

the Ecology Learning Center

Student & Family Handbook

2024-2025



*Cultivating Compassionate
& Resilient Leaders*

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OUR MISSION

The mission of the Ecology Learning Center is to deeply root students in Maine's ecological & cultural landscapes, foster authentic real-world learning through mentorship & craft, and cultivate compassionate and resilient leaders prepared to engage in the challenges of today & tomorrow.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Ecology Learning Center is guided by the principles of ecology at every organizational level. This requires us to take a systems approach to each challenge and every opportunity. No individual thrives or stumbles alone; we are a community of interdependent students, teachers, thinkers and actors suspended in a web of relations that extends beyond the school doors and into the world. This awareness has informed the development of these guiding principles, which will serve to inspire, inform, and guide our decisions. All stakeholders will align all policies, practices, and procedures to accommodate these Guiding Principles.

Place-Based

Students will explore the local environment, culture, history, and economy as the foundation of their studies across the curriculum. By situating all learning in the places that are familiar and significant to our students, we help to generate the life-long habit of thinking critically about the world we live in and the challenges that face us every day. Every student will complete an interdisciplinary project annually that includes field studies and service projects at local farms, businesses, or organizations.

Hands-On and Performance-Based

Students will be evaluated on their ability to solve problems, integrate knowledge across disciplines, and contribute to group work. We respect multiple intelligences. We value alternative learning styles. We celebrate non-traditional teaching relationships, including mentorships, apprenticeships, and independent study. Upon graduation, every student will complete at least one internship, one apprenticeship, and a personal portfolio.

Reflective and Empowering

Students will strengthen their inter- and intrapersonal intelligence through collaborative and individual work. We believe that social and emotional learning are indispensable in the transformation of children into young adults. By reflecting honestly on their learning experiences, students will benefit and grow from their failures and their successes equally. All students will participate in regular advisory groups, all-school meetings, team-building challenges, leadership training, and guided self-reflective practice.

Dedicated to Wellness

We honor the connection between mind and body and strive to support the healthy development of our students as whole persons. Students will participate in activities that promote healthy eating, active living, and time outdoors. Every student will complete a project on growing, harvesting, and/or preparing local foods before graduating, and participate in at least one overnight wilderness trip per year.

CORE VALUES

What we accomplish is important, but how we accomplish it is sometimes even more important. Our core values govern how we will work together as we carry out the mission and vision of the school. We expect every member of the Ecology Learning Center community to uphold these values as we interact with each other, with students, and with the greater community. By modeling these values, we expect them to become part of the moral and ethical fabric of our students' lives, and we sincerely hope that they will carry them beyond graduation.

Diversity

We believe that diversity is as elemental to a human community as it is to an ecosystem. Diversity brings new perspectives, challenges old ways of thinking, finds innovative solutions, and pushes each individual to question their assumptions and embody their best self. Diversity is not a checklist. Diversity is a reflection of real lived experience. If it is to be a cornerstone of our organizational culture, it is incumbent upon those from majority backgrounds to actively elevate the voices of the minority. We acknowledge the necessity of criticism and discomfort in creating a school culture that reflects a genuine commitment to diversity that goes beyond tolerance. We will seek out diversity in our teaching materials, in our staff and mentors, and in the communities in which our learning takes place.

Accountability

At the Ecology Learning Center, we believe that every success lifts the whole community. We equally believe that harm to one harms all. Harm and hurt are often unintentional, and are always an opportunity for learning and growth. We are committed to addressing conflicts in our community through Restorative Justice practices that emphasize honest accounting of harm done, and provide concrete actions to repair the damages. In formal Restorative Justice proceedings and everyday, we aim to create a culture in which all community members take responsibility for their actions, hold themselves and each other accountable for upholding our community values, and celebrate our successes together.

Collaboration

The success of our mission calls upon the strengths and resources of our whole community. We believe that the best decisions are reached through transparent and honest discussion. We believe that successfully implementing those decisions depends on buy-in from all stakeholders, from the board president to the first year student. We also believe that real-world learning cannot be divided into clear categories. In order to understand the world and our place in it, we will rely on collaboration across disciplines, across grades, and across the community.

Creativity

The Ecology Learning Center is built upon the theory that small groups of students led by dedicated and compassionate experts can discover innovative solutions to problems old and new. This depends on one essential ingredient: the willingness to try new things. We expect school leaders to listen eagerly to new ideas from unexpected sources. We expect teachers to innovate in classroom presentation and in evaluations in order to accommodate diverse learning styles. We expect students to push themselves to their growing edge by exploring new subjects and trying new activities. Together we will create a dynamic and welcoming learning community where, when life gives you lemons, you can learn to juggle.

SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

We, as educators at the Ecology Learning Center, will support students in the following ways:

1. Provide challenging curriculum and instruction for students to meet the state's Learning Standards:
 - provide a safe, caring environment that promotes active learning
 - provide quality teaching and leadership
 - inform students, families, and the community about the high academic standards at our school and how they can help students achieve these standards
 - explain assignments clearly and provide homework (as needed) that supports the curriculum
 - give students the time they need in order to learn
 - recognize students as individuals with different learning styles and needs

2. Develop a caring school climate that promotes academic achievement:
 - educate parents, staff and students about our Code of Conduct
 - help children to solve conflicts in nonviolent ways and take responsibility for their actions
 - promote understanding and appreciation for cultural differences
 - provide mentoring opportunities

3. Provide opportunities for parent involvement in their child's schooling.
 - hold an open house each trimester
 - schedule parent-teacher conferences in the fall or as needed throughout the school year
 - develop opportunities for parents to volunteer
 - encourage parents and other family members to share their skills with the school community

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

We, as parents/guardians, will support our children's learning in the following ways:

- talk and listen to my child regarding their school experiences
- require regular, on time school attendance
- send my child/children to school ready to learn
- attend school activities and parent-teacher conferences
- show respect and support for my child, the staff and the school
- provide a quiet place for my child to study
- encourage my child to do well at all school assignments
- volunteer for school-related activities
- monitor my child's homework
- promote positive use of my child's extracurricular time
- stay informed about my child's education and communicate with the school when necessary

Student Responsibilities

As a student, I will share the responsibility to improve my academic achievement. Specifically, I will;

- come to school regularly, on time, and ready to learn
- work hard and do my best
- accept responsibility for my own actions
- show respect for myself and others
- resolve conflicts peacefully
- ask for help when I need it
- make healthy decisions that help me reach my goals
- know what is expected of me

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Ecology Learning Center Board of Directors represent our community. The Head of School attends all board meetings, but is not a voting member. Staff, while not members of the board, will be encouraged to attend as their schedules permit.

The responsibilities of the board include the following:

- upholding the mission of the school and being the responsible agent for the accountability requirements established in the Charter
- approval and oversight of annual budget
- setting policy
- appointment of one or more advisory members or committees
- setting educational priorities
- overseeing the school's growth plan
- reviewing and approving significant contracts, e.g., for facilities and benefit programs
- overseeing matters for which the board serves as a hearing body for action or appeals, including student discipline
- any other matters not administrative in nature and/or that are prescribed in statute or rule

The board will meet on a monthly basis. Please check the school public calendar for each month's date, as well as committee meetings. Meetings are open to the public except during closed sessions. All parents are invited to attend board meetings and to address in person or in writing any concerns, questions, or feedback concerning the operation of the Center.

STUDENT SELF REGULATION

We believe that students need to develop the skills to identify and take care of their own basic needs. This means that we also need to assist and support our students to build the social and emotional capacities to self regulate in a safe and nurturing environment. Specifically, students will learn to take care of their own needs in a safe, respectful, and responsible manner, which include, but are not limited to:

- eating snacks throughout the day in an appropriate location
- taking a motor break and walking around the classroom or building
- sitting, standing, or kneeling in class
- having a flexible work environment available

STUDENT PACE VS. ADULT PACE

Students should be instructed at their level and allowed flexibility with their pace of learning. However, this does not mean that a student can avoid work or be allowed to fall behind in a way that jeopardizes their success in life or their graduation. Traditional "factory" models of teaching are based on a "teacher pace." We look at each individual student and base instruction on what they need, when they need it. Evidence of learning (assignments, quizzes) are artifacts that are time based, which means there are due dates. Those due dates are flexible on a case by case basis.

