prospective kindergarten students must schedule a readiness assessment before their application has been reviewed.

- International Students: International students are required to provide documentation of their mastery on the TOEFL exam or an equivalent test.

- Enrollment: A student is not considered officially enrolled until a tuition payment plan has been set up in FACTS and the first payment has been made.

- Enrollment Deadline: We do not admit students for the current academic year after the start of the second semester.

- Provisional Admission: All new and transfer students have a six week probation period in which to become acquainted with the requirements of being a Notre Dame Elementary Student.

Student Privacy

A request form for parents and legal guardians to examine their child's education records is available at the Main Office. The school requires at least 24 hours' notice for this request. Such records are kept confidential and may not be released or made available to persons other than parents/guardians or students (over 18 years old) without their written consent in certain circumstances. In this regard, the School generally follows the prescriptions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 USC § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) ("FERPA"). The Principal or another authorized person must be present when records are viewed to provide necessary interpretation.

The school generally and voluntarily abides by the provisions of FERPA regarding the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of an order from a court or other authorized agency to the contrary, **Notre Dame Elementary** will provide the non-custodial parent with access to academic records and other school-related information about the child. If there is a court order specifying that no information should be given, it is the custodial parent's responsibility to provide the School with an official copy of that order.

Divorced or separated parents must file a court-certified copy of the custody section of their divorce or separation decree with the Principal's office. The school is not responsible to enforce or interpret custody and visitation orders, but will make reasonable efforts to help facilitate such orders, assuming it receives timely notice of such an order and its requirements.

Personnel Access to Student Records

The following personnel have access to student records without the previously noted consent:

- Professional personnel employed by the School, including independent contractors and their employees who provide services to the School
- School officials at an educational institution to which the student is transferring or seeking admission
- Authorized personnel of Diocesan or State Education Departments
- Those possessing a court order or subpoena, or in other circumstances in which distribution is permitted by FERPA without parental authorization.
- Individuals or entities to which a parent or guardian has authorized the School to release student education records.

School Calendar / Hours

- **School Annual Calendar:** https://ndu-ny.client.renweb.com/ftp/ndu-ny/newsletter/Final%20School%20Calendar%202025%202026.pdf
- **School Events Calendar:** https://calendar.renweb.com/shell/calendar?date=09%2F01%2F2025&view=Month
- **School Hours:** 7:30 AM - 2:30 PM
- **Before School and Drop-off Procedures:** https://ndu-ny.client.renweb.com/ftp/ndu-ny/newsletter/arrival%20&%20dismissal%202025.pdf
- **After School and Pick-up Procedures:** https://ndu-ny.client.renweb.com/ftp/ndu-ny/newsletter/ASC%20dismissal%20procedure.pdf

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Visitors Policy

All parents and visitors must enter the School through the Cornwall Ave doors, report to the Main Office, identify themselves, sign in, and wear a visitor's badge while in the building.

Any forgotten items should be dropped off at the Main Office. Please do not deliver them directly to your child's classroom. Parents are welcome to visit a class in session after making an appointment through the Main Office and with the Principal's approval. Teachers are unable to speak with parents during school hours when they have classroom responsibilities, as their primary obligation is to the children in their classroom and their safety. If you wish to speak with a teacher(s) or the Principal about your child, please send an email/note or call to schedule an appointment. Teachers will return your email/call within 24 hours.

Visits by parents, potential students, and tours are arranged through the Principal or designee. Please contact the Main Office to make an appointment.

General Parent Information

Tuition Non-Payment Policy

Families with a single payment delinquency will be notified by FACTS as being past due. The Pastor/Pastoral Administrator, Business Manager/Finance Director, and Principal are also notified of this past due status. Families with balances more than 90 days past due will not be permitted to return to school until the outstanding balance is resolved. When necessary, the school will pursue every avenue to obtain tuition and before/after-school care payments, including collection agencies and legal options. We encourage you to talk to the Tuition Management Office and/or School Administration at any time if you're experiencing difficulties paying your tuition bill. Your situation will be reviewed with confidentiality and compassion, and a mutually agreeable settlement should be possible.

Continuing Enrollment for the Following School Year

Students with past due balances will not be allowed to begin the next school year until the outstanding balance is paid.

