



PA Distance Learning  
CHARTER SCHOOL

# Parent/Student Handbook

2023-2024

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School  
2605 Nicholson Road, Building 4100  
Sewickley, PA 15143

Main Toll-Free Phone Number 1.888.997.3352

Enrollment – press 1

Technical Support – press 2

Counselors – press 3

Attendance – press 4

Special Education – press 5

Records – press 6

Testing – press 7

Shipping, School Materials – press 8

Internet Reimbursement and FLEx Funds – Press 9

For other inquiries – press 0

Administration –

Homeless Liaison – ext. 137

Foster Care Liaison – ext. 114

Right to Know Officer – ext. 163

Title IX (Office of Civil Rights) – ext. 230

School Safety & Security Coordinator – ext. 109

Main Toll-Free Fax Number 1.866.977.3527

Dear Families,

Welcome to our Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School family! Congratulations on making a choice to be actively involved daily in your scholar's education through our fully online public cyber charter school. Our blended learning model provides online live class time with teachers, and peers, as well as parent facilitated lesson time throughout the 5 – 5.5 hours per day of school. We value the opportunity to partner with you in providing your scholar a supportive learning environment. Participating in our parent and student orientation sessions sets the stage for success throughout the school year. We are confident that your decision to enroll in Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School is because you are seeking to be involved in the day-to-day public education of your scholars. Our service mission is to create a collaborative learning environment between home and school for all students to academically grow. Thank you for selecting our school to be a part of your child's academic experience. Welcome!

Teachers, Administration, and Support Staff



2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100  
Sewickley, PA 15143  
Phone: 1-888-997-3352  
Fax: 1-866-977-3527

## 2023 – 2024 Calendar

July 2023						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Students – 0 days

August 2023						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Students – 4 days

September 2023						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Students – 20 days

October 2023						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Students – 20 days

November 2023						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Students – 18 days

December 2023						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Students – 15 days

January 2024						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Students – 19 days

February 2024						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		

Students – 20 days

March 2024						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Students – 20 days

April 2024						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Students – 20 days

May 2024						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Students – 22 days

June 2024						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Students – 2 days

### NOTES:

- Jul 4: Holiday - School Closed
- Aug 1: New Staff Reports
- Aug 7: Teachers and Counselors Report
- Aug 28: First Day of School
- Sep 4 : Holiday – School Closed
- Oct 6: PD Staff Only/ Students No School
- Oct 9: No School
- Oct 25: Open House
- Nov 2: First Day - Quarter 2
- Nov 10: Holiday – School Closed
- Nov 22-24 : Fall Break – School Closed
- Dec 4-8: Keystone Testing
- Dec 12: PD Staff Only/ Students No School
- Dec 25- Jan 1: Winter Break – School Closed
- Jan 15: Holiday – School Closed
- Jan 22-23: PD Staff Only/Students: No School
- Jan 24: First Day Quarter 3
- Feb 19: Holiday – School Closed
- Mar 28: First Day – Quarter 4
- Mar 29 – Apr 1: Spring Break – School Closed
- Apr 10: PD Staff Only/ Students No School
- Apr 22 – May 10: PSSA Testing
- May 13 - 24: Keystone Testing
- May 27: Holiday – School Closed
- Jun 4: Last Day of School
- Jun 6: PD Staff Only
- Jun 8: 2024 Graduation Ceremony
- Jun 19: Holiday – School Closed

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School. Throughout this Parent/Student Handbook, the school is referred to as “PDLCS” and the parent/guardian is referred to as “parent”.

Choosing a school for your child or children is an important decision. PDLCS places a great deal of responsibility on the parent and student to make distance-learning work. To better understand this responsibility, parents (and students 18 and older) who are enrolling or continuing enrollment at PDLCS are required to read this Parent/Student Handbook and to sign the Agreement Form found at the end of this document. By signing, the parent is stating that the handbook has been reviewed and that both the parent and student agree to the regulations and guidelines within the handbook.

### Mission

Our mission is to empower students to own their learning, grow, achieve, and succeed through the use of evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally responsive practices as we build positive relationships in our online environment with all students, families, and communities.

### Vision

Today’s confident students are tomorrow’s successful and impactful citizens of our global community.

### Shared Values

#### **Integrity manifests accountability.**

- Students learn to commit to honesty by doing the right thing when nobody's watching, even when faced with difficult situations.
- Caregivers and community members foster integrity by modeling, teaching, and supporting the children we serve to make ethical decisions in and out of school because it’s the right thing to do.
- School team members exemplify integrity by ensuring compliance with regulations and providing all students with rigorous opportunities to meet their greatest potential.

#### **Communication promotes collaboration.**

- Students build relationships and increase understanding through interactions with their peers, their teachers, and their community.
- Caregivers and community members support achievement for all students through open, honest communication and collaboration.
- School team members leverage communication and collaboration to allow for clarity for all stakeholders.

**Agency builds self-efficacy.**

- Students are empowered to own their learning through self-advocacy, perseverance, voice, and choice.
- Caregivers and community members guide students to develop conscious decision-making skills and increase self-efficacy with a growth mindset.
- School team members positively impact student outcomes through shared belief and collective action ensuring that all students succeed.

**Non-Discrimination Policy**

PDLCS accepts students of any race, creed, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or ethnic origin. PDLCS will not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, immigration status or ethnic origin in the administration of its educational programs and activities.

**Our Commitment**

PDLCS is committed to providing a barrier-free learning environment. We strive to ensure access and opportunities for ALL students, believing that ALL students can learn. Through our culturally responsive teaching and personalized learning, we will transform the lives of our students.

**ENROLLMENT**

PDLCS does not charge tuition to parents or students. PDLCS will be in full compliance with open enrollment regulations and withdrawal requirements specified by the school's Charter and Pennsylvania Law. When demand exceeds space available (as determined at the sole discretion of the School's Board of Trustees), enrollment will be determined by a lottery of all applicants in a given category, except that returning students and their siblings will be given priority over new students. After the Lottery is completed, those students not selected for enrollment will be placed on a waiting list in order of their random selection. Students whose application for enrollment is received after the lottery is completed shall be placed on the waiting list and admitted on a first-come, first serve basis as long as the last date for enrollment to PDLCS has not passed.

**Non-Discrimination Policy**

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## **Age Requirements**

Children entering the kindergarten program must be five years of age prior to the cut-off date outlined by the home school district's enrollment requirements. Students may not be more than 21 years of age at the time of Enrollment, but may be permitted to complete the school year in which the 21st birthday falls, subject to change based on rules and regulations established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Compulsory education age in Pennsylvania is age 6 years old through 18 years old.

## **Enrollment Application**

The Enrollment Application represents the first step in a multi-step process. By completing, signing and submitting the Enrollment Application, the parent expresses a desire to have their child attend PDLCS. Completing the application does not mean the child will be automatically enrolled in PDLCS. The parent will submit copies of the following documents for each student as required by law:

- Proof of age (Birth Certificate)
- Immunization Record
- Proof of Residency (Driver's License, Mortgage Statement, Utility Bill, etc.)
- Parent Registration Statement
- Home Language Survey

After signing and submitting these forms to the Enrollment Department, the parent/guardian will be contacted by a PDLCS Enrollment Specialist to discuss the next steps. The student is officially enrolled at PDLCS when they are assigned an official start date which is within five business days after all required documentation is received.

PDLCS also requests the following information, which will not delay enrollment of a student:

- Private Physician Medical Form
- Private Dental Form
- Proof of Custody, if applicable
- Copy of most recent K-8 Report Card or High School Transcript. PDLCS will award equivalent credits at PDLCS as was awarded at previous school entity.
- Enrollment Notification Form
- Signed Parent/Student Handbook Form
- Signed Authorization for Release of Information Form, if applicable
- Signed Computer/Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- Income Verification Form (Free & Reduced Lunch Form)

- Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan

PDLCS will also follow all applicable regulations when enrolling Emancipated Minors and those who enroll using the Address Confidentiality Program.

## **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**

In compliance with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), PA Distance Learning Charter School is attempting to identify all children within the district that may be experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied homeless youth.

The term homeless children and youth is defined as individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes individuals:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason;
- Living in a motel, hotel, trailer park or campground due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations or similar settings;
- Living in substandard housing (no running water or working utilities, infestations, etc.).

PDLCS attempts to identify homeless students during the initial enrollment process and on an ongoing basis. If a student or family has indicated they are homeless, or if a staff member has reasonable suspicion that a student or family is homeless, they are required to alert the Homeless Liaison. All procedures in place are designed to ensure this identification does not create or exacerbate educational barriers.

Students shall not be discriminated against, segregated nor stigmatized based on their status as homeless. To the extent feasible, and in accordance with the student's best interest, a homeless student shall continue to be enrolled in their school of origin while they remain homeless or until the end of the academic year in which they obtain permanent housing. Parents/Guardians of a homeless student may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the student is actually living or other schools. If a student is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the PDLCS Homeless Liaison will consider the views of the students in determining where they will be enrolled.

The selected school shall immediately enroll the student and begin instruction, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to PDLCS policies. However, PDLCS may require a parent/guardian to submit contact information. The homeless

liaison may contact the previous school for oral confirmation of immunizations, and the school shall request records from the previous district. Homeless families are not required to prove residency regarding school enrollment.

PDLCS may contact the district of origin for oral confirmation that the student has been immunized, but must not be a barrier to enrollment. Oral confirmation between professionals is a sufficient basis to verify immunization with written confirmation to follow within thirty (30) days. The instructional program should begin as soon as possible after the enrollment process is initiated and should not be delayed until the procedure is completed. The Homeless Liaison will assist the parent/guardian in obtaining necessary immunizations, or immunization and medical records.

Homeless students shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other PDLCS students including but not limited to: programs for students with limited English proficiency; and educational services for which students meet eligibility criteria, such as programs for disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities. Homeless families will also have access to all parent involvement activities and initiatives.

PDLCS has staff members who will work with local community agencies to coordinate services in the student's community. The staff includes a Social Worker, Community Engagement Team as well as those involved in Student Assistance Program. Additionally, PDLCS has certified nurses on staff that work to ensure necessary referrals take place to appropriate health care, dental services, and other medical services.

PDLCS will ensure the student has transportation to school related events, such as, but not limited to testing and field trips.

Placement/Dispute/Complaints: If PDLCS is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the school shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the student's placement.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The parent/guardian/student will be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision on the dispute, including the right to appeal. The parent/guardian/student will be referred to the Homeless Liaison who will carry out the state's grievance procedure as expeditiously as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. In the case of an unaccompanied student, the Homeless Liaison shall ensure that the student is immediately enrolled in school pending resolution of the dispute.

If disputes or complaints on noncompliance arise regarding the education of homeless students, the following steps may be taken:

- The person filing the complaint shall first contact the school's Homeless Liaison, the Principal or the Chief Executive Officer to present their concerns to the people closest to the situation and most likely to be able to resolve it quickly.

- If Step 1 is not successful or is not possible under the circumstances, contact should be made with the Homeless Project Education Liaison, or the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will accept complaints directly through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.
- Individual cases may be referred to PDE's Office of Chief Counsel and the Office of the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, as needed, by the State Homeless Coordinator.

PDE will deliver a response within fifteen (15) business days of the receipt of the complaint. The complaint may arrive in the form of a copy of the school/district letter or on the Dispute Letter Form if given directly to a Liaison of the Homeless Initiative.

Children who are experiencing homelessness may qualify for assistance, with school supplies/materials, and/or tutoring so that they can remain in their school throughout the duration of their homeless episode.