PARENTS' RIGHT TO KNOW

Following the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, parents have the right to request information on teacher qualifications at any time and the Ecology Learning Center will provide that information. Parents also have the right to know what their children are being taught at the Center and they have the right to

request information concerning testing policies and procedures. Parents may contact the Head of School or Dean of Students any time for this information.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Before entering high school, students need to know the standards for receiving a high school diploma in order to plan an appropriate educational program to meet that goal.

The Ecology Learning Center follows a standards-based system of teaching and learning. To be awarded a high school diploma, students graduating will demonstrate competency in content areas to be ready to enter a post-secondary educational program or a career as a clear and effective communicator, a self-directed and life-long learner, a creative and practical problem solver, a responsible and involved citizen, and an informed and integrative thinker, by earning credits as defined in this document.

The Head of School, through the high school principal or other designee, shall be responsible for providing accurate information concerning graduation requirements to incoming students and their parents prior to the start of their ninth grade school year. A copy of this policy will be disseminated to all incoming ninth grade students at the time of course selection. This policy will also be included in every edition of the high school student handbook.

I. DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

The Ecology Learning Center administration, faculty, and staff will develop and apply a set of graduation standards and performance indicators that align with the content-area standards of the Maine Learning Results.

The student must successfully complete a total of twenty-four (24) credits. They are:

1. English/Language Arts – 4 credits, or the equivalent in standards achievement;
2. Mathematics – 3 credits, or the equivalent in standards achievement;
3. Social studies – 3 credits, or the equivalent in standards achievement;
4. Science – 3 credits, or the equivalent in standards achievement;
5. Wellness – 2 credits, or the equivalent in standards achievement;
6. Arts – 1 credit, or the equivalent in standards achievement;
7. World Languages - 1 (2 college prep) credit, or the equivalent in standards achievement;
8. Career Readiness - 2 credits, or the equivalent in standards achievement; and
9. Electives – 5 credits

Total Credits: 24

II. MULTIPLE PATHWAYS FOR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Students have the opportunity to choose from multiple pathways for educational opportunities and/or credits in order to gain and demonstrate competency in the required Maine Learning Results. In addition to taking courses offered by the Ecology Learning Center, a student may earn credits through non-traditional pathways. Examples of non-traditional classes include, but are not limited to:

- Early college/dual enrollment courses
- Career and technical education programming
- Online/virtual learning
- Apprenticeships, internships and/or field work
- Community Service
- Exchange programs
- Independent study
- Alternative education/“At Risk” programming
- Adult education

Each pathway must provide a quality learning experience comparable in rigor to the school unit’s own educational experience (course) offerings. If a student wishes to use one of these pathways, they must gain approval from the guidance department, content area learning leader, and Head of School.

III. STUDENTS RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

As specified by goals and objectives of their Individual Education Plan, students must meet the standards of the Maine Learning Results and students must satisfy graduation requirements in order to be awarded diplomas.

IV. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE AWARDING OF STANDARDS-BASED DIPLOMAS

- Transfer Students: For students who transfer to the Ecology Learning Center from another state or from an educational program that is not required to meet the content standards of the system of Learning Results, the Ecology Learning Center Head of School shall determine the value of the student’s prior educational

experience towards meeting graduation requirements.

- Home-schooled Students: For previously home-schooled students wishing to receive a diploma from the Ecology Learning Center, the Head of School shall determine the value of the student's prior educational experience toward meeting graduation credit requirements. A home-schooled student must be a full time student at the Ecology Learning Center for their senior year.
- Early Awarding of Diplomas: A student who has met the State's and the Board's diploma requirements in fewer than four years of high school may be awarded a diploma.
- Substitutions/exceptions: Any substitution or exception to the local course requirements for graduation will require the approval of the Head of School.
- Extended Study: Students are eligible for extended years of study to complete the requirements of a diploma if they have not reached the age of 20 at the start of the school year. Students eligible for extended years of study may be referred to adult education or other resources suitable to young learners. Extended study for students with disabilities shall be specified in the student's Individualized Education Plan.
- Participation in Graduation Ceremony: A student must complete all School Board requirements for a high school diploma in order to participate in graduation exercises.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

The calendar for the year is posted on our website, prior to the first day of school in the fall. Please check the calendar for regular school closings and vacations.

Professional Development Days: Several professional development days are set aside each year for work by teachers. Students do not attend school on these days.

Remote Learning Days: Several Remote Learning days are set aside on the calendar, aligned with RSU3's half days, to prepare students for unexpected school closures. Storm days will also be Remote Learning drill days and not have to be made up at the end of the school year.

The school day begins at 8:30 am and ends at 2:30 pm. Lunch is at 12:10.

DROP-OFF & PICK-UP

Students should arrive 10 minutes before the start of the instructional day, by 8:30 am. Students should be dropped off by their parents or carpool drivers at the front of the school building, but then walk to the back of the building to enter. Students not going to their usual destination when leaving school must bring a signed and dated note from a parent or guardian authorizing the change in destination. Phone, email, texting, and private messaging to the administrations are acceptable forms of notes, however, receiving this **prior to 2:00 pm is imperative**.

Student parking is located at the Unity Union Church, at the intersection of Depot and Main Streets.

VISITORS

Parents are encouraged to visit the school often and are always welcome in the classroom, but must check in at the office first. While phone calls in advance are appreciated and a professional courtesy, we also believe that you should always have access to your child and their learning environment. We ask that when you visit the Center, you respect the instructional time of the teachers and students. If visiting causes a disruption to learning, we will address those issues on a case by case basis. If you have a matter to address with a teacher, please find a mutually agreeable time to discuss the matter. During morning drop off or afternoon pick up may not be the best time.

Any parent or guardian who needs to pick up a child during the school day must first report to the office before the child can be released. Any other individual who may be picking up a student must be listed on that student's emergency card or parents must notify the school in advance if somebody else is picking their child up. This individual must have a photo ID ready to present to a school official. All visitors must check-in at the office when they first arrive.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS/DELAYS

The Ecology Learning Center will follow RSU 3's storm day closing and delay decisions. These decisions will be posted on RSU3's website, and also on the Ecology Learning Center's website. On storm closure days, students will complete school work remotely; storm days are remote learning days.

While RSU 3 and the Ecology Learning Center's Head of School make the decision based on the information available, it is ultimately up to the parent to make a decision whether they feel safe to send their child to school.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance is an essential requirement for academic and future employment success. A child must be in attendance at school for 3.5 or more hours to count as attending that day per the Maine Department of Education. Ideally parents need to let the office know prior to 8:30am if their child is going to be absent or arriving after 8:30 am. Students that are signed up for lunch and are absent will be charged for the meal, unless the office is notified prior to 8:30 am.

We are a very family friendly school that understands that learning is not time based. Learning takes place beyond our brick and mortar walls and "seat time" does not constitute learning time.

Learning experiences that occur in the classroom are meaningful and vital components of the educational process. Time lost from class, whether for legitimate reasons or due to truancy, is an irretrievable opportunity for instructional interaction. When students are away from school for extended periods of time for non-educational reasons, it becomes difficult for some to meet the educational standards of the Center. Requests for specific excused or extended leaves-of-absence from school need to be submitted in writing to the Head of School prior to the beginning of the leave. If your child receives Special Education Services, you are making the decision to forgo those services while your child is absent. Our school is based on a growth model, which means we need to make sure our students are making adequate growth from year to year.

While make-up assignments and reading may be done independently, many learning experiences (field studies, discussions, etc.) cannot be reproduced outside of the classroom. Thus, attendance and participation in specific class activities are important factors of academic achievement that may be taken into account along with other performance requirements when determining student progress towards graduation requirements. Students are expected to take responsibility for attending their classes, engaging in learning experiences in and out of class, and keeping their parents informed of any problems related to school attendance.