Transfers to Another Catholic School

Students with past due balances will not be accepted at any other Catholic school within the Diocese of Syracuse until the past due amount is resolved.

Clubs and Activities

Children of Mary Club (K - 5th Grade)
Youth Basketball (K - 2nd Grade)
Basketball (3rd - 5th Grade)
Running Club (2nd - 5th Grade)
Track (2nd - 5th Grade)
Girls Softball (2nd - 5th Grade)

School Closings

Our school follows the Utica City School District closing decisions. We will send a text message to our families announcing school closings, delays, and cancellation notices. However, this should not be your sole source of information, as access to our computers may be delayed or disrupted due to weather. We also announce school closings and delays on social media and local TV stations.

Students attending our school often travel several miles, and weather conditions can vary dramatically from location to location. The decision to close or dismiss school early is made with the safety of our students and staff in mind. If school is scheduled to be open and you feel this decision puts your child at risk, you may choose to bring your child to school yourself or keep them home for the day. This will be recorded as an **unexcused absence**. If your child is unable to attend due to your home district being closed and not providing bus transportation, an **excused absence** will be recorded. You will still need to send in an excuse with your child as normal whenever they are absent from school.

Field Trips

Field trips are an integral part of the learning process and a privilege afforded to students. A student may be denied participation in a field trip if they fail to meet academic or behavior requirements. Permission forms must be submitted for authorization. Parents reserve the right to refuse to allow their child to participate in a field trip.

Lunch Procedures

Free Lunch Program:

All students in the school will receive meals at no charge regardless of household

income or completion of the free and reduced lunch application. However, families are strongly encouraged to complete and submit the Free and Reduced-Price application as this form is used to determine eligibility benefits for State and Federal funding/programs.

In order to receive a free lunch, students must take a full meal, which includes the main entree, side dish, fruit/vegetable, and milk. If the student does not take a full meal, they will be charged for individual a la carte items.

Transportation

Each public school district is required to transport children within local transportation guidelines, typically within a 15-mile radius (as the crow flies). Bus transportation must be requested by parents from their public school district of residence prior to April 1 for the following school year. Bus schedules are published by each school district during August. Parents should contact their public school bus transportation department for any questions concerning bus scheduling. All students riding buses are expected to adhere to the rules of conduct pertaining to buses as published by their home district. Since we are concerned with the safety of all bus children, it's important that students maintain orderly conduct and follow the directions of the bus monitor or driver. Failure to comply may result in removal from the bus and/or termination of service for the disruptive child. Bus disciplinary decisions are made by local school districts. If a bus suspension occurs, parents are responsible for student transportation. Parents should encourage their children to obey the bus driver and rules.

A student **MUST PRESENT a WRITTEN, DATED note** if they are **NOT** to take the bus home on a certain day, with directions as to how they will get home. The main office will call to confirm these notes.

General Policies

Attendance

There is a direct correlation between a student's attendance and academic performance.

Pupils are expected to be in attendance every school day. We believe any absence from school is detrimental to a student and strongly discourage it. Children are **tardy** if they enter the school after **8:00 a.m.** Instances of tardiness and excused absence

are part of your child's attendance record.

Absences

When your child is absent for any reason, please contact the **Main Office**, providing the date, student's name, grade, and reason for absence. The Main Office will contact parents/guardians who fail to notify the school.

Students should bring a written excuse for any period of absence on the day they return to school. This written excuse should be dated, give the reason for and dates of absence, and be signed by the parent/guardian. Any absence without a written excuse is considered an unexcused absence.

Excused Absences:

- Sickness
- Medical or Dental appointment
- Serious family illness
- Court
- Death of a family member or close friend
- Approved school-related program
- Religious
- Participation in a school-sponsored event

Unexcused Absences:

- Oversleeping
- Missing the school bus
- Weather-related (if school is open)
- Late ride
- Family vacation (not aligned with school calendar)
- Traffic
- Non-school trips

The student and/or parent is responsible for contacting teachers (upon return to school) to arrange to make up missed work.

Vacations

Please refrain from scheduling family vacations while school is in session. An interruption in a student's instructional schedule can make it difficult for them to catch up. All vacations that do not follow the school calendar are considered **unexcused absences**. Your student will be expected to make up any work and tests

assigned by the teacher during their absence. If your family will be out of town, necessitating an extended absence, please notify the school at least two weeks prior to the vacation, particularly if you wish assignments to be prepared before your departure.