If you believe your child(ren) may qualify for this service, please contact the- Homeless Liaison at 888-997-3352 ext. 137

If your living situation changes during the school year, and you and your children become homeless, please be sure to contact the school. We will work with you so that your child(ren)'s education is disrupted as little as possible.

## **Health Certification and Immunization Requirements**

In order for a student to be admitted to PDLCS, the parent must submit satisfactory evidence that all required immunizations have either been administered, are in the process of being administered, or must file a certificate of exemption. In special circumstances, the student's physician may recommend additional immunizations.

If there are any questions about immunizations or where to get them, the parent should contact the local county or city Public Health Nurse.

## **Official Enrollment**

On the official start date provided to the parent, the student must attend orientation and begin

completing school work daily as outlined in the student's course calendars. Parents must also attend a parent orientation session.

In order to maintain a student's enrollment, the parent must:

- Assure that a working phone and Internet connection (high-speed) are maintained at the location where the student is being educated at all times;
- Call the PDLCS Records Department, to provide updated Proof of Residence and Enrollment Notification form for any and all parent or student address and phone number changes within 10 days. Failure to submit up-to-date proof of residency information may result in the removal of a student from PDLCS rolls;
- Monitor daily attendance and completion of course work via the course delivery system. Attendance may be substantiated by course work completed as outlined by the teacher in each course the student is enrolled.

## **Continuous Enrollment**

PDLCS students will automatically be re-enrolled from school year to school year. Parents of re-enrolling students will be sent annual forms to complete, print, sign, and return.

Annual forms collected for students are:

- Signed Parent/Student Handbook Form
- Signed Authorization for Release of Information Form (if applicable)
- Home Language Survey
- Signed Computer/Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- Private Physician Medical Form with required immunizations for students entering 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Grades
- Private Dental Form for students entering 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Grades
- Income Verification Form (Free & Reduced Lunch Form)

## **ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

### **Curriculum – General**

PDLCS's curriculum and graded courses of study meet ALL requirements set forth by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The curriculum will be explained to all parents during student course scheduling.

## Curriculum – Graduation Recovery

PDLCS offers a Graduation Recovery program. This program is for students who have experienced set-backs in their education for many reasons. It allows students to recover lost credits in a set amount of time moving them towards graduation from high school. This program is fully on-line and offers full-time or part-time enrollment. For more information you can contact your Counselor.

## Curriculum – Advanced Placement (AP)

PDLCS offers Advanced Placement (AP) classes allowing students to earn credits for college. Most four-year colleges award course credit, advanced placement or both on the basis of AP Exam scores. Talk with your Counselor for more details.

## Daily Schedule

- Attendance is recorded by evidence of student's active online engagement each day.

Students follow different schedules depending on classes and/or grade of the child. Families with extenuating circumstances may meet with the School Counselor to discuss their child's schedule and accountability measures. The important thing for families to know is that your child's success increases with consistency in attending school daily, participating in live learning classes, completing daily lessons, and communicating regularly with teachers. Set an at home schedule and stick to it.

*Synchronous Class* is time spent during live learning. Students gather in the virtual classroom with their teacher and peers to learn together. *Asynchronous Class* is learning through the lessons that are set up in the virtual course. Students are required to complete assigned daily lessons independently with the guidance of a parent throughout the day.

Students have synchronous class (live learning) in all grades for every class. Asynchronous lessons are available to students 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The table below gives an idea of average daily instruction and learning time.

Elementary students (grades K-6) are required to complete a minimum of 5.0 hours of schoolwork daily. Middle and high school students (grades 7-12) are required to complete a minimum of 5.5 hours of schoolwork daily. The school sets the whole group live learning schedule (synchronous classes). It is up to families to determine how a student will complete the remainder of parent facilitated required learning hours. Families can do this by combining Synchronous and Asynchronous learning spaces.



	<b>Synchronous</b> (approximate time of live learning) <b>Monday - Friday</b>	<b>Asynchronous</b> (in addition to virtual lessons completion of daily calendar lessons with supervision of parent)	<b>Total</b>
Kindergarten	2.5 hours/day	2.5 hours/day	5
Grades 1-6	2.5 hours/day	2.5 hours/day	5
Grades 7-12	2.5 hours/day	Varies 2.5-5.5 hours/day	5.5

## Daily Assignments

Each grade or course teacher will share with students how to turn in assignments. All assignments are submitted electronically. Students learn how to submit assignments during school and course orientations.

## Grading

### Grades K-12 Academic Letter Grades

- A+ 97%-100%
- A 93%-96.99%
- A- 90%-92.99%
- B+ 87%-89.99%
- B 83%-86.99%
- B- 80%-82.99%
- C+ 77%-79.99%
- C 73%-76.99%
- C- 70%-72.99%
- D 60%-69.99%
- F 0%-59.99%

## Course Selection

Teacher assignments are based on certification, prior to student course selection. Students enrolled in our school are scheduled into classes using a system that does not provide visible income information. Course selection forms are completed by the student in high school, and by the counselor in grades K-8. Students and counselors can only see the student's name, course name, day(s) and time(s) the course is offered. There is no other identifiable information in the system. The scheduling system automatically enters students into course sections based on the student's availability to attend their selected courses. The system then randomizes the students and balances the number of students in each section of a course.

## Course Completion

High school courses are scheduled as semester long courses receiving credit for successful completion ("D" grade or better). There are two semesters scheduled within one school year.

Students are expected to complete each course according to the due dates required by the course teacher within the semester given.

#### High School Credits and Grade Level Assignments

Number of Credits Earned	Grade Level
0 – 5.49 Credits	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade
5.5 – 10.9 Credits	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade
11 – 16.49 Credits	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade
16.5+ Credits	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade

#### **PDLCS Minimum Graduation Requirements (22 credits)**

English: 4 credits

All students must show mastery of secondary English Language Arts standards and skills

All students must complete a Career Project when taking English III

Mathematics: 3 credits

All students must show mastery of Algebra I standards and skills

It is recommended that all students take 4 credits of mathematics

Science: 3 credits

All students must show mastery of Biology standards and skills

It is recommended that all students take 4 credits of science

Social Studies: 3 credits

All students must show mastery for U.S. Government and U.S. History standards/skills

It is recommended that all students take 4 credits of social studies

Business/Technology: 0.5 credits

Physical Education: 1.0 credits

World Language: 1.0 credits

Fine Arts: 1.0 credits

Health: 0.5 credits

Financial Literacy: 0.5 credits

Electives: 4.5 credits

## Statewide High School Graduation Requirement

Act 158 of 2018, mandates that all students demonstrate readiness for postsecondary success by meeting one of five graduation pathways prior to being issued a high school diploma. Act 136 of 2020, states, the graduation pathway requirements will begin with the graduating class of 2023. Certain elements and pathways do not apply to PDLCS. For clarity, the information below has been pared down to only list what applies to our students as possible pathways to graduation.

- **Keystone Proficiency Pathway:** Scoring proficient or advanced on each Keystone Exam - Algebra I, Literature, and Biology.
- **Keystone Composite Pathway:** Earning a composite score of 4452 on the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams (while achieving at least a proficient score on at least one of the three exams and no less than a basic score on the remaining two). Or earning a composite score of 2939 on two of three Keystone Exams (neither of which may be Below Basic and at least one must be Proficient or better) while earning a non-numeric Proficient in the remaining Exam pursuant to Act 136 and also successfully completing locally established, grade-based requirements for academic content associated with each Keystone Exam in which the student does not have a numeric or non-numeric score of Proficient/Advanced.
- **Alternate Assessment Pathway:** Successful completion of locally established grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone Exam on which the student did not achieve proficiency **and** one of the following:
  - Attainment of an established score on an approved alternate assessment (SAT, PSAT, ACT, ASVAB);
  - Gold Level on the ACT WorkKeys Assessment;
  - Attainment of an established score on an Advanced Placement Program in an academic content area associated with each Keystone Exam on which the student did not achieve at least a proficient score;
  - Successful completion of a concurrent enrollment course in an academic content area associated with each Keystone Exam in which the student did not achieve at least a proficient score;
  - Successful completion of a pre-apprenticeship program; or
  - Acceptance in an accredited 4-year nonprofit institution of higher education and evidence of the ability to enroll in college-level coursework.
- **Evidence Based Pathway:** Successful completion of locally established grade-based requirements for academic content areas associated with each Keystone Exam on which the student did not achieve proficiency and demonstration of three pieces of evidence consistent with the student's

goals and career plans, including

- One of the following:
  - Attainment of an established score on the ACT WorkKeys assessment or an Advanced Placement Program Exam;
  - Acceptance to an accredited nonprofit institution of higher education other than a 4-year institution and evidence of the ability to enroll in college-level coursework;
  - Attainment of an industry-recognized credential;
  - Successful completion of a concurrent enrollments or postsecondary course; and
- Two additional pieces of evidence, including one or more of the options listed above, or: satisfactory completion of a service learning project; attainment of a score of proficient or advanced on a Keystone Exam; a letter guaranteeing full-time employment; a certificate of successful completion of an internship or cooperative education program; or satisfactory compliance with the NCAA's core courses for college-bound student athletes with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.0.

## **Civics Knowledge Exam Requirement**

Per Act 35 of 2018, all students must earn proficiency on a local civics exam by the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade will be administered the same exam, and proficiency on that test will omit students from needing to take the assessment again in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The exams will be given in the online setting as part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies course, the required U.S. Government course, or another history course the 11<sup>th</sup> grade student might have on their schedule.

## **High School Drop/Add Period**

PDLCS understands that a student may need a schedule change. High school students may contact their Counselor to discuss the need for schedule changes. Classes will only be changed within a 2 week period of the start of a semester. Students may not drop a course after the 2 week period.

## **Standardized Testing**

Like all public schools in Pennsylvania, PDLCS is required to administer several standardized tests each year. Further explanation of the tests currently in place appears below.

### **PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment)**

The PSSA is a standards-based assessment administered in all Pennsylvania public schools. They are administered in a face-to-face environment, usually in the month of April, to students in grades 3-8. There are currently three content-specific assessments including English Language Arts, Math, and Science (grades 4 and 8 only).

### **PASA (Pennsylvania Alternative School Assessment)**

The PASA is a standards-based alternative assessment administered in all Pennsylvania public schools. They are administered in a one-on-one face-to-face environment, usually in

the months of February and March, for students in grades 3-8 & 11. There are currently three content-specific assessments including English Language Arts, Math, and Science. The student's IEP team will determine if the alternative assessment is appropriate.

### **Keystone Exams**

The Keystone Exams are end-of-course assessments designed to evaluate proficiency in academic content. Students must demonstrate proficiency on the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams to graduate. Students will be offered multiple face-to-face opportunities to take the Keystone Exams throughout their high school careers. Keystone exams are a graduation requirement in Pennsylvania.

### **Universal Screener**

All students will be administered a Universal Screener in the area of mathematics and reading at the beginning of the school year or upon enrollment. The results of the assessment will help to determine the best personalized path of learning for the student.

### **Benchmark Assessments**

Benchmark Assessments measure the proficiency level and academic growth of students in grades K-12 in the subjects of Math, English Language Arts, and Science in grades 3-12. Benchmark tests are administered three times each school year and students complete the tests online at home. K-2 students complete their assessments 1-on-1 with a teacher.