As long as a student is enrolled in the Center, the student's parents or legal guardians are responsible for their attendance and tardiness. Exceptions will be made only for students who have been legally emancipated by court decree or for any student who is eighteen years of age, living on their own and has prior approval from their parents and the Administration.

Excused Absences

The following absences are excused under State law:

1. Personal illness;
2. Observance of a recognized religious holiday when the observance is required during the regular school day;
3. An appointment with a health professional that must be made during the regular school day;
4. Family emergencies; or
5. A planned absence for personal or educational purpose which has been approved in advance by the administration. (See Planned Absence Form is at end of this handbook)

In addition, classes missed for the following reasons will be treated as present in school and excused from class:

6. In the case of a disabled student, a reason which the student's IEP or 504 Plan determines the absence is disability related;
7. Absence from class due to participation in a school-sponsored or approved trip or event; and
8. Serving a school-imposed disciplinary suspension.

Absence Reporting

The student's parent or guardian is expected to notify the school on the morning of an unplanned absence by 8:30 am. This notice should be sent to "attendance@ecologylearningcenter.org." If the guardian does not have internet access, they should call the school's land line at 207-948-3520 with the attendance notice. Any student who does not have a notice via email or phone by 9:45 am will receive a call home and be marked "absent unexcused" unless we are informed otherwise.

If this notification is not received, a written note must be received by the school within two (2) school days after the student's return. For illnesses longer than five (5) consecutive days, appropriate documentation from a physician will be required. For planned absences, a student's parent is expected to provide written notification in advance.

All parent notes must include the student's name, date(s) of the absence, the specific reason for the absence and the parent's signature. Failure to provide acceptable documentation or proper calls to the school office will cause the absence to be recorded as UNEXCUSED and any work missed during that period may be subject to consequences.

Make-up Work For Excessive Absences Or Truancy

The amount of time a student has to make up missed work due to an excused absence will be determined by the classroom teachers in a conference with the student. During this conference the teachers and student can discuss any deadlines and/or help sessions that may be needed to help the student successfully complete the work in the agreed upon timeframe. This conference should happen within the first two (2) days of the student's return from the absence.

The burden of responsibility for making up work is with the student. Work assignments and activities missed due to absences will be provided to the student. Hands on activities and discussions provide a relevant and rigorous learning opportunity and therefore cannot be replicated. Teachers will attempt to provide alternative independent learning opportunities. All excused absences, including absences due to disciplinary actions entitle the student to make up the work.

If a student has experienced hardships or extenuating circumstances that prevented them from being successful in a course due to attendance and missed assignments, they may be eligible to have an action plan created to help ensure their success. Administration, guidance, and teachers, in a conference with both student and parent, will develop such a plan in which additional accommodations and/or support can be implemented to ensure the student's completion of coursework. The student will be responsible for completing this plan.

RELEASING STUDENTS

For reasons of safety, students will be released only to parents, guardians, and persons listed on the emergency forms. Please provide the Center with documents about restraining orders or custody limitations. Notify the office if there is any concern that an individual with restricted access to the child might attempt to contact or pick up the child from school. We understand that parent schedules can change. If you would like your child to leave with someone else after school, please contact the office. Please make arrangements before school, to minimize phone calls during the day.

FIELD TRIPS AND CELEBRATIONS

Field Trips

At the Ecology Learning Center, we believe that learning extends beyond the four walls of the school. Field studies, internships, apprenticeships, volunteer work and other off campus learning opportunities are essential parts of our learning model. These experiences will be planned ahead of time so that families will always be aware of their student's activities and whereabouts. Parents/guardians will need to complete permission forms for all off campus activities. For recurring activities, such as weekly apprenticeships, only one permission form is needed.

The classroom teachers will provide the parents/guardians with a permission form that will include information:

- concerning the purpose and destination of the trip
- transportation, eating arrangements
- date and time of departure and return
- detailed itinerary when the field trip will extend beyond the school day
- written consent from parents/guardians authorizing the school to arrange for necessary medical treatment

Parents are encouraged to help out with field trips. If a parent chooses to drive their own child to an event, the child will be marked as absent during that period of time and will not be technically present until arriving at the field trip. Due to liability, parents who are not also employees should not be driving other students.

Celebrations

Celebrations throughout the year will occur with an emphasis on traditions of the family and friends of the Ecology Learning Center community. Respect for the diversity of our community is of the utmost importance.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Participating in our children's education and developing the strong sense of community that comes from working with others toward a common goal are central to the mission and vision of the Ecology Learning Center. Parents' active participation in the classroom, in school governance and other aspects of the school organization is vital to the challenging work of educating our children. The Ecology Learning Center is a parent participation school. By choosing to enroll your child, you are agreeing to participate in the work of the school and commit to support your child's education.

Honoring this commitment is the way members of the school community demonstrate their belief in the philosophy of the school and its education practices, as well as their understanding of the vital role they play in the school. The success of the Ecology Learning Center depends upon all families participating in the operation of the school. We encourage families to volunteer. It could be in the classroom, or serving on a committee, and/or performing a school support job.

When you volunteer at school-related events, you may sometimes be exposed to sensitive issues involving students and their families, including physical, emotional, academic and social/disciplinary challenges. Just as you would like adults who interact with your child to be sensitive to issues of confidentiality, we ask that you treat information about all students and families with great care. If you have particular concerns about children that stem from your observations during school activities, please consult that student's classroom teachers. Always refrain from inappropriate interactions with students and other parents that breach these confidentiality guidelines.

Parent-Initiated Communication

Ongoing parent-teacher communication is vital to your child's well-being. Simple questions and concerns may be addressed at drop-off and pick-up times. For more complex concerns, please leave a phone message, send a note with your child, or use email. Your child's teacher(s) should generally be the first person you contact.

Please do not expect to be able to come to school and have an in-depth talk with someone immediately unless it is very urgent. Teachers have many demands on their time, both before and after school. If you would like to discuss an issue, it is best to agree on a time for an appointment. This also ensures more privacy. Regular parent conferences are held in the fall, but please reach out sooner if you have questions or want information. Talking together about our children is one of the most important things we can do. With teamwork, we are more effective.

Friends of Ecology Learning Center

Friends of ELC is designed to assist the parents of the school in expressing their thoughts, ideas, support, and concerns to the greater school community, including the Center's Board of Directors. By facilitating

clear and consistent communication between parents and the governing body of the school, the Friends of ELC will help to serve the mission of the Center. The Friends of ELC will also serve the Center by supporting and facilitating school activities, celebrations, fundraising, and special events, in an effort to foster a strong sense of school community. There will be an opportunity for any parent to serve on a PTA committee. Meeting times and dates will be announced in the fall, and included in the yearly calendar. Parents are encouraged to attend those meetings.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Emergency Information Forms

It is very important that parents promptly return the Emergency Information forms so that school staff are aware of your child's medical information and know how to reach you during the school day. Please let us know whenever you have a change in address, telephone number, place of employment, or emergency contact person.

COVID-19

It is crucial to be aware of how our individual actions can affect the health and well-being of our communities and our ability to keep schools open for in-person learning.

The Ecology Learning Center provides in-person learning, Monday through Friday. If a student tests positive for Covid-19, they should stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days after the day they took the test, or from the day symptoms started (whichever was earlier). During this time they will do asynchronous remote learning. The Ecology Learning Center's ability to stay open depends on how well our towns do with following CDC and State guidelines for reducing community spread. Please do your part!

The Maine DOE recognizes the importance of a school's context in effectively implementing these guidelines and rightly leaves decisions about that implementation to the district. This means the Ecology Learning Center's implementation may look different than our neighboring districts' implementation. Key factors are:

- The Ecology Learning Center is a "small-by-design" school and is able to respond and adapt quickly and nimbly.
- The Ecology Learning Center serves students who reside in more than 30 different towns and 5 different counties (Waldo, Lincoln, Kennebec, Knox, Penobscot) and so has a unique mix of factors to consider if different counties are designated different colors by the Maine CDC or when towns have different infection totals and community spread rates.
- The Ecology Learning Center's curriculum is place-based and project-based, so facilitating learning outside the confines of the classroom walls is something we do well.