Participation in After-School Activities

A student who is absent or goes home sick from school is not eligible to participate in after-school activities such as practices, special events, concerts, etc., on that day.

Attendance Interventions

The Principal will schedule meetings with the student and parent when attendance interferes with academic progress. Together, the group will formulate an attendance improvement plan. Consequences for unexcused absence/tardiness may result in additional disciplinary sanctions including suspension, probation, dismissal, and exclusion from co-curricular activities. The Principal may request a physician's note for cases of excessive absence.

Tardy Policy

We believe that arriving on time creates a respectful learning environment, builds a strong community, and ensures uninterrupted learning for everyone.

When students experience late arrival due to home district bus transportation, we understand the impact on their learning and will work collaboratively with them to ensure they have the necessary support to catch up.

We value every student's learning time. If a student arrives after the start of the school day, a note from a parent or guardian is required. This helps us partner together to address any challenges that may be impacting their timely arrival. Also, please have late-arriving students stop by the office so we can help them connect with their classroom.

Truancy

We value every student's presence in class. When a student is frequently late or absent without communication, it suggests they might need additional support. To better understand their needs and collaborate on solutions, we'll facilitate a conversation involving the student, their family, and school staff.

Academic Policy

Academics:

Notre Dame Elementary School offers Universal Pre-K classes, Montessori Pre-K programs, and Kindergarten through fifth grades.

Pre-K Programs at Notre Dame Elementary

Montessori:

- The program began in 1970 and follows the educational principles of Maria Montessori. The classroom consists of 3-5 year olds which allows for a two-year placement for many students. Also, it is an appropriate placement for those children who are 5 years old, but who are academically and/or socially not ready for Kindergarten. Guided by teachers and assistants, children are encouraged to develop independence and are offered age-appropriate activities to guide the process. In addition, the children attend physical education classes, library classes and music classes. Religion is included in this full curriculum program.
- Each classroom is staffed with a qualified teacher and full time assistant. This Pre-K program is tuition based and offers a half-day session or full day session and runs five days a week following our school calendar.

Universal Pre-K:

- This program comes to Notre Dame through the Utica City School District and began in 2000. It is available to Utica residents only, and the children must be
- 4 years old by Dec. 1st. We offer an AM session, a PM session, and two classes of full day sessions. There is no cost to parents.
- The curriculum follows all New York State pre-k requirements. Designated themes are followed and children attend physical education classes, music classes, and library classes. Assessments are conducted throughout the year to monitor the children's progress. Our teachers are certified and each classroom has a full time assistant.
- The school calendar is followed and consists of 180 days.

Kindergarten-Grade 5:

- Notre Dame Elementary provides a structured, disciplined, and vigorous curriculum based on the New York State Department of Education standards and the Interdiocesan goals. Notre Dame Elementary School has been awarded accreditation by the Middle States Association, which validates that quality standards and academic standards have been met.
- Notre Dame Elementary School encompasses a faith-based approach to education which inspires our students to live an ethical and moral existence. We welcome students and families of all faiths.

- Music, Physical Education, and Library are provided for all students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade Five.
- Technology and Art are provided for students in Kindergarten through Grade Five.
- STEM opportunities are integrated into all grade levels.
- Project Lead The Way (PLTW) empowers our students to thrive in our ever-changing world. PLTW integrates Math, Science, Technology, and Engineering by fostering problem solving and critical thinking skills.
- Spanish classes/instruction are part of the Kindergarten through Grade Five curriculum.
- Instrumental Music, Band, Choir, Altar Servers, Children of Mary Club, and Athletics are offered to interested students.
- Opportunities for student participation in liturgies, prayer services, and music concerts are available.
- Outreach is an important part of our school year. By helping those in need, the students develop a sense of kindness, generosity, and social justice.
- Academic Support Programs in Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and Resource are provided by the Utica School District. We have an ELA and Math remediation program in place.

Report Cards

Grades K-5 use a quarterly grade marking system. Report cards are one important vehicle of communication between teachers and parents. Please refer to the school calendar and school communications for specific dates.