### **ACCESS Testing (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Learners)**

ACCESS for English Learners is an English language proficiency assessment that is administered to all Kindergarten-12<sup>th</sup> grade students identified as English Learners. The test is given annually to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English. The ACCESS for English Learners assesses students in the four language domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

For more information about testing, please contact the PDLCS Testing Department.

## **Honesty in Schoolwork**

It is important that students complete their own work. While families can help students develop study habits and encourage organization of time and materials, families must resist the temptation to provide answers for the student. This may be misleading to the teacher who then thinks the

student is applying their learning on their own. If you see your child struggling on an assignment, direct them to their resources to find answers – online program, study guide, course folder. It is also good advice to tell your child to write down questions and ask the teacher in class, in an email, by chat or by calling on the phone. Students may also join a teacher in regularly scheduled Office Hours for assistance.

### **What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism is the act of presenting the words, ideas, images, sounds, or the creative expression of others as your own. In more common terms – you are “copying” someone else’s ideas, words, or expression as your school work. There are two types of plagiarism:

#### **Intentional**

- Copying a friend’s work
- Buying or borrowing papers
- Cutting and pasting blocks of text from electronic sources without documenting
- “Borrowing” from print sources without documentation

#### **Unintentional**

- Careless paraphrasing
- Poor documentation
- Quoting excessively
- Failure to use your own “voice”

### **Avoid Plagiarism by using Documentation**

There is nothing wrong with using other people’s words or ideas, but you must give them credit. Giving credit is called *documentation*. It is a simple process, and it turns a dishonest essay into true scholarship. Documenting sources has two steps:

- Indicate in the text where the information was found. Most modern writers put that information in parentheses.
- Have a *Works Cited* page at the end of the paper providing the full bibliographic information about the source. Documentation is taught in your courses when outside research is required. Information about documentation can be obtained from teachers at any time.

### **Tips when documenting, or citing, someone else’s work:**

- When using quotes, be sure to cite the source.
- When paraphrasing information from a source, be sure to cite the source.
- The only time you do NOT need to cite information is if it is common knowledge and you knew it before beginning your research. For example, “William Shakespeare is a poet and playwright from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.”

If you plagiarize your work, you will not receive credit for the assignment. Continued acts of plagiarism will constitute a referral to administration and in extreme cases *can* result in legal action. Plagiarism is an illegal action and is taken very seriously in this environment to protect academic integrity.

## Reporting Progress

In grades K-8, families receive Report Cards at the end of each quarter, or every 45 days. Grades are averaged across the four quarters on the end-of-year Report Card. In grades 9-12, families receive Progress Reports each quarter, or every 45 school days. Report cards are issued at the end of the each semester (January and June) for high school transcript publication. All Progress Reports and Report Cards are made available electronically on the Student Information System Parent Portal. Students and parents have 24/7 access to view grades by logging into the Student Information System at [sis.padistance.org](http://sis.padistance.org) with their school issued login.

## Retention

PDLCS may retain an elementary student in a grade level if mastery of that grade level's curriculum has not been achieved. The student's teachers may complete a *Request for Collaboration Form*. In the case of a student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the Director of Special Education must agree and sign off on the form. Documentation, evidence, and/or explanation must accompany the form. There will be an opportunity for the parent to schedule a conference with an Administrator and the student's teachers to review the child's academic progress and educational plan.

Recommendations for retention consider the following data:

- Benchmark Assessment and Standardized State Test Scores
- Rate of attendance is poor – Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) has not been successful
- Grades earned in courses are less than 60%
- Performance lacks evidence of required standards-based mastery level
- Failure to complete grade-level curriculum by last day of school

## CODE OF CONDUCT

As part of the Enrollment/Continuing Enrollment process, both the parent and student are required to sign the Agreement Form (found at the end of this handbook) and submit it at the time of Enrollment and annually thereafter. The signed agreement is kept on file and, among other things,

expresses the acceptance of the PDLCS Code of Conduct by both parent and student. Failure to adhere to the Code of Conduct by either the student or parent is cause for expulsion of the student from PDLCS. If a student is expelled from PDLCS, or leaves PDLCS for any reason, they must return all PDLCS property and materials, including, but not limited to, the computer, hardware, software, textbooks, workbooks, and other materials and supplies loaned by PDLCS.

All suspensions and expulsions will be conducted in accordance with due process procedures. Only the Administrator may suspend or expel a student. The Administrator will provide the student and the parent/guardian with written notice of the intent to suspend/expel, which will include reasons for the intended suspension/expulsion. The notice will state the time and place to appear for a hearing on the matter, which will not be less than three (3) days or later than ten (10) days after the Notice of Intent to Suspend/Expel was provided to the student and parent. The student, parent and/or legal representative will have an opportunity to appear on request before the Administrator at a PDLCS chosen location to challenge the suspension/expulsion, or to otherwise explain the student's actions that led to the intended suspension/expulsion. The Administrator may grant an extension of time for the hearing date. If granted, the Administrator will notify all parties in writing of the new date, time and place of the hearing.

Suspension and expulsion of students with disabilities will comply with all federal and state laws, policies and procedures. The IEP Team will meet to review the student's IEP and consider the development of a Behavioral Intervention Plan any time the suspension exceeds 5 days in the academic year. Any student with an IEP who is suspended for more than 10 days during an academic year will continue to receive special education services via a change of placement as determined by the IEP Team. In the event that the student is being disciplined for an expellable action, the IEP Team will meet and conduct both a Manifest Determination and Functional Behavior Analysis. An Alternate Interim Placement will be identified for a period of time not to exceed 45 school days. The suspension shall not exceed 10 school days. No expulsion shall exceed one year, except as otherwise allowed or required by law. A written notice of the suspension/expulsion will be sent or given within one school day to the parent of the student. The notice will contain the reasons for the suspension/expulsion and the right of the student to appeal the suspension/expulsion to the Administrator or Board of Trustees, or its designee. **If a student is expelled from PDLCS for the remainder of the school year, that student may not attempt to re-enroll with PDLCS during the same school year without the approval of the PDLCS Administrator.**

Following are the infractions of the Code of Conduct that may subject a student to discipline up to and including suspension or expulsion, if the same occurs during the presentation of any learning opportunity or at any school event, activity or function.

**Cheating**– To act dishonestly, copying or using someone else's work.

**Insubordination**- Not accepting directions; refusing to cooperate with PDLCS employees, agents,



and other representatives.

**Theft** – To take the property of another without right or permission.

**Fighting** – To participate in physical contact with one or more students, faculty, or staff of PDLCS or any other person with the intent to injure.

**Possession** or Intake of Alcohol, Illegal Controlled Substances or Tobacco Products.

**Vandalism** – Purposeful destruction, misuse or defacing of PDLCS property or another's personal property. This includes the computer, printer/fax/scanner/copier unit, and all hardware loaned to the student by PDLCS.

**Profane/Obscene Language or Gestures** toward Students/Staff/Teachers/Others. Use of unacceptable, disrespectful words stated audibly or in text, terms or gestures intended to embarrass or insult.

**Inappropriate use of Internet** access, as detailed in the Technology & Internet Acceptable Usage Policy.

**Wrongful Conduct** – Any action or inaction not specifically referenced in the listing above that impedes, obstructs, interferes with, or violates the mission, philosophy, policies, procedures, rules, and/or regulations of the PDLCS and/or is disrespectful, harmful, or offensive to others or property.

**Truancy** - as defined in the Attendance section of this Handbook.

## **MATERIALS, TECHNOLOGY, AND SUPPLIES**

Certain equipment, supplies and services will be on loan to PDLCS students, which have been deemed necessary to ensure the functionality and ability to participate in the PDLCS educational program. The textbooks, computers, software, hardware, and other materials loaned to the parent and/or student are the property of PDLCS and no parent and/or student has any right to these except for usage in strict accordance with the school's educational model, Code of Conduct, rules, regulations, policies and procedures. Parents and students are responsible for the care and safekeeping of textbooks, computers, software, hardware, and other materials loaned to the parent and/or student during the school year. Materials and property must be used solely in connection with the education services provided by PDLCS.

### **Internet Cost Provision**

PDLCS strongly recommends that all families use high-speed Internet to help their children succeed in the program. PDLCS will provide Internet reimbursement to families at the conclusion of each quarter. Complete instructions on how to submit the form for reimbursement can be found in the "How to Use Internet Reimbursement" document located in the Student Information System at [sis.padistance.org](http://sis.padistance.org) using a school issued parent or student login.

## **Loaned Materials and Property**

Pursuant to Pennsylvania law, each family enrolled in PDLCS has the right to have one computer provided per child enrolled in the program. PDLCS loans families a computer, a combination printer/scanner/copier, and other curriculum materials. Parents must return the materials and property promptly if their student withdraws, is removed or expelled from the program. Parents must return curriculum materials at the close of the semester and/or school year.

## **Recovering and Returning Materials**

Recovery of the computer and printer/scanner/copier commences when any of the following occurs:

- A parent's written Notice of the Intent to Withdraw;
- A student's mandatory withdrawal after 10 consecutive school days of non-attendance;
- A student's graduation from PDLCS; or
- A student's expulsion

Within thirty days after four corresponding authenticated attempts of recovery have been made by an authorized PDLCS de-installer, a written notification is sent to the parent informing them that the following actions may be taken:

- A police report will be filed with the appropriate law enforcement agency to recover the computer, printer, accessories and all other Material and Property from the parent.
- A credit complaint against the parent may be filed with the three major credit-reporting agencies. Other legal action permitted by law and in equity may be taken to secure the return of the school's materials and property, including civil and criminal actions.

## **Technical Support and Technology Repair**

PDLCS offers technical support services during regular office hours (7:30 am to 4:00 pm on school days) by telephone, 1-888-997-3352, option 2. Students and families may call to receive assistance with setting up or troubleshooting issues with school-owned and/or issued hardware, software, and websites.

PDLCS helpdesk staff will make every attempt to resolve issues remotely via guidance over the phone, or by using software or apps to remotely access the student's computer. In the event that a computer or other hardware must be shipped back to the school for repair, the school will mail or email return shipping labels. Parents must ensure shipping of equipment to the school upon receipt of the labels. Technical Support will repair or replace, then ship out the hardware within one (1) business day of receipt of the equipment.

Most initial repairs will be completed at the school's expense. Families may be charged for repairs if obvious physical abuse of the equipment is evident, or when a pattern of repeated damage is evident. Please refer to the letter included with your computer to see a list of potential fees associated with hardware repair.

## ATTENDANCE

Pennsylvania Public School Law requires children to receive the following Educational Learning Hours:

Kindergarten: 5.0 hours per day (25 hours per week, completing a minimum of 900 hours per year)

Grades 1-6: 5.0 hours per day (25 hours per week, completing a minimum of 900 hours per year)

Grades 7-12: 5.5 hours per day (27.5 hours per week, completing a minimum of 990 hours per year)

Accordingly, parents are required to supervise daily school attendance to avoid truancy issues. **Under the supervision of their parent, students must log into the Student Portal/Learning Management System to complete and submit assignments as outlined in the student's course calendar.** Parents are responsible for providing PDLCS with written verification of the reason for an absence **within three (3) days** of such absence. A partial day of absence under Pennsylvania regulations is considered a day of absence from school. A maximum of ten days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification may be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten cumulative days require an excuse from a physician.

### Truancy Prevention Process

It is the belief of PDLCS that students **achieve academic success through consistent attendance**, engagement in daily coursework and on-going communication with teachers. In order for a student to learn expected skills, it is important they develop a positive and responsible approach to study habits through regular school attendance. Compulsory education in Pennsylvania begins upon the enrollment in a public school, but no later than age 6 years through age of 18 years.