The Ecology Learning Center is committed to the support of every individual in our school community. We aim to build a strong, interdependent support system for students, families and faculty. This places us in a strong position to effectively respond to Covid-19.

Outside of School: Families are expected to do their part at home in safeguarding the health and well-being of the Ecology Learning Center community.

Staying Home: Students and staff will be required to stay home if they experience Covid-like symptoms. If symptoms are mild, they should complete remote learning assignments. If symptoms are moderate to severe, they should rest and consider calling a doctor. Students may return to school if they have not had a fever for 24 hours (without fever reducing medicine) AND symptoms are improving. If symptoms and fever are not improving, call your doctor.

If a student or staff member has been exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid, they should wear a high-quality face mask when around others at home and indoors in public for 10 days. During this time, they should monitor themselves for symptoms. Regardless of vaccination status, they do not need to quarantine.

Students who have been exposed to someone with Covid-like symptoms but who have not had a Covid test should be extra cautious with wearing a mask, washing hands and keeping a distance.

Sending Students Home: The Ecology Learning Center will contact parents/guardians to pick up students immediately who have symptoms while at school. Guidelines from above for “staying home” should then be followed.

Outdoors: The Ecology Learning Center will maximize outdoor learning and recreation time.

Symptoms Screening: We ask that parents take their student’s temperature before they leave home in the morning (a temperature higher than 100.4 degrees F requires the student to stay home). We will rely on parents to check symptoms each morning before sending students to school and report concerns via email to the Head of School. Staff members will self-report symptoms. [Student Self-Checker](#) [Staff Self-Checker](#)

Air Quality: We will ensure that our HVAC systems are working effectively to exchange air continuously, and keep the building windows open as weather permits.

Hand Washing: Students wash their hands with soap and water as they enter the school building, before and after using the bathroom, and before and after eating.

Cleaning Routines: Students will participate in cleaning the building throughout the school day using earth-friendly products. Clear protocols will be enforced for cleaning.

Immunizations

Each student shall present their immunization record certifying that they have received all required immunizations currently due, or shall present an exemption as allowable by law before they are admitted to the school.

Illness

Please keep your child home if they have:

- vomited and/or had diarrhea during the night or before school, or has not tolerated solid food
- a fever of 100 degrees or higher - temperature should be normal for 24 hours without medication before returning to school

- a sore throat with white spots, or accompanied by headache or fever
- a rash that cannot be identified
- Any contagious illness, such as but not limited to: strep throat, conjunctivitis (“pinkeye”), or impetigo: your child must be receiving antibiotic treatment for 24 hours before returning to school.
- lice: If your child has lice, or you suspect the occurrence of lice, please contact the school immediately. Once treatment has occurred, your child may return to school.

Medication

Any pupil who is required to take a medication prescribed by a licensed provider during the school day, shall be supervised in taking the medication by a school designee. The following regulations must be followed:

1. A written statement from the student’s doctor indicating the frequency, dosage, route of administration, duration and possible side effects of the medication must be provided.
2. A written statement from the parent requesting that school personnel give the medication.
3. Medication should be brought to school by the parent. In the event it is brought in by the student, then the parent will be contacted.
4. All medication must be received in the original labeled container.
Over-the-counter medications will only be administered by a parent or guardian, except in specific cases determined by the School Nurse or their designee.

Health Screenings

The Center will conduct health screenings, including vision, hearing and in some instances, height/weight in accordance with Maine State law and the Department of Education. Parents/guardians have the right to object to these screenings based on religious beliefs, unless a sight or hearing defect is reasonably apparent. To opt your child out, written notification must be provided to school administration within the first two weeks of school. Failure to notify the school will be considered consent to screenings. In addition, children who have received a comprehensive eye exam from an eye care provider within the previous 12 months do not need to have a vision screening. Parents/guardians are encouraged to notify the school in these instances and forward a copy of the results from this appointment for school records.

The results of a student's individual screenings will remain in the school file. It is important to recognize that these are not official exams. Should the screening indicate any abnormality, a report of the screening will be provided to you, recommending that a referral be made to a specialist. Arranging for a referral with a specialist is the responsibility of the parent/guardian. It is also the responsibility of the parent/guardian to notify the school should the specialist recommend any additional accommodations that need to be made for your child during school.

School Injury/Illness

Parents will be notified in the event of a student’s serious illness or injury. Please notify the school of any changes in your work or home phone numbers. If parents cannot be reached, the adults listed on the emergency contact form will be asked to pick up your student.

TRANSPORTATION

As a school of choice the Center has a large geographic catchment area and our goal is to provide transportation in as many areas as possible. We do not provide door to door busing, but rather have specific pick up and drop off locations in different areas. In the event that a door to door stop exists, it cannot be guaranteed to continue and is subject to change at any point in time. Bus stops are based on a variety of factors including enrollment, safety, and financial feasibility. Any of these factors can

influence if a bus stop location or time has to be created, moved or eliminated. In the event of a change in a stop, we will give parents a minimum of 48 hours notice. While we do our best to keep stops consistent from year to year and during the school year, it is important to understand that there is no guarantee that a stop will remain the same time or location.

SCHOOL BUS RULES AND CONSEQUENCES

A student's privilege to ride the school bus to and from school and on field trips is conditional to the observance of the following rules. Parents are responsible for supervision of their student until they board the bus in the morning and after disembarking after school. As a rule children will not be dropped off unless a parent or guardian is there to receive them, however, parents may give permission to have a student walk home or to get off without adult supervision. Any changes to pick up or drop off should be made in writing or by phone **no later than 2:30pm** to assure the student gets where they need to go.

Bus Rules

A student's privilege to ride the bus depends on obeying these rules and their behavior can result in disciplinary action including the loss of this privilege.

1. The driver is in charge of the bus and students. Students must obey the driver promptly and address them with respect.
2. When the bus is in motion, safety is paramount. This means that students must remain seated facing forward.
3. Standing, crawling, jumping seats and sitting backwards will not be tolerated.
4. Students will respect other students. They will keep their hands, feet, and objects to themselves. Any bullying, threatening behavior, or physical violence will not be tolerated and may result in immediate suspension from the bus.
5. Students need to respect the bus and its property.
6. Respectful and appropriate language must be used.
7. Board Policies may extend to the bus, including, but not limited to, tobacco use, bullying, harassment, and any violation of State or Federal laws.
8. Students that have an assigned seat must sit in that assigned seat.
9. Personal electronic devices are permitted on the bus as long as they are not disrupting others. Personal electronic devices cannot be used for taking pictures and/or accessing content that would not be allowed in a classroom. The bus driver has the right to inspect and check personal devices for appropriate content and students' privileges will be suspended on a case by case basis. Personal speakers are not allowed and headphones should be used when listening to audio/video content.

Bus Consequences

- First offense is a verbal warning given to the student.
- Second offense is a written warning that will be sent home and signed by the parent. The student will not be allowed to ride until the signed document is returned to the driver.
- Third offense is a suspension. Duration of suspension depends on the offense and is determined by *the administrator in consultation with the driver*.

DRESS CODE

At the Ecology Learning Center, we value student exploration of their identities with the goal of fostering growth into becoming positive adults and healthy human beings. We strive to honor and affirm the identities of students who belong to groups that have been historically oppressed, marginalized, or mistreated. Learning about and redressing the wrongs that social groups have suffered is part of how our students learn to engage with the challenges of today and tomorrow. We aim to affirm the identities of all kinds of people.

CLOTHING

To support students being positive, healthy human beings, the Ecology Learning Center does not allow students to wear:

- Culturally insensitive clothing or regalia
- Clothing that is associated with adult or pornographic topics
- Clothing that is provocative, inflammatory, or unprofessional
- Clothing which is overly revealing and / or is beach wear
- Non-human objects including tails and ears
- Clothing, hair, or accessories that obscure students' faces from teachers and peers.
- Clothing and/or accessories that advertise or imply alcoholic beverages, cannabis, tobacco, illegal substances or inappropriate messages

Students at the Ecology Learning Center are expected to wear comfortable and functional clothing and shoes that are appropriate for a broad range of school activities, indoors and out, including science labs, outdoor and experiential education, games, and movement. Students' clothing must protect them from the elements – cold, rain, snow, mud, wind, and hot sun.