Report cards will be distributed in the following months:

- November
- February
- April
- June

Student Transfer to Other Schools

Occasionally, parents/guardians decide to transfer a child to another school for a variety of reasons. When a change of school is anticipated, the following steps should be taken:

- The parent/guardian should contact the school administrator regarding the impending change to ensure proper placement in a new setting.
- Arrangements to transfer school records should be made with the principal.
- All student instructional material should be returned.

- Payment of any outstanding financial obligations should be made.

Transfer of Records

Notre Dame Elementary maintains confidential, accurate, and current records of the academic achievement, health, and attendance of each enrolled student. Upon leaving **Notre Dame Elementary**, a student's academic records are transferred to the new school upon written request from the parent.

Communication/Grievance Process

As a Catholic school community, we recognize parents as the primary educators of their children. Therefore, we value communication as a key to the success of all children entrusted to our care.

Parents/guardians who have questions about their child's education should begin with individual classroom or specialized teachers. Parents/guardians wishing to schedule a conference should write a note to the appropriate teacher or call the Main Office during school hours. Spontaneous classroom visits are not allowed.

This communication table serves as a guideline to assist parents and school community members in contacting the appropriate school staff members with questions or concerns. We encourage you to contact the staff member most immediately involved with your question or concern as the first contact. If the issue is not resolved, please progress through the table below.

Questions/Concerns	**First Contact**	**Second Contact**	**Third Contact**
Academics	Teacher	Principal	Pastor or Board President
Athletics/CYO	Coach	Athletic Director / Program Coordinator	Pastor or Board President
Student Behavior	Teacher	Principal & Counselor (if applicable)	Pastor or Board President
Extra-Curricular Activities	Club Advisor	Principal	Pastor or Board President

Financial Aid	Principal	Pastor or Board President	
Medical	School Nurse	Teacher	Principal
Religion	Teacher	Principal	Pastor
Safety	Teacher	Principal	Pastor/Superintendent
Special Education	Teacher	AIS Teacher / Special Ed Teacher or Principal	K-12th Grade: School District of Catholic School Location; Preschool/ Pre-K: School District of Student Residence
Transportation/Bus Behavior	Driver	Principal	Transportation Department of District of Residence
Technology	Teacher	School Technology Coordinator (if applicable)	Principal
Tuition Payment	Tuition Management Company	Principal	School Business Manager
Use of Facilities	Parish Office	Principal	Pastor or Board President

If an issue or dispute cannot be resolved after the third contact, a conference will be scheduled with the parent, teacher, Principal, and possibly the student. Parents should contact the Principal to schedule this conference. An additional conference with the Principal can occur after this meeting should further discussion be necessary. Secondly, if after the second conference with the Principal further discussion is still requested, a conference with the parents, Pastor, and the Principal will occur. Parents should contact the Pastor to schedule this meeting.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Formal Parent/Teacher Conferences will be held at the end of the first marking period.

These conferences will be held at appointed times on publicized dates, providing an opportunity for discussion regarding individual students' academic, social, and religious development. Informal parent/teacher conferences are arranged as individual needs arise. Parents may not confer with a teacher during class hours without an appointment.

Due to the confidential nature of a parent/teacher conference, only the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) may attend. Please try to schedule only **one** conference rather than separate conferences in situations that apply. The child may also be included in a parent/teacher conference at the discretion of both the parents and the teacher(s).

In fairness to all involved, conference appointment times should be strictly adhered to so that all parents may be accommodated.

Expectations for Student Success

We believe that all children are a blessing from God and their dignity should be held in the highest regard, as each person is created in the image of God. Therefore, all students have a right to be an active part of a safe and orderly learning environment.

As a Catholic school, **Notre Dame Elementary** emphasizes whole child development. Spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical growth are fostered. The school staff aims to see all children develop an ever-increasing awareness of their own self-worth and the worth of others, and a reverence for each person. The school environment attempts to emphasize the need for an increasing sense of responsibility and self-discipline, rather than imposed control, on the part of students. Justice and charity are the two guiding virtues. Discipline is the key to good conduct and proper consideration for other people. Good discipline is maintained by recognizing and praising good behavior and taking corrective action when necessary.