Preventing truancy issues is important to PDLCS and involves many people. **Parents** are responsible for ensuring students attend school. **Students** are responsible to completing daily coursework with the guidance of teachers and parents. The PDLCS **Attendance Officer** is responsible for enforcing, tracking and reporting attendance, as well as developing a Student Attendance Improvement Program to aid families in complying with public cyber-charter school regulations.

**Attendance is taken on each school calendar day.** Attendance involves daily log-in to the Student Portal/Learning Management System.

**Parents are notified of a full-day of absence** through an automated phone reporting system. Parents may submit an Excused Absence Form within 3 days of a reported absence. There is a maximum limit of ten parental excuses in one school year. Medical excuses, from a physician's office, must be submitted for all subsequent absences.

Unlawful or unexcused absences occur following a student's absence for which a parental or medical excuse is not submitted within 3-days of the reported absence. Parents are notified after the 3<sup>rd</sup> unexcused absence. Children and Youth Services are notified for students age 16 years and

under with 6 days of unexcused absences, as well as for those who do not participate in the Attendance Improvement Program. Students who continue to accumulate absences will be referred to the local magistrate.

**Partial days of absence are considered full-days of absence** under Pennsylvania school regulations requiring parental or medical excused absence forms be submitted. Failing to make adequate progress in courses and/or course grades below 60% are often a direct result of unexcused partial days of absences.

## **Excused Absences**

Parents are responsible for providing PDLCS with written verification of the reason for each absence within three (3) days of such absence. Legal excused absences constitute valid excuses for absence of a student from PDLCS, provided satisfactory evidence or documentation is submitted to PDLCS Administration within 3 days of such absence. This includes absence of partial days. A maximum of ten days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification may be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten cumulative days require an excuse from a physician. Legal excused absences include, without limitation, the following:

- Observance of a Religious Holiday. An absence may be considered excused if the tenets of a bona fide religion, to which a student or the parent adhere, require observance of a religious event. (22 PA. CODE § 11.21) The parent must submit written request for the excusal **prior** to the absence.
- Tutorial Work. An absence may be excused for the purpose of the student receiving tutorial instruction in a field not offered by PDLCS only if (i) the excusal does not interfere with the student's regular program of studies, and (ii) the qualifications of the instructor are approved by PDLCS Administration. (22 PA. CODE. § 11.22)
- Medical or Dental Appointments. An absence resulting from a medical (health care or therapy) or dental appointment, if: (i) such appointment cannot be scheduled outside of regularly scheduled academic calendar days, (ii) the health or therapeutic services are to be rendered by Commonwealth of Pennsylvania licensed practitioners, or (iii) the time of necessary absence from PDLCS involves a minimum of interference with the student's regular program of studies. Notice should be given to the teacher and/or the Attendance Officer prior to the absence, except in the case of an emergency. (22 PA. CODE § 11.23)
- Illness or Injury. An absence resulting from illness or injury, which prevents the student from being physically able to attend PDLCS. Any student missing more than three (3) consecutive school days requires a note from a physician. (22 PA. CODE § 11.25)
- Urgent Reasons. An absence resulting from an urgent reason may be excused. PDLCS shall strictly construe the term "urgent reason" as it applies to such absences and such excuse does not permit irregular attendance. (22 PA. CODE § 11.25)
- Educational Opportunities or Family Educational Trips. Families that take educational trips

during the school year must notify the school prior to the start of the trip so that arrangements can be made for the completion of lessons and other learning activities scheduled during the time of the trip. Absences during the trip cannot be excused, under current guidance from the PA Department of Education. Following completion of the required request form, a school staff member will be in touch to develop a plan for the completion of lessons and activities scheduled for the time of the trip. The request should be submitted no later than one week prior to the trip.

- Death in the Immediate Family. An absence resulting from the death of a member of the student's immediate family. The immediate family of a student includes, but is not necessarily limited to, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters.
- Court or Administrative Proceedings. An absence resulting from the attendance of a student at the proceedings of a court or an administrative tribunal if the student is a party to the action or under subpoena as a witness.
- Testing. Testing for educational purposes

In the event that a medical excuse cannot be provided, the parent may submit an Excused Absence Form to PDLCS Administration, requesting approval of the absence. Absences resulting in three (3) or more consecutive days require a medical excuse and Excused Absence Forms are not applicable. Students may only accumulate a maximum of 10 (ten) per school year. This includes partial days. A maximum of ten days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification may be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten cumulative days require an excuse from a physician.

## **Excused Absences and Making up Schoolwork**

Students whose absences are excused are required to make up all assignments missed or to complete alternative assignments as deemed appropriate by PDLCS. Work missed because of absence must be made up within the timeline set forth by the course teacher. Any work not completed within this period shall result in no credit for the missed assignment. In the case of an extended illness or other extenuating circumstances, the parent must contact PDLCS Administration.

## **Unexcused/Illegal Absences**

Any day that the student has not logged into PDLCS that is not determined to be legal or excused will be considered as an unexcused/illegal absence. The following reasons for absences are illegal and unexcused in accordance with the Pennsylvania State Attendance Laws:

- Truancy
- Lack of transportation
- Trips not approved in advance
- Shopping
- Birthday or other celebration
- Hunting, fishing, attending ball games or sporting events
- Gainful employment
- Sleeping in
- Babysitting
- Any other reason not listed in the Excused Absences section above

## **Attendance Notification**

- All Absences – reported to parents using an automated phone reporting system
- Excused Absence Form – parents submit an Excused Absence Form or Medical Excuse within three (3) days
- Unexcused Absence – when no Excused Absence Form or Medical Excuse Form is received after three (3) days
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Unexcused Absence – reported to parents via the school automated phone system
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Unexcused Absence – reported to parents via the school automated phone system
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Unexcused Absence – students are considered truant by law
    - Parent is contacted immediately after the 3<sup>rd</sup> unexcused absence occurs via phone call by the automated system and the Attendance Officer. A letter outlining the absences will also be sent to the parent via school issued parent email account and postal mail.
    - The Attendance Officer will set a Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) meeting with the parent and student as well as the appropriate staff members to put a plan in place to eliminate truancy and assist in academic success.
  - 6 Unexcused Absences – students are considered habitually truant by law
    - The student will be referred to our Attendance Improvement Program (AIP).

- A meeting with the parent/guardian, student and Attendance Officer is required to document the AIP plan for achieving regular attendance and full participation in the school's academic program.
- Students and parent/guardians of children under the age of 16 years old who refuse to participate in the AIP or do not regularly attend school following the plan's implementation will be referred to Children and Youth Services.
- A truancy citation will be filed with the local magistrate (where the student resides) for students who fail to participate in the AIP or fail to attend school regularly.
- Failure to comply with the AIP for ten consecutive days may result in truancy violations that may lead to the removal of the student from active membership at PDLCS.

## **EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING**

Should it be necessary to close the offices or testing centers of PDLCS for weather or other unforeseen emergencies, information will be posted on the PDLCS website or provided in a telephone recording on the school's main telephone line.

## **SAFE2SAY SOMETHING (S2SS)**

PDLCS participates in Pennsylvania's Safe2Say Something program, which is enforced and operated by the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General. S2SS is a program that provides an easy and confidential way for youth (students in grades 5-12) to report safety concerns to help prevent school violence, suicide, abuse and other tragedies. More information regarding the program can be obtained from the school's Administration or by visiting [www.safe2saypa.org](http://www.safe2saypa.org).

## **Threat Assessment Team**

PDLCS has established and maintains a Threat Assessment Team for the assessment of and intervention with students whose behavior may indicate a threat to the safety of the student, other students, school employees, school facilities, the community or others.

## **CRISES PLAN ACTION STEPS**

If a student threatens to harm themselves, employees of PDLCS will make every attempt to keep the student on the phone, chat or in class. The employee will continue talking to the student and engage the student so they do not hang up the phone or leave the location. The employee will find

a nearby teacher, counselor or administrator and inform them of the situation. This staff member will call home immediately to speak with the parent or guardian and if no one answers the phone, the staff member will call 911. The staff member will provide the student with the crisis hotline (Lifeline 1-800-273-8255, available 24 hours per day). If the student will speak with someone immediately on the crisis line, a three way call with the student may be initiated. After the incident has been reported, the staff member will also report the incident to the student's counselor and to an administrator and prepare a SAP (Student Action Plan) referral, if necessary.

If a student threatens to harm others, employees of PDLCS should gather as much information as possible. The staff member will attempt to keep the student on the phone, chat or in class. In addition, the staff member will enlist the help of a nearby colleague, who will call 911. It is imperative to keep the student on the phone. Following the incident and after the incident has been reported to 911, the staff member must make a report to ChildLine then, report the incident to a school administrator. If necessary, a SAP (Student Action Plan) referral may be documented.

If a student tells a staff member something of concern such as prior bullying, family conflict, depression, etc., the staff member will gather as much information as possible and determine if there is an immediate threat. If there is an immediate threat, the staff member will refer to the previous steps listed. If there is not an immediate threat, the staff member will contact the student's counselor and complete a SAP (Student Action Plan) referral, if necessary.

## **HARASSMENT POLICY**

Harassment is any form of hostility, conduct or language that alters the condition of the student's school environment and which creates a hostile, intimidating or offensive school environment. Additionally, sexual harassment can consist of unwelcome sexual advances, intentional and unwelcome touching, verbal remarks and requests or demands for sexual favors.

The prohibition against harassment is applicable to all employees of the PDLCS, which includes all staff members, teachers, administrators, managers, and officers. The prohibition also applies to all PDLCS students and parents, prohibiting them from harassing other students, staff or other persons.

Any student that believes another student has harassed them, or any person employed by PDLCS, should immediately report the incident to a teacher. If there is any hesitation to discuss the matter with a teacher, the incident should be reported to the PDLCS Administrator. If a student is uncomfortable about reporting to an Administrator, a parent should make the report. Reported incidents will be investigated immediately and the results of the investigation will be thoroughly discussed with the parent and student. Corrective action will be taken if deemed appropriate and



the student will be referred to the Student Assistance Team.

## **TITLE IX POLICY**

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §1681 et seq., protects students from discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. Title IX states that:

No person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any academic, extracurricular, research, occupational training, or other education program or activity operated by a recipient, which receives Federal financial assistance.

Refer to the PA Distance Learning Charter School Board of Trustees Title IX policy, dated September 8, 2020 for more information and guidance. This policy covers student on student as well as employee on student sexual harassment.

## **ANTI-BULLYING POLICY**

### **General Statement of Policy**

The PDLCS Board of Trustees recognizes the negative impact that bullying can have on the health and safety of students and the learning environment. PDLCS strives to preserve a learning environment that is devoid of bullying; therefore, bullying is prohibited at school-sponsored events and activities, at annual testing, and other school sponsored venues.

### **Definition of Bullying**

“Bullying” means repeated behavior by an individual student, an individual student within a group of students, or group of students that is intended to cause the victim(s) to feel frightened, threatened, intimidated, humiliated, shamed, disgraced, ostracized, or physically abused. Bullying implies an imbalance in power or strength in which the student being bullied has difficulty defending themselves. Bullying manifests itself in many forms, including physical, verbal, social/relational and/or cyber bullying.