Students who are not dressed according to the dress code will be asked to change their clothing. They may need to call their parent or guardian for a change of clothes, or the school will do our best to provide a change of clothing.

SHOES

Shoes need to be suited to a wide variety of activities that students may participate in throughout the day. Students should understand the risk presented by wearing platforms, backless clogs, high heels, or flip-flops while running and playing. Also, in order to cut down on the amount of mud and dirt that is brought into the classroom, students will be encouraged to have a change of shoes/slippers with hard soles that can be left at school. Part of our curriculum is based on social responsibility and our students can help with the maintenance of keeping a clean school by doing their part. Having inside shoes will make that task easier.

ITEMS FROM HOME

We encourage students to leave money, toys, electronic games, cell phones and other personal belongings at home. However, we recognize that these items can be important for a student so while we do not encourage them, we do not prohibit bringing them either. Students need to learn when and how to use these items appropriately; use cannot interfere with the functions of the school or with the learning and safety of any other student. Some items from home cannot be exclusive, meaning a student cannot bring a frisbee and determine who will and who will not play. Items from home cannot be used as currency or trading. The school is not responsible for lost, stolen, or broken personal items.

CELL PHONE & ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY

Students may not use a cell phone or personal electronic device during school hours, between 8:30 am and 2:30 pm unless a teacher specifically requests that students use their cell phone or device for instructional purposes. If a student brings a cell phone or device to school, the phone or device must remain completely off and out of sight during school hours. If a parent needs to contact their student during the day, they will need to call the school. We recognize that there are certain circumstances when a student may need to use their cell phone, which is only allowable if permission is granted by the school. The school is not responsible for lost or damaged belongings. The head of school's office is available to store devices during the day if there is a concern about losing the device.

Consequences for violating cell phone policy daily

- First offense - reminder to put away phone or device.
- Second offense - phone or device is taken from the student and put in the head of school's office where it can be picked up at the end of the day by the student.
- Third offense - phone or device is taken away and stored in the head of school's office during school hours for the remainder of the trimester. Repeated offenses may require a guardian to come to the school to pick up the phone or device.

Students who are uncomfortable keeping their phones or devices in their lockers may keep them on their person between classes but they must place the phone or device in a receptacle provided by the teacher at the beginning of each class.

Personal electronic devices cannot be used for taking pictures and/or accessing content that would not be allowed in a classroom. The school has the right to inspect and check school-issued devices for appropriate content.

These rules also apply to tablets, Kindles, iPods, smart watches or any other electronic device for which use may be disruptive to other students, teachers, or the learning environment.

STUDENT COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE

The Center's computers, iPads, Chromebooks, network, and Internet access are provided to support the educational mission of the school and to enhance the curriculum and learning opportunities for students and school staff.

Student use of school computers, iPads, Chromebooks networks and Internet services is a privilege, not a right. School internet is to be utilized by campus issued devices only, and not by any privately owned devices (smart watches, cell phones etc.). Compliance with the school unit's policies and rules concerning computer use is mandatory. Students who violate these policies and rules may have their computer privileges limited, suspended, or revoked. Such violations may also result in disciplinary action, referral to law enforcement, and/or legal action.

The Center's computers remain under the control, custody, and supervision of the school unit at all times. The school unit monitors all computer and Internet activity by students. Students have no expectation of privacy in their use of school computers and the use of personal laptops on school networks.

The Center utilizes filtering technology designed to block materials that are obscene or harmful to minors, including but not limited to child pornography. The Center takes precautions to supervise

student use of the Internet, but parents should be aware that the Center cannot reasonably prevent all instances of inappropriate computer use by students in violation of board policies and rules, including access to objectionable materials and communication with persons outside of the school. The school will maintain a track of students with assignments that require school devices to be sent home. The school is not responsible for the accuracy or quality of information that students obtain through the internet. The school is not liable for any unlawful online use of any student.

Students and parents shall be informed of this policy and the accompanying rules through handbooks, the school website, and/or other means selected by the Head of School. The Head of School is responsible for implementing this policy and the accompanying rules. Additional administrative procedures or school rules governing the day-to-day management and operations of the school unit's computer system may be implemented, consistent with board policies and rules.

STAFF LIMITED USE OF RECORDING DEVICES

Staff and administrators may use audio and/or videotape for legitimate educational or administrative purposes, including but not necessarily limited to:

- evaluating student and/or staff performance;
- developing student or staff skills through self assessment;
- accommodating the needs of students or staff with disabilities; or
- other professional development opportunities.

Students may video for instructional purposes under the supervision of staff.

Video or audio tape recordings of students' instructional programs or activities are confidential student records protected under FERPA. Staff is prohibited from the use of audio and/or video recording of meetings, conferences, or personal conversations without the consent of all parties. Where parent-staff conversations may be recorded with one party consent, staff must notify the Head of School. Disclosing the content of any electronic recording of in-person communication without the consent of all parties could lead to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

STUDENTS AND PARENTS LIMITED USE OF RECORDING DEVICES

Students may use audio and/or videotape recording for legitimate educational or instructional purposes under the supervision of staff. Students are not able to upload, post, or share audio, video, or photos without permission from staff.

Video or audio tape recordings of students' instructional programs or activities are confidential student records protected under FERPA. Students and parents are prohibited from the use of audio and/or video recording meetings, conferences, or personal conversations without the consent of all parties.

Parents shall be permitted to audio record any IEP meeting regarding their student at their own expense. Schools may also audio record (or video record for families who are deaf or hard of hearing) IEP Meetings in which case the recording becomes an educational record subject to the provisions of Chapter 101 under M.U.S.E.R.

HARASSMENT POLICY

Harassment of students because of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, ancestry or national origin, or disability is prohibited. Such conduct is a violation of Board policy and may constitute illegal discrimination under state and federal laws. The term “sexual orientation” under state law means a person’s “actual or perceived heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality or gender identity or expression.”

Harassment

Harassment includes but is not limited to verbal abuse based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, ancestry or national origin, or disability. Harassment that rises to the level of physical assault, battery and/or abuse and bullying behavior are also addressed in the Board policy JICIA - Weapons, Violence, Bullying and School Safety and JICK – Bullying.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes but is not limited to unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or pressure to engage in sexual activity, physical contact of a sexual nature, gestures, comments, or other physical, written or verbal conduct that is gender-based that interferes with a student’s education. School employees, fellow students, volunteers and visitors to the school, and other persons with whom students may interact in order to pursue school activities are required to refrain from such conduct. Harassment/sexual harassment of students by school employees is considered grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.

Harassment/sexual harassment of students by other students is considered grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion. The Superintendent will determine appropriate sanctions for harassment of students by persons other than school employees and students.

The Head of School or the employee designated as the Affirmative Action will investigate complaints of harassment in accordance with the Student Harassment Complaint Procedure. School employees, students, and parents shall be informed of this policy/procedure through handbooks and/or other means selected by the school administration.

HAZING

Maine statute defines injurious hazing as “any action or situation, including harassing behavior, that recklessly or intentionally endangers the mental or physical health of any school personnel or a student enrolled in a public school.”

Injurious hazing activities of any type, either on or off school property, by any student, staff member, group or organization affiliated with this school unit, are inconsistent with the educational process and shall be prohibited at all times.

“Harassing behavior” includes acts of intimidation and any other conduct that recklessly or intentionally endangers the mental or physical health of a student or staff member.

“Acts of intimidation” include extortion, menacing, direct or indirect threats of violence, incidents of violence, bullying, statements or taunting of a malicious and/or derogatory nature that recklessly or intentionally endanger the mental or physical health of another person, and property damage or theft.

No administrator, faculty member, or other employee of the school unit shall encourage, permit, condone, or tolerate injurious hazing activities. No student, including leaders of students’ organizations, shall plan, encourage, or engage in injurious hazing activities.