All students at **Notre Dame Elementary** are expected to:

I. Conduct and Respect (Behavioral Expectations)

- **General Respect and Courtesy:**
  - Treat everyone with courtesy and respect.
  - Greet and respond to everyone in a polite manner.
  - Be considerate of the needs of others.
  - Demonstrate respect for teachers, staff, and peers.
  - Treat self and others with respect and kindness.

- Celebrate the unique gifts and talents of each person, recognizing them as made in God's image.

- **School Environment:**
  - Demonstrate Catholic values in speech and action.
  - Conduct themselves in a manner that does not interfere with the learning environment.
  - Participate and contribute in a positive manner in the classroom and the school environment throughout the school day.
  - Comply with all policies, rules, and regulations as specified or implied in this handbook, including the uniform policy.
  - Accept responsibility for their own actions.

II. Academic Integrity and Responsibility (Learning Expectations)

- **Academic Honesty:**
  - Complete all work honestly and ethically.
  - Avoid cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty.
  - Respect intellectual property.
- **Responsibility and Engagement:**
  - Take responsibility for their own learning and behavior.
  - Take responsibility for the completion of assigned work both inside and outside of class.
  - Maintain good attendance and arrive at school and classes on time.
  - Engage actively in class discussions and activities.
  - Ask thoughtful questions and seek clarification.
  - Engage in respectful and productive discussions.
  - Listen actively and attentively to others.
  - Collaborate effectively with peers.

III. Intellectual Growth and Learning Habits (Personal Development)

- **Curiosity and Growth Mindset:**
  - Demonstrate a desire to learn and explore new ideas.
  - Show a willingness to take on intellectual challenges.
  - Embrace challenges and view mistakes as learning opportunities.
  - Persevere through difficulties and maintain a positive attitude.

IV. Technology and Digital Citizenship (Digital Expectations)

- **Responsible Technology Use:**
  - Use technology effectively and ethically.
  - Practice safe and responsible online behavior.

- Understand and respect digital privacy.

Statement on the School's Philosophy about Safe and Ethical Generative AI Use

Notre Dame Elementary believes in embracing the powerful capabilities of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in a manner that is ethical, safe, and aligned with our educational values. Students are expected to recognize that generative AI has the potential to augment human intelligence and creativity in remarkable ways. However, students will learn to understand the risks of misuse, including the potential for generating misinformation, violating intellectual property rights, and amplifying societal biases and harms. Students will learn to recognize that generative AI tools like language models and image generators can be powerful aids for learning across all disciplines.

However, it's important to use these tools ethically and safely. When using AI,it's important to be mindful that outputs can contain inaccurate information, biases, or inappropriate content. As a result, when using AI all students are responsible to:

- Defer to their classroom teacher's directions about appropriate use of AI.
- Double-check important facts from authoritative sources.
- Never use AI tools to produce hate speech, misinformation, or to violate others' intellectual property rights or privacy.
- Attribute any material (text, images, etc.) derived from AI appropriately.
- Use critical thinking when interacting with AI, and do not blindly trust all information AI generates.
- Not humanize AI by attributing human behaviors or characteristics to it.
- Follow the "Ground Rules for Using AI" document.

Ultimately, students are responsible for the ethical use of these tools and the integrity of your work. Students who violate the acceptable use policy or rules specific to plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary consequences. If you have any concerns, consult a teacher or trusted adult for guidance.

Ground Rules for Using AI

1. Understand AI's Role: AI is a tool to assist in learning, not a replacement for critical thinking or personal effort. Students should use AI to enhance their learning process and not rely on it to do their work for them.
2. Respect Academic Integrity: AI should not be used to cheat, plagiarize, or produce work that students pass off as their own. Students must always give credit when AI assists in generating content or ideas.
3. Be Transparent: If students use AI in any part of their schoolwork, they should disclose how they used it. This includes specifying if AI was used for brainstorming, writing, problem-solving, or any other assistance.
4. Maintain Privacy: Avoid sharing personal, sensitive, or identifiable information with AI tools, as these tools may not guarantee data privacy.