Bullying occurs in several forms, including but not limited to, the following:

- Written, verbal, or nonverbal threats
- Intimidating or threatening gestures
- Unwanted physical contact, violence, or assault

- An intentional display of force that would give the victim reason to expect or fear physical contact or injury
- Jeering, taunting, or mocking
- Teasing
- Degrading, insulting, or derogatory comments
- Extortion
- Theft of money or possessions
- Vandalism of a student's personal property
- Unauthorized exercise of control over a student's personal property

## **Cyber Bullying**

Cyber bullying, which is sometimes referred to as online social cruelty or electronic bullying, involves but is not limited to:

Sending mean, vulgar or threatening messages or images; posting sensitive, private information about another person; pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad; intentionally excluding someone from an online group (Willard, 2005).

Cyber bullying can occur through:

- Emails
- Instant messaging,
- Text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones, Web pages,
- Web logs (blogs),
- Chat rooms or discussion groups, and
- Other information communication technologies

## **Preventative Measures**

The following preventative measures will be taken:

- A copy of this policy will be provided to staff, students and parents on an annual basis.
- The staff will discuss bullying with students and will provide age appropriate examples to assist students in identifying bullying and understanding why it is inappropriate.

- All students shall be informed that bullying will not be tolerated in any form.
- All students shall be encouraged to report any bullying regardless of whether they are the victim or an observer.
- When bullying has occurred and it has been dealt with in accordance with this policy, preventative measures shall include:
  - Counselor will check in with the student who has been bullied;
  - Counselor will check in with parents/guardians to see if bullying has continued.

Additional preventative measures may include encouraging students to become involved in activities such as friendship groups, peer support groups, new student orientation groups and extracurricular activities and clubs.

The PDLCS Board of Trustees will review this policy at appropriate intervals to ensure its continued efficacy. As part of its review, the Board may require that a survey be conducted to determine the scope and extent of bullying in the school.

## **Reporting Procedures**

**Victims/Targets.** All students who believe they have been the victim/target of bullying shall promptly report the bullying to a teacher, Administrator or other school staff.

**Parents/Guardians.** All parents/guardians who become aware of any bullying are encouraged to report the bullying to a teacher, Administrator or other school staff.

**Student Witnesses.** All students who witness or become aware of bullying shall immediately report the bullying to a teacher, Administrator or other school staff.

**School Personnel.** Any staff person who witnesses bullying shall immediately intervene and take appropriate action to stop the bullying. In addition, any staff person who witnesses or receives a report of bullying shall make a report to a school Administrator and follow any other processes put in place by the school for reporting bullying incidents.

**School Administration.** An Administrator who observes bullying or receives a report of bullying shall document the incident and ensure that the school process for investigating and following up on bullying incidents is implemented in a timely manner.

## **Disciplinary and Other Actions**

Consistent and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken for bullying behavior. The primary purpose of such action is to protect the victim and to deter bullying behavior in the future. The

discipline imposed should match the offense.

In regard to investigating reports of bullying, Administrators or their designees shall discuss bullying with the victim in a place where the victim feels secure. The initial discussion with the victim shall not take place in the presence of the offending student(s). If more than one student is involved in perpetrating the bullying, the Administrator shall talk to each of the offending students separately. If an investigation substantiates that bullying has occurred, the Administrator or their designee shall take appropriate action consistent with this policy, including placing a written record of the behavior in the offending student(s)'s discipline file. Students involved in bullying situations will also be referred to the Student Assistance Team who will follow-up with the appropriate post-vention procedures.

PDLCS recognizes that parents can play an important role in educating their children and preventing bullying. Accordingly, the parents of each offending student shall be informed of any bullying incidents involving their child. Parents of offending students may be encouraged to attend one or more conferences with an Administrator or their designee to review the bullying behavior and cooperative strategies for correcting it.

The school's Administrator or designee shall also inform the victim's parents as soon as reasonably possible of any and all bullying behavior involving their child. Parents of students who have been bullied may also be provided with bullying prevention resources to support their child and receive ongoing communications from the school regarding the bullying situation. The Administrator or designee will inform the parents of the victim when the investigation has been completed.

Disciplinary action for bullying may include suspension of privileges, removal from class, suspension, and expulsion or exclusion. If the PDLCS Administrator believes that the conduct rises to the level of a crime, disciplinary action will also include referral to law enforcement officials.

The penalties and prohibitions in this policy are in addition to, and do not replace or supersede, any related provisions in school policy prohibiting conduct such as harassment, violence, assault, and hazing.

Without disclosing personally identifiable data, PDLCS shall make summary information about violations of this policy available to the public, upon request, consistent with the Pennsylvania statutes.

## **Reprisal**

PDLCS will discipline or take appropriate action against any pupil, teacher, administrator or other school personnel who retaliates against any person who reports alleged bullying or any person who testifies, assists or participates in an investigation, or who testifies, assists or participates in a proceeding or hearing relating to such bullying. Retaliation includes, but is not limited to, any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment.

## **Dissemination of Policy and Training**

This policy shall be presented to staff, student and parents upon enrollment or re-enrollment. Staff members, students, and parents will be required to sign a statement that they are aware of the policy and agree to adhere to its terms.

PDLCS will develop and implement a method of discussing this policy annually with students and employees.

This policy shall be reviewed at least annually for compliance with state and federal laws.

## **CHILD ABUSE/SEXUAL ABUSE POLICY**

School staff members who come into contact with children are mandated to report when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child under the care, supervision, guidance or training of that person or of their agency, institution or organization is an abused child. In addition, any person may report suspected abuse, even if the individual wishes to remain anonymous. All suspected child abuse situations must be reported to ChildLine immediately and may be referred to the Student Assistance Program (SAP).

## **SEXUAL ASSAULT POLICY**

If a student enrolled at PDLCS is convicted or adjudicated delinquent of committing a sexual assault against another enrolled student, PDLCS will take one of the following actions:

1. Expel the convicted/adjudicated student; or
2. Transfer the convicted/adjudicated student to an alternative education program

A student who is expelled or transferred because of their conviction/adjudication for sexual assault may return to PDLCS only if the victim ceases to be enrolled at PDLCS or the conviction or delinquency is reversed and no appeal is pending.

A student convicted of a sexual assault upon another student enrolled in the same public school entity must notify the public school entity of the conviction no later than 72 hours after the conviction.

Upon registration, a parent or guardian must provide a sworn statement or affirmation stating whether the student was previously or is presently expelled under the provisions of section 1318.1 covering *Students Convicted or Adjudicated Delinquent of Sexual Assault*.

In the case of students with disabilities, PDLCS will take all steps necessary to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Public Law 91-230, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.).

## **GRIEF POLICY**

Mental health issues as well as the death of a family member or friend may disrupt daily life at home, at school or in the community. Without help, mental health problems and unaddressed grief issues can lead to school failure, alcohol or other drug abuse, family discord, violence or even suicide. However, help is available through the Student Assistance Program at PDLCS. Any student experiencing barriers to learning that are social-emotional in nature, or who experience the loss of a loved one will be referred to the Student Assistance Program for follow-up and referral to outside community resources if needed.

School community members wishing to memorialize a loved one within school parameters must discuss their wishes with the Student Assistance Team to determine the appropriateness of the proposed memorial.

## **SAFE AND DRUG FREE SCHOOL POLICY**

In accordance with Federal Law, the PDLCS prohibits the use, possession, concealment or distribution of drugs by students on the PDLCS grounds, in any school building, or at any PDLCS related event, activity or function (e.g. standardized testing). Drugs include any alcoholic beverage, tobacco products, anabolic steroid, and dangerous controlled substance as defined by State or Federal statute, or any substance that could be considered a “look alike” controlled substance. Compliance with this PDLCS policy is mandatory for all students, and any student who violates this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, in accordance with due process and as specified in the PDLCS Code of Conduct as listed in this Parent/Student Handbook, up to and including expulsion from the PDLCS. The Student Assistance Team will be notified in any case of a student suspected of violating the Drug-Free School Policy. When required by the state law, the PDLCS will also notify law enforcement officials.

## **SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM**

The Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School Board of Trustees recognizes that suicide is a major cause of death among young people and that all suicide threats must be taken seriously. The school’s Crisis Plan must be followed when a suicide attempt, threat or disclosure is reported. Counselors and the School Nurse shall also provide training for students, parents/guardians and staff to help them recognize the warning signs of severe emotional distress and take preventive measures to help potentially suicidal students.

Staff shall promptly report suicidal threats or statements to 911, or Crisis Response then, to the Administration, Counselors, or School Nurse, who shall promptly report the threats or statements to the student’s parents/guardians. These statements shall otherwise be kept confidential. In addition, if a student self-reports that they are considering suicide, demonstrates any suicidal

ideation or reports are received by any school member that another student may be suicidal, they will automatically follow the Crisis Plan and refer the student to the Student Assistance Program (SAP).

## **TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNET APPROPRIATE USAGE POLICY**

The use of technology is a privilege and an important part of the overall curriculum of the school. PDLCS does not warrant that technology resources will meet any specific requirements the student, or other users may have, or that they will be error free or uninterrupted. PDLCS will, from time to time, make determinations on whether specific uses of technology are consistent with school policies for students and school employees. PDLCS always reserves the right to monitor and log technology use, to monitor file server space utilization by users, and to examine specific network usage (as may be deemed necessary) for maintenance, safety or security of the technology resources or the safety of the user. It is the policy of PDLCS to:

- Annually require students and parents to sign the Technology and Internet Acceptable Usage Policy;
- Prevent user access over its computer network to receive or transmit inappropriate material via Internet, electronic mail, or other forms of direct electronic communications;
- Prevent unauthorized access and other unlawful online activity and/or damage to school resources;
- Prevent unauthorized online disclosure, use, or dissemination of personal identification information of minors; and
- Comply with the Children’s Internet Protection Act [Publ. L. No. 106-554 and 47 USC 254(h)].

The Google G Suite for Education is utilized across all aspects of the school for educational purposes in grades K-12. This account will potentially provide the student’s name to Google G Suite Applications and other third party applications. Parents/Guardians consent to the creation of a Google G Suite account for all students by the School to be utilized for school communication, lesson activity completion and as a means for logging into third party educational applications that utilize a Google account single sign on protocol.

## **WEAPONS POLICY**

The PDLCS Board of Trustees recognizes the importance of a safe school environment relative to the educational process. Possession of weapons in the school setting is a threat to the safety of students and staff and is prohibited by law.

## **Purpose**

Weapons serve no educational purpose. The Board of Trustees directs that any student of PDLCS found to be in possession of a weapon at a school related function shall be subject to discipline as outlined herein.

## **Definitions**

**Weapon** - the term shall include but is not be limited to any knife, cutting instrument, cutting tool, martial arts device, firearm, air rifle, pistol, slingshot device, explosive device, replica of a weapon, and/or any other tool or instrument capable of inflicting serious bodily injury.

According to statute, “weapon” shall be defined as a device, instrument, material or substance (animate or inanimate) that is used for, or is readily capable of, causing death or serious bodily injury, except that such term does not include a pocket knife with a blade of less than 2 ½ inches in length.

**Possessing** - a student is in possession of a weapon when the weapon is found on the person of the student, in the student’s vehicle, under the student’s control while on school property or on property being used by the school, at any school function or activity (testing locations or field trips) , or at any school event.

## **Prohibited Activity**

Any student of the school who is in possession of a firearm, explosive, or weapons as defined herein, at any school function or activity, including school authorized events held away from school property, shall be in violation of this policy.

## **Investigation Procedures**

An investigation based upon reasonable suspicion requires specific objective facts that reasonably lead one to believe that the individual in question is in possession of a weapon(s).