Students who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action which may include suspension, expulsion, or other appropriate measures. Administrators, professional staff, and all other employees who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

In the case of an organization affiliated with this school unit that authorizes hazing, penalties may include rescission of permission for that organization to operate on school property or to receive any other benefit of affiliation with the school unit.

Persons not associated with this school unit who fail to abide by this policy may be subject to ejection from school property and/or other measures as may be available under the law.

These penalties shall be in addition to any civil or criminal penalties to which the violator or organization may be subject.

The Head of School/designee shall be responsible for administering this policy. In the event that an individual or organization disagrees with an action—or lack of action—on the part of the Head of School/designee as they carry out the provisions of this policy, that individual or organization may appeal to the Board of Directors. The ruling of the Board of Directors with respect to the provisions of this policy shall be final.

This right to appeal does not apply to student suspensions of 10 days or less or to matters submitted to grievance procedures under applicable collective bargaining agreements.

A copy of this policy shall be included in all school, parent, and faculty handbooks or otherwise distributed to all school employees and students.

The Head of School may develop administrative regulations necessary to implement this policy.

SUBSTANCE USE POLICY

School Nutrition and Snacks

Healthy eating is an important goal at the Center. It is also a goal for students to learn to regulate their own bodies in healthy ways. The Center serves free breakfast at 8:30 am and free lunch at 12:10 pm. The Center encourages students to bring healthy snacks from home, but to limit the consumption of these snacks to the time between classes and during lunch, and not during class.

The purpose of the following administrative procedure is to state the mandates imposed by the various federal and state laws in addition to the Board’s “Drug & Alcohol Use By Students” policy (JICH). For the purpose of this policy these are the definitions of Smoking and Tobacco: “Smoking” means inhaling, exhaling, burning or carrying any lighted or heated cigar, cigarette, pipe or joint, or any other lighted or heated tobacco or plant product intended for inhalation, including hookahs, whether natural or synthetic

in any manner or in any form. "Smoking" also includes the use of an electronic smoking device which creates an aerosol or vapor, in any manner or in any form, or the use of any oral smoking device for the purpose of circumventing the prohibition of smoking in this policy. "Tobacco" is defined as all tobacco-derived or containing products, including but not limited to, cigarettes, cigars, little cigars, cigarillos, bidis, kreteks; all smokeless and dissolvable tobacco products, including but not limited to, dip, spit/spit-less, chew, snuff, snus, and nasal tobacco; and any product intended to mimic tobacco, containing tobacco flavoring or delivering nicotine, including but not limited to, electronic nicotine delivery systems, e-cigarettes, e-cigars, e-hookahs, vape pen or any other product name or descriptor. Or the use of any other type of tobacco or nicotine product for the purpose of circumventing the prohibition of tobacco in this policy. This does not include products specifically approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the purpose of cessation or nicotine replacement therapy.

I. PROHIBITED CONDUCT

A. Students

The use, possession, sale, dispensing or distribution of tobacco products by all students is prohibited in school buildings and facilities, during school sponsored events, including field trips, on school grounds and buses, and at any other time when a student is under the supervision of the Center or its staff. The display or wearing of any type of tobacco promotion materials is also prohibited.

B. Employees and All Other Persons

The use of tobacco products and substances by employees and all other persons is prohibited in school buildings, facilities and on school buses, and during school sponsored events and at all other times on school grounds. In addition, employees and all other persons are strictly prohibited, under law and this board's policy/administrative procedure, from selling, dispensing or distributing tobacco products to students.

II. ENFORCEMENT

In order to enforce the "Drug & Alcohol Use By Students" policy, the following guidelines shall be utilized. Staff shall report any violations of this policy/procedure, as promptly as practicable, to the Head of School. Students are encouraged to uphold these community standards and report incidents to staff members. Any tobacco or other substances will be confiscated immediately and not returned.

Based upon the facts of each case and in accordance with established disciplinary procedure, the Head of School will suspend students who violate this policy and discuss appropriate next steps with the Dean of Students up to and including an expulsion hearing for the first offense. Second offense goes to the Board for an expulsion hearing from school. Students will also be referred to law enforcement authorities for investigation and/or prosecution.

Research indicates that many individuals who abuse substances begin developing these unhealthy patterns of behavior as adolescents. Intervening with students who are using substances provides an opportunity for education, treatment, and support. In addition to disciplinary responses, policies encourage student support, intervention and/or treatment. This may include encouraging the use of diversion programs; identifying local community referrals and youth treatment programs; and providing staff training and education.

A. Differentiated Levels of Violation

1. Suspected of using alcohol or other drugs at school, or at school-sponsored events

2. Found in possession of alcohol or other drugs at school, or at school-sponsored events.
3. Found using alcohol or other drugs at school, or at school-sponsored events.
4. Selling or distributing alcohol or other drugs at school, or at school-sponsored events.

B. Other Persons in Violation

All other persons violating this policy (employees, visitors, etc) shall be immediately directed to cease violative behavior. This includes non- school hours and all functions of the school, athletics or otherwise. This also includes other organizations using school property. In addition, all persons suspected of selling, distributing or in any way dispensing tobacco products to students shall be referred to a law enforcement agency. If the visitor does not comply, they will be asked to leave. If they refuse to leave, the police may be called.

III. NOTICES The Board's "Drug & Alcohol Use By Students" policy and corresponding disciplinary actions for infractions is cited in the Student / Family handbook each year.

KNIFE POLICY

Students may carry a pocket knife as a tool; this is considered to be a folding knife, with a blade no longer than 2.75 inches in length. Fixed blade knives and folding knives with blades longer than 2.75 inches are not permitted.

If a student has brought or is found using a knife not permitted by the school, or using any knife in an inappropriate manner, the knife will be confiscated and put aside until it is picked up by the student's parent or guardian, and the student will attend a Restorative Justice circle if needed. The results of the circle will dictate the student's future knife usage at the school.

Students who inadvertently bring a knife to school that is not permitted may turn it in first thing in the morning, without repercussions, to be picked up when they leave at the end of the day.

Students riding RSU3 school buses must follow the district's policies, which is that knives (of any size or design) are not allowed on the bus..

DISCIPLINE POLICY

Student Code of Conduct (See Appendix A)

The Ecology Learning Center Code of Conduct is a living document that is created with student and staff input at the beginning of each school year. Following its adoption, a copy will be sent home with each student so that families are aware of the expectations of behavior at school and during all school sponsored events. The Ecology Learning Center is unique in that we are a school of choice. Having chosen to be part of our community, parents are expected to work actively with their children and the school to help the student master the skills necessary to be a respectful contributor to the school community. Conflict resolution is an important part of this collaboration. In all disciplinary situations, students' rights are protected, and no individual student's behavior or consequences are discussed with anyone who is not the parent or legal guardian, except for those school staff who need to understand the issue.

Positive Behavior Recognition

Recognition of positive behavior is important. We will be celebrating positive behavior in different ways and recognizing students that meet or exceed our behavioral expectations.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY

At the Ecology Learning Center, we believe that every member of our community is valuable. Like a diverse ecosystem, it is the differences between us that help us to grow and adapt to new challenges. This is true even when our differences cause conflict. This Conflict Resolution Policy follows the model of Restorative Justice. The policy is set up to ensure that even when we have conflicts in our school community, we never lose sight of the value that each person brings.

WHAT?

Restorative Justice is a movement around the world that is used by law enforcement and schools to deal with problems that happen in the community. When a crime or a conflict happens, Restorative Justice asks questions. Who was harmed? Who caused the harm? What can that person do to make it better? How can we all, as a community, learn, and make sure this kind of harm doesn't happen again? Educators will meet as needed to understand the steps taken to make wrongs right as well as understand action steps taken.

This curiosity will inform our response and actions: Restorative practices cultivate a community of belonging in which every member— students, teachers, parent volunteers, and supporting members—feel that they are seen, heard, and respected. Instead of punishment, students are encouraged to reflect on and take responsibility for their actions to come up with plans to repair harm.