5. Verify Information: AI-generated content should be fact-checked and verified against reliable sources. Students should develop the habit of questioning and validating the information AI provides.
6. Use Age-Appropriate Tools: Ensure that the AI tools used are suitable for educational purposes and appropriate for the students' age group. Always follow age restrictions and link your @mtlstudents.net account to AI tools for official school work.
7. Use AI Ethically: Know that there are many ethical implications of AI, including biases, limitations, and the overall impact of AI on society. Any issues that you encounter while interacting with an AI tool should be brought to the attention of your teacher, counselor, or unit principal.
8. Follow School Policies: Adhere to the Acceptable Use Policy regarding the use of technology and AI in the classroom.
9. Follow Classroom Policies: Each teacher has the freedom to set rules around the use of AI in their classroom. These rules will vary from assignment to assignment and from teacher to teacher. If students are uncertain about how to use AI appropriately or if its use is acceptable, they should ask their teacher for clarification.
10. Do Not Humanize: Remember, AI and Chatbots are not humans; they do not have feelings, consciousness, or desires. Do not attribute human characteristics to AI systems. In addition, avoid emotional attribution and be mindful of the relationships formed with them.

Diocese of Syracuse Catholic Schools Student Technology Use Policy

Introduction

Grounded in the Catholic Church's view of technology as a gift (Aetatis Novae, #2), the Diocese of Syracuse Catholic Schools embraces technology to enhance learning in alignment with Church teachings, safety, and legal requirements. This policy governs all student use of devices (school-owned and personal), internet access, and related services within school settings and at school events. Violations may result in disciplinary action.

Definitions

1. **Acceptable Use Policy (AUP):** This policy governing the use of internet services and devices on school premises and at school events.
2. **Catholic School Office (CSO):** The administrative office of the Diocese of Syracuse Catholic Schools.
3. **Code of Conduct:** Each local school's established behavioral guidelines.

4. **Digital Devices:** Any hardware or software used for electronic data creation, receipt, storage, transmission, or manipulation. This includes computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, wearables, network systems, and related peripherals and applications.
5. **Diocese:** The Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, New York.
6. **Diocesan/School Resources:** Any technology-related property or service owned or provided by the Diocese or local schools, including devices, networks, internet access, email, cloud storage, and software platforms.
7. **Educational Purpose:** Technology use directly related to the school's curriculum, extracurricular activities, or administration.
8. **Electronic Communication:** Any digital transmission of information, including email, messaging apps, online forums, social media, file sharing, and web content.
9. **Internet/Network:** The global network of interconnected computer networks, including school-based (intranet/Wi-Fi) and external access.
10. **Local School:** Any Catholic school affiliated with the Diocese.
11. **School Policy:** Any official rule or guideline issued by the CSO or a local school, including the Code of Conduct.
12. **School Event:** Any school-sponsored or endorsed activity, regardless of location or supervision.
13. **School Property:** Any physical or digital asset belonging to the Diocese or its schools.
14. **Harassment (including Sexual Harassment):** Any offensive behavior (verbal, written, visual, physical, or digital) that creates a hostile environment, consistent with the Diocese of Syracuse Catholic Schools Office's Harassment Policy.
15. **Student:** Any individual enrolled in a Diocesan school.

Acceptable Use Terms

Student use of all technology resources is contingent upon adherence to this AUP, school policies, and all applicable laws.

Specific Terms:

1. Students are responsible for all activity associated with their assigned accounts and must protect their login credentials.
2. School-provided technology is to be used solely for educational purposes.
3. Technology use on school property or at school events, regardless of ownership, must be aligned with the Expectations for Student Success.
4. Technology access is a privilege that may be revoked at any time by the school principal without prior notice or process.
5. Students are prohibited from using another individual's accounts, creating fake accounts or attempting unauthorized access to any system.
6. Students shall not alter system configurations or assigned passwords without explicit permission.
7. Use of personally owned digital devices during the school day, on school property is prohibited unless specifically authorized in writing by the principal.