When determining if there is reasonable suspicion, there are some factors that a school official may consider. These factors include the student’s age, history and school record, the prevalence of weapon(s) in the school, the importance of not delaying the search, the value and reliability of the school official’s information, and the school official’s personal experiences with the student.

Only areas and spaces that could potentially contain a weapon may be searched. This is called the “scope of the search”. If there is reasonable suspicion that an individual is in possession of a weapon, a police officer should be summoned to conduct the search when possible.



- When no police officer is present, School officials should only search individuals of the same gender.
- The individual should be moved to a private area in which the search should take place. Such search should be witnessed by one individual who should note all of the surroundings and circumstances as well as all of the actions that take place.
- The police officer will pat-down the individual in a manner consistent with all applicable Federal and State laws and guidelines as well as the officer's training.
- If the search of the individual and/or the belongings does not reveal any weapon(s), then all removed items will be returned to the individual. The search is complete.
- If the search reveals any weapon(s), the police officer will immediately confiscate the item(s) and take appropriate action.

After a search of property such as a coat or backpack is completed, the site employee shall notify and/or summon:

- Local police;
- PDLCS Chief Executive Officer and Principals;
- Parent(s) or guardian(s) of any student(s) involved in the violation;
  - Any employee at the site of a school related activity, upon learning of a possible violation of this policy, shall immediately notify the school's Administration of the violation and the identity of the student(s) involved.
  - After the Administrator has confirmed the violation of the policy, they shall immediately notify the student(s) and the parent(s) or the guardian(s) of the student(s) in writing that the student(s) is/are suspended from school as outlined in the "Penalties" provisions of this policy.
  - The Administrator shall be directly responsible for investigating the violation on behalf of PDLCS with the requested assistance of other school personnel.

## **Penalties**

PDLCS shall expel for a period of not less than one (1) year any student who violates this weapons policy. Such expulsion shall be given in conformance with formal due process proceedings required by law. The school's Administrator may recommend modifications of such expulsions on a case-by-case basis.

In the case of an exceptional student, the school's Administrator shall take all necessary steps to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA).

## **Reenrollment to School**

Before any student found in violation of this policy may be reenrolled to school, a conference involving parents and school officials shall be held to determine if any remediation and/or guidelines for reenrollment are necessary.

As a condition of Reenrollment to PDLCS, the following items shall be considered:

- Recommendation for outside counseling;
- Referral to the Student Assistance Program;
- Referral to a school counselor.

Any student discovered, without previous plan or knowledge that they are in possession of a weapon as defined, shall:

- Immediately report the weapon to a school official;
- Not be in jeopardy of the discipline code unless it can be shown the student had knowledge of the weapon prior to admitted discovery.

## **Enrolling Students**

When the school receives an application from a student who was previously expelled from a Pennsylvania public school for an offense involving a weapon, PDLCS will not accept the student during the expulsion period without prior approval of a PDLCS Administrator.

## **SCHOOL RECORDS**

Student records are directly accessible only to the professional staff and to the students' parents until the student reaches eighteen years of age. Parents have the right to review records, and a request for that viewing should be made through the Administrator.

An official cumulative record is maintained for each student. Recognizing students' rights for privacy, this record shall contain only verified information of recognized importance.

## **Release of Records**

School records are only released to another school upon request from that school stating that the student is now enrolled in that school, from a signed release by the parent or guardian or as otherwise required by law.

## **Updates**

To keep the student's records up to date and for times of emergency, parents must keep PDLCS informed of any address, and/or telephone changes that may occur during the school year. Parents

are required to provide at least one working phone number at all times.

## **Requests for Records**

The Records Department will request the student's records upon completion of the enrollment process. Pennsylvania mandates that the requested records must be received within 10 days. If the records are not received within 10 days, the local law enforcement agency will be notified. The requirement in Pennsylvania that records must be received in a given time comes from school mandates relating to missing children.

## **Student Directory Information**

It is the policy of the PDLCS not to release any personal information such as names, home address, and phone numbers to outside agencies or requesting parties without the direct written consent of the parent or as otherwise required by law. If the parent authorizes release of this information, a completed Authorization to Release Information Form must be on file in the student's record folder. Parents are asked to complete authorization forms annually.

## **Access to Student Recruiting Information**

All local educational agencies (LEAs) must provide to military recruiters or institutions of higher education, upon request, access to secondary school students' (i.e., juniors and seniors) names, addresses and telephone listings. The state military affairs law requires the release of directory information consisting of a list of senior male and female students by name, home address and telephone number. The list will be compiled by the first day of the academic year in which the senior students will graduate. Additionally, parents are notified that the school routinely discloses names, addresses, and telephone numbers to military recruiters upon request, subject to a parent's request not to disclose such information without written consent. Please contact your child's counselor if you would like to opt-out of the public, non-nonconsensual disclosure of directory information. You must contact the counselor and submit the opt-out form no later than the first day of the academic year in which the senior students will graduate.

## **PARENTS' RIGHTS**

### **Teacher Qualifications**

PDLCS will annually notify parents of their right to request the following regarding their child's teacher and/or instructional aide: licensure/certification information, emergency/provisional status, and educational background.

## **Title I LEA and School Parent and Family Engagement Policy**

All Local Education Agencies (LEAs) receiving Title I funds are required under Section 1116 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to develop a written Parent and Family Engagement Policy for the LEA. ESSA states that the LEA Parent and Family Engagement Policy must be jointly developed with parents and family members, incorporated into the LEA plan (Consolidated Application), and distributed to parents of participating children in a format and language that parents can understand. Such programs, activities, and procedures shall be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents and family members of participating children.

The Title I program of PDLCS will foster and enhance parent/involvement in the school. PDLCS wants to involve parents in their children's learning and to form an open line of communication between school and home. This will be accomplished through the following programs, activities and procedures that will be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents and families. This policy was:

- Developed jointly with and agreed upon by parents and family members of Title I children;
- Written in an understandable format and provided in a language parents can understand;
- Distributed to all parents and family members of Title I children;
- Made available to the local community;
- Updated annually to meet the changing needs of parents, family members and the school.

### **Commitments:**

1. PDLCS will hold an Annual Title I Meeting. Parents have the opportunity to review Title I programs and provide input into the planning process during the annual Title I meeting held at the school during flexible dates and times. Additionally, parents' rights and Title I requirements will be discussed. Information about the Title I program will be included in the student handbook.
2. Parent/Family meetings, events, conferences, etc., will be offered at different times of day to encourage as much parent participation as possible.
3. Parent and family members will be involved in the planning, review and improvement of this Parent and Family Engagement Policy through Title I meetings and written and verbal feedback opportunities.
4. Parents and family members will be involved in the planning, review and improvement of the Title I program and Family Engagement through Title I meetings. For parents and family

members who cannot attend the meeting, they will be offered other opportunities to provide feedback, including surveys, etc.

5. PDLCS will provide parents and family members with timely information about the Title I program, a description and explanation of the high-quality curriculum at the school, and forms of assessments used to measure student progress. PDLCS will provide, if requested by parents, opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children and respond to any such suggestions as soon as practically possible.
6. PDLCS will involve parents and family members in the joint development of the Schoolwide plans.
7. A school-parent compact will be jointly developed with parents and family members. The compact outlines how parents/family members, the entire school staff and students will share in the responsibility for improved student achievement. The compact will be reviewed at Title I meetings and distributed in the Fall and upon submitting agreements included in the student handbook.
8. PDLCS will address the importance of communication between teachers and parents/family members on an ongoing basis. Opportunities for communication include:
  - a. Parents are informed about school activities and events through interim progress reports, report cards, mailings, email correspondence, school announcements, parent newsletters, parent/teacher conferences and informal personal and telephone conferences.
  - b. Reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer on any given day of the week and participate in the child's class and observation of classroom activities.
  - c. All parents in grades K-12 are scheduled for a parent-teacher conference in the Fall with an opportunity for a second conference in the Spring. At any other time, a parent may ask to schedule a conference with the student's teacher(s) or an administrator.
  - d. Ensuring regular two-way, meaningful communication between family members and school staff and to the extent possible, in a language that family members can understand.
9. PDLCS will provide assistance to parents and family members in understanding the challenging State academic standards, State and local academic assessments and how to monitor a child's progress and work with teachers to improve the achievement of their children. PDLCS will also provide assistance materials and training to help parents work with their children to improve their children's achievement, such as literacy training and using technology including education about the harms of copyright piracy, as appropriate, to foster parent engagement.

10. PDLCS will educate teachers, support personnel and other staff, with the assistance of parents/family members, in the value and utility of contributions of parents and family members, and in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents and family members as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs and build ties between parents and family members and the school.
11. To the extent feasible and appropriate, PDLCS will coordinate and integrate parent and family engagement programs and activities with other Federal, State and local programs.
12. PDLCS will ensure that information related to school and parent programs, meetings, events, and activities is sent to parents and family members in a format and to the extent practical, that family members can understand.
13. PDLCS will provide opportunities for the informed participation of parents and family members (including parents and family members who have limited English proficiency, parents and family members with disabilities, and parents and family members of migratory children) in the Title I program.

## **Conferences**

Parents have the right to request at any time conferences referring to the cumulative progress of the student with an Administrator.

## **School Contacts with Non-Custodial<sup>1</sup> Parents**

Access to student records will be in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and other relevant Federal and State laws as pertaining to the release of records. Upon request, non-custodial parents shall be entitled to exercise all parental rights to the extent that such rights are not restricted by a legally binding instrument or court order.

If there is a court order concerning legal custody of a child, the information must be shared with PDLCS and filed in the child's cumulative record.

## **Special Education**

PDLCS fully complies with state and federal laws regarding the education of students with disabilities through the use of ChildFind. In the event that a parent, or a teacher, suspects that a child may have a disability that is negatively affecting the child's education, instructional intervention strategies will be provided through the MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) team. When it has been determined that intervention strategies have not been successful, and the child

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<sup>1</sup> A non-custodial parent refers to the parent who does not have physical custody of the child, but does have the right to information about the child's education.

continues to demonstrate a need for more services, a multi-factored evaluation may be conducted to determine if the child does have a school aged disability. PDLCS shall comply with all mandated timelines to complete the evaluation process.

When a child is identified as having a disability, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be provided to meet the specialized needs of the child. As a distance-learning school that relies upon parent facilitation of the school day, PDLCS may deliver educationally appropriate services to students with an IEP using methods that differ from those used at traditional public schools. These methods and services will be determined by the IEP Team. It is the responsibility of the student's parent to take their child to a location specified by PDLCS, for state-mandated standardized testing and other purposes, including certain special education related services.

## **Policy and Procedure for Parental Complaints**

Any parent may file a complaint regarding a violation of school policies, regulations, rules or procedures or federal, state or local law to the Board of Trustees of PDLCS by filing the same in writing with the School Administrator. To file a complaint with the Administrator, the parent shall deliver the written complaint containing:

- The student's and parent's name (anonymous complaints will not be processed);
- The signature of the complainant;
- The complainant's name and phone number;
- The specific violation of school policy, regulation, rule and procedures, and/or federal, state or local law. The complaint may be delivered in person or by U.S. Mail properly addressed to PDLCS in care of an Administrator.

Upon filing of any complaint, PDLCS will do the following:

- Date stamp the complaint upon receipt;
- Notify the President of the Board of Trustees and the Board's attorney;
- Send a letter of acknowledgement to the complainant within 7-10 business days. The letter should address the general procedures that will be followed.
- Conduct an investigation as directed by the President of the Board of Trustees. This process may include the following:
  - Collaborating with other offices, employees and personnel within the school;
  - Conducting a telephone or personal interview and/or conference(s) with complainant and other necessary parties; and/or
  - Sending written correspondence.
- The Administrator will inform the President of the Board of Trustees of the investigation

process and findings.