Traditional Approach	Restorative Approach
School rules are broken.	People and relationships are harmed.
Justice focuses on establishing guilt.	Justice identifies needs and responsibility.
Accountability = punishment.	Accountability = understanding impact and repairing harm.
Justice directed at the offender; the victim is ignored.	Offender, victim, and school all have direct roles in the justice process.
Rules and intent outweigh whether outcome is positive or negative.	Offender is responsible for harmful behavior, repairing harm, and working toward positive outcomes.
Limited opportunity for expressing remorse or making amends.	Opportunity given to make amends and express remorse.

WHO?

At the Center, we will do this through Restorative Meetings between the person (or people) who was harmed, the person (or people) who caused the harm, and a group of mediators who have been trained in the Restorative Justice Process.

HOW?

At the beginning of every school year, the whole school community will agree on a Community Code of Conduct. A "conflict" happens when someone in the school does something that goes against the Community Code of Conduct. When a conflict happens, the Center will follow these steps:

1. A student reports a conflict to a staff member, or a staff member sees a conflict happening. Some conflicts - physical harm, possession of illicit substances, or possession of guns or other weapons - are illegal, and the Center is required by law to suspend or expel the student. These are *non-discretionary causes for suspension and/or expulsion*. Other conflicts, including sexual harassment, bullying, or threats are *discretionary causes for suspension and/or expulsion*. If this happens, it is up to the Head of School or team to decide if the student needs to be suspended or expelled. In both discretionary and non-discretionary cases, the student can appeal the suspension or expulsion to the board of directors. Until the board makes a decision, the student must stay out of school. If a student is suspended, they need to complete a Restorative Meeting before they can come back to school. If a student is expelled, they can participate in a Restorative Meeting if they would like, but it is not required. Some conflicts don't end up in suspension or expulsion, but they are still conflicts. These conflicts will be dealt with through a Restorative Meeting during school.
2. After a conflict is reported, a Restorative Meeting will be planned. This Meeting will happen within five (5) school days of the conflict being reported, or before a student returns from suspension. The Meeting will involve the person (or people) who was harmed, the person (or people) who caused the harm, and at least two mediators. Those mediators could be any of these people: the Head of School, a board member, a teacher, a staff member, or a student peer counselor. Anyone in the meeting who has the role of mediator will have training in Restorative Justice practices. Any student can also have a parent or guardian with them during the meeting.
3. Each Meeting will be different, but the goals are always the same. The goals are: for the person who caused the harm to take responsibility for their actions and the consequences; for the person who was harmed to say what they need in order to move on and feel safe in the community; for the whole community to better understand what causes conflicts so we can all grow. After each Meeting, everyone will agree on a plan for how to resolve the conflict and meet the goals of the Restorative process.
4. If any person involved in a conflict does not agree with the plan that is made during the Restorative Meeting, they can appeal the decision. First they need to appeal to the Head of School. The Head of School will review the plan and decide whether or not to make changes to it. If this decision is not agreed to, the next step is to appeal to the board of directors. The board will make a decision at their next scheduled meeting. This decision will be final.
5. If a student's IEP or 504 plan does not allow them to participate in these Restorative Meetings for any reason, the IEP or 504 plan will include an alternative conflict resolution process.
6. For more details about causes for suspension and/or expulsion, the process of suspension and expulsion, appeals, and safeguards against discrimination, please ask the office for a copy of the Student Discipline Policy.

When the behavior of a student presents a risk of injury or harm to the student or others, a trained staff member may use physical restraint and seclusion with the student as an emergency intervention to support a safe school environment. The staff member will follow standards defined and explained in the Ecology Learning Center's Board policy "Use of Physical Restraint and Seclusion" (JKAA).

Three Levels of Response to Student Misbehavior

The three levels described below reflect that consistent adult responses to low-level challenging behaviors produce a positive school climate in which more serious infractions will be infrequent.

LEVEL 1

Student Behavior	Possible Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Off task behavior(s) *Minor to moderate disruption *Inappropriate verbal interactions *Non-responsive to teacher direction *Inattention to classroom work *Unprepared for class *Tardy to class *Wandering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Appropriate apology *In/out of class break *Verbal behavior plan *Loss of privileges *Parent notification/involvement *Behavior reflected in Social Emotional Learning grade

LEVEL 2

Student Behavior	Possible Responses	Automatic Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Any Level 1 behaviors continue unabated during one class or over a period of classes. *Student behavior causes a major disruption to others' learning or safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Development of individual behavior plan with teacher and advisor *Loss of privileges *Behavior reflected in Social Emotional Learning grade *Meeting with Head of School *School community service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Appropriate apology *Parent, Advisor and Administrator Notification *Restitution *Consideration for alternative educational programming

LEVEL 3

Student Behavior	Administrative Actions	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Chronic violation of school or classroom rules *Verbal aggressions or threats *Possession, use or sale of alcohol/drugs or paraphernalia *Damage to school or community property *Physical altercations or assault *Weapons possession or use *Harassment *Theft/Forgery *Civil rights violations *Plagiarism *False alarms 	<p><u>Automatic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ensure the accused student "due process," hearing their perspective as well as gathering information and evidence from all relevant parties. <p><u>Possible</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Meeting with Head of School *Refer for functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plan *Participate in any parent conferences and re-entry circles 	<p><u>Automatic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Appropriate apology *Meeting with Parent/Guardian, Advisor and Head of School *Restitution <p><u>Possible</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Interagency referral such as Youth Court, substance abuse counselor or community service *Restorative Justice Circle with victim(s) *In school suspension *Out of school suspension *School community service *Consideration for alternative educational programming *Recommendation for expulsion *Notify Police

Respect for Diversity

Our community is fortunate to include people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Students have the opportunity to learn from their peers – and that opportunity extends to matters of language, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, disabilities, socio economic status, and cultural traditions. Students are expected to offer the same kind of respect they deserve to receive from others - and will face disciplinary consequences if they fail to do so.

Students should be aware that colleges routinely require schools to report if a student has had any suspensions as a part of the college application process.

Bullying Statement

It is the intent of the Ecology Learning Center Board of Directors to provide all students with an equitable opportunity to learn. To that end, the Center has a significant interest in providing a safe, orderly and respectful school environment that is conducive to teaching and learning.

Bullying is detrimental to student learning and achievement. It interferes with the mission of the school to educate our students and disrupts the operations of the school. Bullying affects not only students who are targets but also those who participate and witness such behavior. Additionally—racism, sexism, homophobia, and cultural intolerance are not acceptable behavior within our learning community.

The board believes that promoting ethical and responsible behavior is an essential part of the school's educational purpose. Ethics, responsible behavior and "character" are important if a student is to leave school as a "compassionate and resilient leader" as described in our mission. Bullying interferes with the accomplishment of this goal.

It is not the board's intent to prohibit students from expressing their ideas, including ideas that may offend the sensibilities of others, or from engaging in civil debate. However, the board does not condone and will take action in response to conduct that interferes with students' opportunity to learn, the educational mission of the Center, and the operation of the school.

Bullying Prohibited

Bullying, as defined in this policy, is not acceptable conduct at the Ecology Learning Center and is prohibited. Any student who engages in conduct that constitutes bullying shall be subject to disciplinary consequences up to and including suspension and expulsion. A student's bullying behavior may also be addressed through other behavioral interventions. Students will be provided opportunities to develop empathy, understand truths, and find intrinsic motivation to move forward with a healthy understanding of the world and themselves. Students must be willing to approach such opportunities with an open mindset and participate with a shared sense of purpose of a safe school community and culture.

Bullying Defined

For the purpose of this policy, “bullying” means any physical act or gesture or any verbally, written, or electronically communicated expression that:

- A. A reasonable person should expect will have the effect of:
 - 1. Physically harming a student or damaging a student’s property;
 - 2. Placing a student in reasonable fear of physical harm or damage to their property; or
 - 3. Substantially disrupting the instructional program or the orderly operations of the school; or
- B. Is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, hostile educational environment for the student who is bullied.

Application of Bullying Policy

This policy applies to bullying that takes place at school or on school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity or event, or while students are being transported to or from school or school-sponsored activities or events. It also applies to bullying that occurs at any other time or place that substantially disrupts the instructional program, operations of the school, or welfare of students. This includes online bullying between students of the Center.