8. Technology shall not be used in any way that is inconsistent with Church teachings or school policies, including but not limited to:
    - Accessing, viewing, transmitting, or storing inappropriate, offensive, or illegal content (e.g., sexually explicit material, hate speech, illegal activities).
    - Using disrespectful, abusive, or objectionable language in any communication.
    - Engaging in harassment, sexual harassment, cyberbullying, or attacks on others.
    - Unauthorized access, use, or damage to any technology resources or accounts.
    - Wasting limited resources (e.g., excessive bandwidth, printing).
    - Commercial or political activities unrelated to schoolwork, or any activity violating laws.
    - Creating or using fake accounts of any kind.
9. All school-provided technology remains the property of the school and/or Diocese. Students have no expectation of privacy regarding its use.
10. The Diocese, CSO, or local school reserves the right to access, monitor, review, download, print, copy, and delete any material on or transmitted through their technology resources at any time, without cause or notice. This information may be shared with law enforcement or other authorities as deemed appropriate.
11. By acknowledging receipt of the Student Handbook, parents/guardians and students acknowledge that there is no right to privacy, exclusive possession, or access to school technology resources and waive any such rights.
12. Upon suspension or termination of technology privileges, students must immediately return any school-provided equipment and access information.
13. Students must grant immediate access to any school-provided technology upon request.

Consequences and Penalties for Violation of AUP

Consequences for violating this AUP will be determined by the principal, consistent with this policy and the school's Code of Conduct. Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Parental notification and conference.
2. Penalties outlined in the school's Code of Conduct (e.g., loss of privileges, detention, suspension, expulsion).
3. Requirement to reimburse for damages to technology or property.
4. Legal action to recover damages.
5. Loss of technology access and use privileges (with potential for supervised reinstatement).
6. Notification of law enforcement agencies when criminal activity is suspected, in consultation with the CSO.

The Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Syracuse Student Technology use Agreement

1. I have read and understand the "DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS STUDENT TECHNOLOGY USE POLICY (2025)."
2. I agree to abide by the terms of this policy and understand that I will be held accountable for any violations.
3. I understand that all technology access provided by the school is for educational purposes only.
4. As a user of the school network, I agree to comply with all school rules, policies, and applicable laws and to use the network responsibly.

Parent/Guardian Agreement

As the parent/guardian of the student, I grant permission for my child to access school technology resources, including internet and network services. I understand that my child may be held liable for violations of the Technology Use Policy and/or applicable laws. I also understand that while the school takes precautions, some online content may be inappropriate, and I accept responsibility for guiding my child's technology use and setting expectations for selecting, sharing, and exploring information and media. I agree to discuss this policy with my child and ensure they understand its terms. I understand and accept that my child's technology access may be revoked for any breach of this policy.

Cell Phone Policy

Cellphones, smart watches and similar devices may not be used by students during the instructional day. All devices must be turned off and kept in the student's backpack. Students' cellphone numbers must be registered with the main office and noted on the student emergency form.
Failure to comply with this policy will result in confiscation of the device by school personnel. Once a device has been confiscated, it will only be returned to a parent or guardian.

Dress Code Policy

https://ndu-ny.client.renweb.com/ftp/ndu-ny/newsletter/Uniform%20and%20Dress%20Code%202025%20-%202026%20PDF.pdf

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Drug and Alcohol Policy

Notre Dame Elementary is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy environment

for all students. Students may face **expulsion** if any of the following conditions exist during school hours or at any school-sponsored event:

- A student sells, gives, or deals drugs or alcohol to other students.
- A student is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- A student is detected using drugs or alcohol.
- A student is in possession of drugs or alcohol.

Should any of these infractions occur, parents/guardians will be notified immediately. A conference will be arranged with the student, parent/guardian, and administration. Disciplinary action will be taken, which may include probation, suspension, expulsion, or reporting the activity to the local police department. If necessary, counseling will also be arranged.

Parents or family members who come to school grounds or a school event in possession of, or attempt to sell, or are under the influence of alcohol or drugs will be reported to the local police. Such actions may also result in the revocation of the student(s)' enrollment at the school.

Gun-Free School Policy

Notre Dame Elementary, as a Catholic school within the Diocese of Syracuse, aligns its policy on firearms with the federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. Any school pupil determined to have brought a weapon to school will be **expelled** and will not be permitted to attend any diocesan school.

Addressing Infractions: Our Approach

When expectations are not met, it is considered an infraction. The overall goal of working with students and their families when an infraction occurs is to help the student make better choices in the future.