- The investigation will be based on fact and findings specific to the allegation(s) stated in the complaint. (The reason for the decision will be outlined in the letter of findings.)
- The Board of Trustees, or its representative, will issue a letter (or approve the letter) to the complainant of:
  - Compliance – (findings were unsubstantiated and school has complied); or
  - Non-Compliance – noting the areas of non-compliance, recommending possible changes/technical assistance and requesting that the school respond to the complainant with a corrective action plan letter within 10-15 business days. All documentation of the complaint, findings and any corrective action plan(s) must be placed in the appropriately market complaint file for closure.

## WITHDRAWAL

It is against Pennsylvania state code for a student to be simultaneously enrolled in PDLCS and another school district; therefore, the parent is responsible for contacting the PDLCS Records Department before the student enrolls in another public school. It is critical that parents send PDLCS a written request for withdrawal as soon as the decision to withdraw a student has been made.

To withdraw a student from PDLCS, the parent must contact the School to obtain the necessary forms, sign and submit the forms to PDLCS Records Department. This signed form gives official notice of the child's withdrawal and grants permission for PDLCS to send records to the student's new school. Except as prohibited by law, the student's grades and credits will not be released until all obligations are met, including the return of all textbooks, equipment, and materials as detailed in this handbook. PDLCS will contact the family via telephone to discuss the reasons for the withdrawal and what steps may be taken to keep the student enrolled in PDLCS.

Should a student decide to return to PDLCS, the enrollment process will be the same as for newly enrolled students and required documentation must be received prior to enrollment.

PDLCS has an obligation under Pennsylvania Law to immediately initiate proceedings to withdraw a student in the event that said student, without a legitimate excuse, fails to participate in 10 consecutive school days during an academic year.



# REQUIRED ANNUAL NOTICES

## Student Records

It is the intent of this Annual Notice and policy to inform parent/guardian(s) and eligible children (i.e. students 18 and older) of their rights relevant to their privacy rights in the collection, maintenance, release and destruction of these records as required by the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*, 20 U.S.C. '1232g. 34 C.F.R. part 99.

Annual notice of this policy is provided on the PDLCS website, in Student and Family Handbook, and is available at the school.

The different categories of information maintained by PDLCS are as follows; educational and health records, personally identifiable information and directory information. Information known as directory information can be released without consent. Parents may opt out of this by requesting in writing to the school principal that some or all directory information not be released. In addition, photographs, audio, videos may be used in publications, websites, or social media highlighting various school activities or coverage of school events. If you do not wish your child to be photographed or videotaped for these purposes, you must inform PDLCS principal in writing.

Educational Records include records directly related to a student that are maintained by Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School (PDLCS). The educational records of PDLCS students may include all of the following (this list is not intended to be exhaustive): grades, standardized test results, student evaluation reports, samples of student work, records transferred from sending schools, discipline records, medical records and any other records created and maintained by the school district directly related to the student. Educational records do not include communications with legal counsel that are attorney client privileged. Educational records do not include records maintained solely by the creator for their personal use, not shared with others. The contents of a student's educational file shall be determined by the PDLCS unless a specific parental request is made or a complaint is made consistent with this Notice.

PDLCS shall permit the parent/guardian(s) of a student or an eligible special education student, who is or has been in attendance in the school, to inspect and review the education records of the student upon written request. The school will comply with a written request to review records within a reasonable period of time (never to exceed 45 calendar days from the date of written request) after the request has been made. When there are special cases and where necessary, a parental request to review records will be granted and arranged as soon as possible. Visits to review a student's records shall be arranged and facilitated by a Principal or designee, or any party selected by the school, for the purposes of security and assistance in explaining or interpreting the data. The right to inspect and review education records includes:

1. The right to a response from PDLCS to reasonable requests, made in writing, for explanation and interpretations of the record; and
2. The right to obtain copies of records from PDLCS where failure of PDLCS to provide the copies would effectively prevent a parent or eligible student from exercising the right to inspect and review the educational records (e.g. where the parent lives too far to come review the records personally). *A reasonable fee of \$0.25 will be charged per page for duplicate copies of documents already provided to parents/guardians.*

In accordance with FERPA, PDLCS will not produce or compile documentation that does not already exist.

It is presumed by the school that both natural parent/guardian(s) of a student has authority to inspect and review the educational records of the student at the school in the conference room by appointment unless there is evidence that there is a legally binding instrument, or a State law or court order governing such matters as divorce, separation or custody, which provides to the contrary. A school designee will sit with the parent when the parent reviews the records in a private conference area of the main office.

**Under federal law, parental consent is not required for the release of Directory Information, which is information contained in an education record of a student that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed.**

PDLCS designates the following as **Directory Information:** information contained in an education record of a student that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed.

(a) Directory Information typically includes, but is not limited to, the student's name; address; telephone listing; date and place of birth; dates of attendance; participation in officially recognized activities and sports.

(b) Directory Information does not include a student's:

(1) Social security number; or

(2) Student identification (ID) number, except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section.

(c) Directory Information includes a student ID number, user ID, or other unique personal identifier used by the student for purposes of accessing or communicating in electronic systems, but only if the identifier cannot be used to gain access to education records except when used in conjunction with one or more factors that authenticate the user's identity, such as a personal identification number (PIN), password, or other factor known or possessed only by the authorized user.

**A written record of this information, or electronic copy of the same, including grade level completed and year completed, may be maintained at least 100 years after a student attains age 21.** A parent/guardian or eligible student may notify the school in writing of their refusal to allow the school to release directory information without prior consent. Such written refusal for consent must be sent to the Right to Know Officer, 2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100, Sewickley, PA 15143, by email to Leigh Anne Lord, Right to Know Officer, at [RTKOfficer@padistance.org](mailto:RTKOfficer@padistance.org), or by fax 1.866.977.3527.

The school is required to release student directory information (access to names, addresses, and phone numbers of high school juniors and seniors) to **military recruiters and college admissions officers**. The law requires high schools to release information to colleges or other higher learning institutions upon request. Any parent/guardian or student who has reached age eighteen may notify the School **in writing of their refusal** for this information to be released. Letters seeking the withholding of information to military recruiters should be sent to: The Right to Know Officer, 2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100, Sewickley, PA 15143, by email to Leigh Anne Lord, Right to Know Officer at [RTKOfficer@padistance.org](mailto:RTKOfficer@padistance.org), or by fax 1.866.977.3527.

Per federal guidance, **student medical records**, maintained by the nurses' office, are considered educational records and will be shared with staff who the school determines has a legitimate educational interest in the information and a need to know medical information to protect the safety and health of the student. **Once provided to the School, specific parental consent will not be sought to share information on a need to know basis. Parental requests to maintain the confidentiality of specific medical information must be made in writing to the nurse's office.** Requests for complete confidentiality of medical information will be granted at the discretion of the nurse. These requests will be granted unless dangerous to the student.

If an agency reports a crime committed by a student with a disability, the school will ensure that copies of the special education records and disciplinary records of the student will be transmitted properly and only to the extent possible that the transmission is permitted by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

The school can communicate about sex offenders from agency to agency.

The school shall obtain the written consent of the parent(s)/guardian(s) of a student age eighteen before disclosing Personally Identifiable Information, other than directory information, from the education records of a student to a third party. Consent is not required where the disclosure is to the parent/guardian(s) of a student who is not an eligible student or the student.

### **Personally Identifiable Information for Educational Records**

The term includes, but is not limited to:

(a) The student's name;

(b) The name of the student's parent or other family members;

(c) The address of the student or student's family;

(d) A personal identifier, such as the student's social security number, student number, or biometric record;

(e) Other indirect identifiers, such as the student's date of birth, place of birth, and mother's maiden name;

(f) Other information that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the school community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty; or

(g) Information requested by a person who the educational agency or institution reasonably believes knows the identity of the student to whom the education record relates.

## Uses of Personally Identifiable Information

The school may disclose Personally Identifiable Information from the education records of a student without written consent of the parent/guardian(s) or the student or the eligible student in several situations. (See 34 C.F.R. § 99) Some important examples of when no consent to release information include (list not exhaustive):

1. To other school officials, including teachers, school counselors, nurses, and Intermediate Unit personnel within the School who have been determined by the School to have legitimate educational interests or are providing instruction or services to students. The School has determined that all school employees involved in the direct supervision of a student (academic or non-academic) (including support staff) have a legitimate education interest in academic and health related student information if the information is necessary to ensure appropriate fulfillment of their professional duties and to ensure the health and safety of the student.
2. To officials of another school or school system or post-secondary schools in which the student seeks or intends to enroll, subject to the requirements set forth in 99.34. Parents may request a copy of the record sent.
3. To appropriate parties in a health or safety emergency, subject to the conditions set in 34 C.F.R. § 99.36, if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.
4. Information designated by the School as Directory Information.
5. Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent/guardian or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR § 99.31):
  - Specified officials for audit and evaluation purposes
  - Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student
  - Organizations conducting studies for or on behalf of the school
  - Accrediting organizations
  - To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena
  - State and local authorities, within the juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific state law
  - Contracted, consultant, volunteer, or other party to whom an agency or institution has outsourced institutional services or functions may be considered a school official under this paragraph--

*(1) Performs an institutional service or function for which the agency or institution would otherwise use employees;*

*(2) Is under the direct control of the agency or institution with respect to the use and maintenance of education records; and*

*(3) Is subject to the requirements of 34 C.F.R. §99.33 (a) governing the use and redisclosure of personally identifiable information from education records.*

*(ii) An educational agency or institution must use reasonable methods to ensure that school officials obtain access to only those education records in which they have legitimate educational interests. An educational agency or institution that does not use physical or technological access controls must ensure that its administrative policy for controlling access to education records is effective and that it remains in compliance with the legitimate educational interest requirement.*

When providing records to authorized third parties, the school will make a reasonable attempt to notify the parent/guardian(s) of the student or the eligible student of the transfer of the records at the last known address of the parent(s)/guardian(s) or eligible student. Per state law, the school will not provide any notice of transfer of records of a student to a school in which a student seeks or intends to enroll.

The school maintains student records in locked filing rooms/cabinets within the confines of PDLCS. This storage space contains special education student records, student health records, 504 Student Service Plan records, etc. Current original special education records with psychological records are maintained in the Special Education Department. All school records of students (K-12) who were evaluated by the school psychologist(s) and found not to be non-exceptional are kept and are secured in the school(s)' offices. All records are kept in a secure location and access to files is limited.

**PLEASE NOTE: PDLCS BOARD POLICY PROVIDES RESIDENT STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS WITH NOTICE THAT THE SCHOOL MAY DESTROY RECORDS UNDER THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES AND TIMELINES:**

a. Records that include a student's name, address, grades, attendance records, classes attended, grade level completed and year completed may be destroyed once 100 years have passed since the student's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

b. **Special Education records**, Section 504 records, Response to Intervention (RTI) records, and health records **may be destroyed once 7 years have passed from the date a student has graduated or reached graduation age** (if exiting the school before graduation) as long as there is no outstanding request to inspect and review the records and the records are no longer deemed useful to the school.

c. **Notice of destruction of these records is provided annually via this publication.** Educational records of a student are no longer needed by PDLCS to provide educational services at the end of one year following a student's graduation from PDLCS. A parent/guardian may submit a written request for the destruction of all education records at that time.

d. Destruction will proceed where parents or eligible students have not requested copies by July 1 of the year the records may be destroyed as per paragraphs *a* and *b* above. Parents or students over eighteen have the right to request a copy of their record before destruction.