Examples of conduct that may constitute bullying include, but are not limited to:

- A. Physical contact or injury to another person or their property;
- B. Threats of harm to a student, to their possessions, or to other individuals, whether transmitted verbally, in writing, or through cyberspace;
- C. Blackmail, extortion, demands for protection money, or involuntary loans or donations;
- D. Non-verbal threats and/or intimidations such as use of aggressive or menacing gestures;
- E. Stalking;
- F. Blocking access to school property or facilities;
- G. Stealing or hiding books, backpacks, or other possessions;
- H. Repeated or pervasive taunting, name-calling, belittling, mocking, put-downs, or demeaning humor relating to a student’s race, socioeconomic status, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ancestry, religion, disability, or other personal characteristics, whether or not the student actually possesses them, that could reasonably be expected to result in disruption of the instructional program or operations of the schools, or that results in a hostile educational environment for the student.
- I. Posting or sharing via social media, text message or other electronic media any comments, photos, video or audio recordings of any student which may have the effect of creating an intimidating or hostile educational environment for the student.

For the purpose of this policy, bullying does not mean mere teasing, put-downs, “talking trash,” trading of insults, or similar interactions among friends, nor does it include expression of ideas or beliefs so long as such expression is not lewd, profane, or does not interfere with students’ opportunity to learn, the instructional program, or the operations of the schools. This does not preclude teachers or school administrators from setting and enforcing rules for civility, courtesy, and/or responsible behavior in the classroom and the school environment.

The determination whether particular conduct constitutes bullying requires reasonable consideration of the circumstances, which include the frequency of the behavior at issue, the location in which the behavior occurs, the ages and maturity of the students involved, the activity or context in which the conduct occurs, and the nature and severity of the conduct.

Delegation of Responsibility

The administration will be responsible for developing and implementing procedures for:

- A. Student and parent reporting of bullying to staff and school administrators;
- B. Staff reporting of bullying to school administrators;
- C. Review of reports and investigation of bullying incidents;
- D. Intervention with and/or discipline of students who engage in bullying;
- E. Support for students who are victims of bullying;
- F. Training staff and students in bullying prevention; and
- G. Periodic evaluation of bullying prevention, intervention, and training efforts and reporting to the board upon request.

Reporting

Students who have been bullied or who observe incidents of bullying are encouraged to report this behavior to a staff member or school administrator. Staff should report bullying to the Head of School. Acts of reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an incident of bullying are prohibited. Any student who is determined to have falsely accused another of bullying shall be subject to disciplinary consequences.

Responding to Bullying

In determining the appropriate response to students who engage in bullying behavior, school administrators should consider the ages and maturity of the students involved, the type of behaviors, the frequency and/or pattern of behaviors, the context in which the incident occurred, and other relevant circumstances. Consequences may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension, expulsion, and/or reports to law enforcement officials.

RESTITUTION FOR DISTRICT PROPERTY WHICH HAS BEEN LOST, STOLEN, DAMAGED OR DESTROYED

It shall be the policy of the Center to collect the replacement cost of any school property which is lost, stolen, damaged or destroyed by a student or students. Students will be charged for any item which is stolen or willfully destroyed and/or damage and breakage which results from carelessness, neglect, or misconduct. The Center will not seek restitution for normal wear or for accidental damage or breakage. The policy will be administered in the following manner:

1. Employees will report any lost, stolen, damaged or destroyed items to the office and the name of the student(s) responsible;
2. A report including a bill will be mailed to the parents/guardians of the student(s). The bill will include the following cost as appropriate: replacement, parts or components, materials, labor, postage/shipping and handling.
3. The Center will make reasonable efforts to collect amounts due and if reimbursement is not forthcoming within a reasonable time damage to school property may be recovered in a civil action to obtain the permitted "double the damage" of costs of lost, destroyed or damaged school books and instructional appliances.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Bomb Threats

The board recognizes that bomb threats are a significant concern. Whether real and carried out or intended as a prank or for some other purpose, a bomb threat represents a potential danger to the safety and welfare of students and staff and to the integrity of school property. Bomb threats disrupt the instructional program and learning environment and also place significant demands on school financial resources and public safety services. These effects occur even when such threats prove to be false.

Making a bomb threat is a crime under Maine law. Any student suspected of making a bomb threat shall be reported to law enforcement authorities for investigation and possible prosecution. Apart from any penalty imposed by law, and without regard to the existence or status of criminal charges, a student who makes a bomb threat shall be subject to disciplinary action by the school. The administration may suspend and/or recommend for expulsion any student who makes a bomb threat.

Emergency Management Preparedness

In the event of an emergency the Ecology Learning Center is taking steps to be able to respond in a way that would protect students and staff in as comprehensive a way as possible. The Center's personnel are working diligently on planning, preparing and practicing emergency procedures. An emergency is any situation that would require the schools to respond in a way to protect students and staff from potential danger. Emergencies can be caused by many sources:

- Natural hazards - such as weather related or environmental hazards
- Technological hazards - such as power lines
- Man-made hazards - such as dams, highways, school violence, terrorism

All emergencies require specific actions to be taken. These actions come down to practicing basic drills. Schools practice these drills periodically throughout the school year, in addition to fire drills. A list of emergency numbers are posted by each phone in the building.

Two Basic Drills

1. Evacuation - *When all students and staff need to exit the building.* The Center will hold two fire drills during the first two weeks of school and an additional eight fire drills during the year. Results shall be recorded and deficiencies noted and corrected. Fire officials will be notified by the head of school before each drill. Staff members will receive an annual orientation to this procedure, and the fire drill procedure will be prominently displayed in each classroom. At the beginning of each school year, the principal will ensure that each teacher acquaints the students under their care with the designated evacuation routes.
2. Secure Building (Lock In or Lock Down) - *When all students and staff need to stay in rooms.* The Center will hold one lockdown drill during the first full week of school and a minimum of one additional drill during the year.

Emergency Plan & Evacuation Procedure

The Ecology Learning Center recognizes that staff and students must be prepared to respond quickly and responsibly to emergencies, disasters, and threats of disaster.

Evacuation Instructions

The board shall grant the use of the school building, grounds, and equipment to public agencies, including the American Red Cross, for mass care and welfare shelters during disasters or other emergencies affecting the public health and welfare. The board shall cooperate with such agencies in furnishing and maintaining whatever services they deem necessary to meet the community's needs.

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Planned Absence Form

Planned absence for personal or educational purpose, approved in advance by the administration.

Student:

Please fill out this form with your parents and teachers before submitting it to the office. This form should be submitted **at least one week** prior to the intended absence.

Student:		Dates:	
Reason:			

STAFF:

The above-named student will be absent for the dates listed. Please indicate below your acknowledgment of this absence and any relevant comments, concerns, or acknowledgement of work that you will provide.

Class	What is your plan to get your assignments?	Date you will have work turned in by:	Teacher signature

I, _____ (parent signature), understand the potential impact on my child's education and take full responsibility for this decision.

I, _____ (student signature), understand that I am still responsible for turning in work for all classes during the time that I missed, due on the agreed dates above.

My child DOES _____ or DOES NOT _____ receive special education services. IF they receive Special Education Services, I also acknowledge that my child won't receive IEP services during this absence.

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APPENDIX A: CODE OF CONDUCT 2024-2025

A “living document” agreed upon by all students September 2024.

- Embrace challenges and work to reach your goals.
- Assume positive intent in others and work to be “solution-minded”.
- Respect for our community partners, academics, environment, others, and ourselves
- Work towards being helpful, patient, curious, resilient, flexible, and understanding.

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STUDENT & FAMILY HANDBOOK 2024-2025

SIGNATURE OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & AGREEMENT

By signing below, or completing this [online form](#), we acknowledge that we have received a copy of the Student and Family Handbook and that we understand the contents within.

By signing below we also agree to the Code of Conduct.

Student Printed Name			
Student Signature		Date	

Guardian Printed Name			
Guardian Signature		Date	

PLEASE RETURN THIS ONE PAGE TO THE SCHOOL OFFICE.