Responses to Infractions

The school employs a range of responses to address infractions, including:

- Redirection by teacher/staff
- Verbal warning
- Written warning
- Communication with parents
- Behavior Plan
- Loss of Privileges (e.g., choice of seating, eating lunch with peers, recess choice, early dismissal, late arrival, student parking, honors pass, free periods, choice of where to move through hallways, cell phone on person)
- After-School Detention
- Suspension
- Written and/or verbal apology
- Redo of assigned work
- Expulsion
- Contacting Law Enforcement

Range of School Responses

The Principal has the right and authority to implement school responses for infractions if they conclude that the student's behavior is harmful to the good order and discipline of the school and its religious mission. The Principal is the final authority in all disciplinary situations.

General Disciplinary Guidelines

Pre-K – Grade 12

The classroom teacher is the primary in-school disciplinarian. They will work directly with the student to reinforce and support expected behaviors. Written communication and/or a telephone call to the home will facilitate communication between the teacher and parents. The teacher will consult with the Principal regarding matters that warrant further attention.

Grades 3 – 12

To maintain consistency across all classrooms at this level, the following procedures apply when a student continues to not meet expectations after the teacher has worked with the student and family to improve the situation. Further infractions will

result in a referral to the Principal/Assistant Principal, and the following plan of action will be invoked:

- After the **third infraction** for not meeting the same expectation, a meeting will be scheduled with the Principal, teacher, parents, and student to create an action/behavior plan designed to guide the student toward better choices in the future.
- All subsequent infractions will be communicated to the Principal, who will address the situation with the parents and assign further responses to the infractions.

If a student is unable to transition from externally imposed discipline to self-discipline, the Principal will exercise authority in deciding what is best for all concerned: the school, the student, and the family.

Suspension

When a student continuously disregards school expectations, short-term suspension may result. Parents/guardians will be notified of the charged offenses and given the opportunity to meet with the Principal or the Principal's designee regarding the suspension.

During a suspension, the student may be in school or out of school during regular hours. If in-school, academic studies will be pursued in a setting isolated from the classroom. All instructional work during the time of suspension must be completed, and all privileges will be lost.

Out-of-school suspension will be implemented only after other measures have proven ineffective and further parent/guardian communication has taken place or where the conduct in question is of such a nature that, in the Principal's sole discretion, it is deemed likely that the student's continued attendance constitutes a danger to other student, to others, to school property, or of a disruption of the educational process. In keeping with due process, suspended students will be granted a conference with the Principal, with reasonable notice, at which the student may present his/her response to the charged infractions and/or appropriate penalty.

If a marked improvement, specifically a positive behavioral change, fails to occur, expulsion may be imminent.

Expulsion

The expulsion of a child from a Catholic school is a serious matter decided by the Principal in consultation with the Catholic School Office. Parents/guardians will be informed of the events leading to the expulsion.

Search and Seizure

School authorities may conduct a search of a student's locker, backpacks, bags, or personal items only when there is sufficient cause to believe that drugs, alcohol, weapons, or other prohibited materials are hidden. Any search must be conducted in the presence of another staff member.

Safe Environment: Our Commitment to a Safe and Respectful School Community

At **Notre Dame Elementary**, the safety and well-being of our students are always our top priority. This means we have clear procedures in place to address any concerns about student safety and respectful interactions.

When there is a basis for a reasonable suspicion that a child has been the victim of child abuse or maltreatment, School personnel will contact the State Central Registry through the Child Abuse Hotline to report the matter and, where there is a basis to suspect that a child is in imminent danger of abuse or maltreatment, they will contact Child Protective Services or call 911 to seek immediate assistance.

When an issue, concern, or incident involves a sexual matter—such as sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment, or inappropriate sexual comments, texts, or pictures between students, students and staff, or students and visitors—schools are required to contact either the Diocesan Safe Environment Office (SE) or the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) to investigate. Representatives from the Catholic Schools Office and/or the Diocesan Safe Environment Office will visit the student's school as a team of two. The team meets with individuals involved, as well as any witnesses. This is done prior to notifying families to ensure unbiased responses and because students are typically more forthcoming with information related to this topic with individuals outside their family. Upon completion of any investigation, the team makes

recommendations to the school's administration. These recommendations could range from calling 911 and/or CPS to being unfounded with no action recommended. Families of all students who have been interviewed will be notified by the school's administration immediately following the conclusion of the investigation.

We believe that this process creates and maintains a safe environment where all students can learn and grow. We are committed to open communication and working together with families to ensure the well-being of every child in our care