Parents are reminded that copies of the records might be needed for the acquisition of Social Security benefits or for other purposes.

### **Amendment of Education Records**

A parent/guardian or eligible student has the right to request amendment of a student's educational file if it is believed that any information is inaccurate, or in violation of a student's rights. The educational agency shall decide within a reasonable time whether to amend the record. If PDLCS decides not to amend the educational record it shall notify the parent/student of the right to and arrange an informal hearing. The hearing will be conducted by an official of the school without an interest in the outcome, who will be either the Right to Know Officer or their designee. The parent may present relevant evidence. The school will issue a written decision based on the hearing. Informal inquiries may be sent to: [ferpa@ed.gov](mailto:ferpa@ed.gov) or [ppra@ed.gov](mailto:ppra@ed.gov). The website address is: [www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guide/fpcd](http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guide/fpcd)

Complaints regarding violation of rights accorded parent(s)/guardian(s) and eligible students with respect to student records are to be submitted to the PDLCS Chief Compliance Officer, 2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100, Sewickley, PA 15143, by email at [dean.pappaterra@padistance.org](mailto:dean.pappaterra@padistance.org), or by fax 1.866.977.3527. All complaints will be investigated and responded to in writing within a reasonable period of time. If complaints cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the school, complaints can be filed with the following

**Family Policy Compliance Office  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202-4605**

Questions regarding the above information or requests for a copy of the records policy may be referred to Leigh Anne Lord, Right to Know Officer, 2605 Nicholson Road, Building IV, Sewickley, PA 15143, by email at [RTKOfficer@padistance.org](mailto:RTKOfficer@padistance.org), by fax 1.866.977.3527, or by telephone 1.888.997.3352 extension 163.

### **Screening and Evaluation**

The PDLCS employs the following procedures for locating, identifying and evaluating the needs of school age students who may require special education programs and/or services. These procedures, as required by state regulation, are as follows:

As prescribed by Section 1402 of the Pennsylvania school code, PDLCS helps families make provisions for health screenings for kindergarten (K) through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and new students without history of recent exams: Vision (Gr. K-12); Hearing (Gr. K, 3, 7 and 11 and any student with a known history of hearing loss); Mandated Physical Exams (Gr. K, 6, and 11); Dental Screenings (Gr. K, 1, 3, and 7); Scoliosis Screening (Gr. 6, 7) and Body Mass Index (BMI) screening (Gr. K-12).

Speech and language skills are screened in kindergarten and on a referral basis by speech clinicians.

Gross-motor and fine-motor skills, academic and social-emotional skills are assessed by the teachers and support staff. Screening activities include: review of group-based data such as cumulative enrollment and health records, report cards and

academic skills scores. Identified needs from these screening sources, as well as information obtained from parents and outside agencies, is assessed, noted within the student's record and discussed with parents.

PDLCS has intervention/prevention teams in place to support students as a pre-referral system. A **Student Academic Team** has been established as part of the pre-referral intervention process. The team consists of principal, guidance counselor, regular education teachers, reading specialists, school psychologist when needed and special education staff when needed. Parents are also part of this process and are contacted and strongly encouraged to participate in all phases of the Student Academic Team process. The Student Academic Team assists teachers and parents with supporting students who are experiencing academic, behavioral, medical, emotional and social skills difficulties.

The **Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)** model is utilized as part of the pre-referral intervention process. The MTSS team coordinates and oversees the MTSS pre-referral process. The team coordinates all meetings between parents and staff and identifies researched evidenced-based strategies that can be implemented in the regular education classroom setting for students who are at-risk. The MTSS team will develop appropriate academic and/or behavioral goals that the students need to achieve in order to succeed academically in the regular classroom setting. The MTSS team also monitors the effectiveness of the instructional strategies that are utilized in the regular classroom environment. The team also works with students on study skills, organizational skills, preparedness, and will, on occasion, provide individual or small group focused tutoring sessions.

The **Student Assistance Program (SAP)** is an additional support used by the school to identify at-risk students. SAP teams are currently in place at the middle and high school levels. SAP is a cooperative effort with parents, utilizing the support staff, students, and community services. It is a proactive prevention/intervention program that attempts to provide intervention before school performance is seriously compromised. The SAP Core Team of individuals are trained in the SAP Model and focus on screening/intervention for student who may be experiencing drug and alcohol, depression, and/or family issues, and will make referrals to appropriate agencies or treatment facilities, aftercare for those returning from treatment, and crisis intervention as needed. If appropriate, a referral process is initiated at each building level through the Student Academic Team, Response to Intervention Team, and Student Assistance Teams, school counseling departments, principal or the Department of Special Education. Assessment data is used by the team to meet the student's specific needs by recommending modifications or adaptations to the regular education program, creating interventions to address the problem and monitoring the student's response to intervention, or to document the need for further evaluation.

If it is determined that a student is in need of further evaluation, the student is referred for a multidisciplinary team (MDT) evaluation, which requires parent permission and includes parent input. Next, a "Permission-to-Evaluate Consent Form" is issued to the parent to sign giving the school district permission to conduct the evaluation. The school has 60 calendar days to complete the evaluation. After the evaluation is completed, an evaluation report is prepared which includes specific recommendations for the types of intervention necessary to meet the needs of the student and to determine the child's eligibility for special education services based upon a school-aged disability.

When the evaluation report is completed, parents are invited, if necessary, to a multidisciplinary team meeting to review findings and plan for the student's needs. This could then include the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) if the student qualifies for special education services or a review of the report if the student does not qualify for services. After the MDT evaluation is completed and an IEP team meeting is held (if the student qualifies for services), parents are given a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement/Prior Written Notice (NOREP), which they sign to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the recommendation.

Parents of students who suspect that their child has a disability and is in need of special education may request a MTSS meeting or multidisciplinary team evaluation of their child through a written request to a PDLCS Principal.

**You may find information regarding the appropriate developmental milestone descriptors for infants and toddlers at the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website:** <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html> For additional information regarding the signs of developmental delays, please contact PDLCS, Director of Special Education, 2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100, Sewickley, PA 15143, by fax 1.866.977.3527, or by telephone 1.888.997.3352 x105

#### **Services for School Age Students with Disabilities (IDEA)**

PDLCS provides a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities according to state and federal rules. To be eligible, the child must:

- Be of school age.
- Have a disability *and* be in need of specially designed instruction.
- Have exposure to appropriate reading and math instruction from highly qualified teachers (attendance to school)
- Meet eligibility criteria for one or more of the following physical or intellectual disabilities as set forth in the Pennsylvania State Standards: autism, deaf-blindness, blindness, visual impairment, emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, other health impairment, traumatic brain injury, and speech/language impairment, orthopedic impairment, hearing impairment, deafness, multiple disabilities or intellectual disabilities. Services designed to meet the needs of eligible disabled students include:
  - The annual development of an individualized education program (IEP).
  - A triennial multidisciplinary re-evaluation for students with disabilities (except for those students with intellectual disabilities where evaluation remains biennial).
  - A continuum of services for students from itinerant level to supplemental level to full time level special education support within the school district or placement in a full-time special education disabilities class outside of the regular school.

The extent of special education services for disabled students and the location for the delivery of such services are determined by the parents and the district staff at the IEP team meeting and are based on the student's identified needs and abilities, individual goals and the level of intensity of the specified intervention. PDLCS also provides related services such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and assistive technology if they are required to enable the student with disabilities to derive educational benefits.

Prior to initiation of services, parents of a student with disabilities are presented a "Notice of Recommended Educational Placement/Prior Written Notice" (NOREP) with which they agree or disagree. If parents agree to the program outlined by the multidisciplinary team, the parent signs the NOREP, and the program is implemented for the student. If parents disagree with the program being recommended, they have the right to request IEP facilitation, mediation and/or a due process hearing. Parents are issued "Procedural Safeguards" which outlines in detail their legal rights as a parent of a child identified as having a disability.

### **Services for Students in Nonpublic Schools**

Public school education may be accessible to resident students attending nonpublic schools on a dual enrollment basis in a special education program operated in a public school. A multidisciplinary evaluation which determines the child's eligibility for services must be conducted and, if eligible, an individualized education program plan (IEP) is developed. Parents of nonpublic school students who suspect that their child is disabled and in need of special education may request a multidisciplinary evaluation of their child through a written request to a PDLCS Principal or Special Education Coordinator.

### **Services for Students under Chapter 15/Section 504**

The school will provide to each protected student with a disability without discrimination or cost to the student or family those related aids, services or accommodations which are needed to provide equal opportunity to participate in and obtain the benefits of school programs and extracurricular activities to the extent appropriate to the student's abilities. To qualify as a protected 504 student with a disability, the child must be of school age with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits or prohibits participation in or access to an aspect of the school program.

Services for protected handicapped students are distinct from those applicable to disabled students enrolled in special education programs. Protected students fall under Pennsylvania's Chapter 15, sometimes known by its federal name, Section 504 (of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act). In contrast, students with disabilities who qualify for special education services are covered by regulations contained in Pennsylvania's Chapter 14/Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While both Chapter 14 and 15 provide services to students, there are technical differences between the two. Additional information about evaluation procedures and provision of services to protected students with disabilities is available by contacting a School Administrator.

### **Services for Preschool Age Children**

Act 212, the Early Intervention Systems Act, entitles all preschool age children with disabilities to appropriate intervention services. Young children experiencing developmental delay or physical or intellectual disabilities are eligible for early intervention services if it is determined that they meet eligibility requirements.

The **Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare** is responsible for providing services to infants and toddlers, defined as children from birth to three year of age. Contact the Early Learning Institute, 2510 Baldwick Road, Pittsburgh, PA, 15205-4104, 412-922-8322.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is responsible for providing services to preschool age children from ages three through five. Contact the **Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Project DART**, 425 East Waterfront Drive, Homestead, PA 15120, 412-394-5941.

### **Confidentiality of Student Records**

The privacy rights of parents and students are mandated by federal legislation known as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA - C.F.R. Part 99), most recently amended in November 1996, state regulations (Chapter 14-Special Education Services and Programs, Chapter 12-Student Rights and Responsibilities) and district policy.

## **Highly Qualified and Effective Teachers**

All Pennsylvania public school teachers with primary responsibility for direct instruction in one or more of ESSA's core content areas are required to demonstrate that they satisfy the State's certification and licensure requirements. This requirement includes:

- Elementary level (grades K-6) teachers who teach all subjects to a particular grade;
- Grades 4-8 who are eligible to teach all subjects grades 4-6, and either mathematics, science, social studies or English Language Arts for 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grades,
- Middle- and secondary-level (grades 7-12) core content area teachers;
- Special education teachers who provide direct instruction in one or more core content areas;
- English Language (EL) teachers who provide direct instruction in one or more core content areas

### **Pennsylvania's Definition of Highly Qualified Teacher**

PDLCS staff meets the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for highly qualified teachers. A highly qualified teacher, according to the United States Department of Education, is fully certified, has a bachelor's degree, a content area major and has passed a content area test. In addition, fully certified teachers in Pennsylvania have completed pedagogical course work in education, including student teaching. We take pride in the tremendous skill and dedication of our faculty and staff.

Please note that, as parents, you have a right to request and receive timely information regarding the professional qualifications of your child's classroom teacher. If you have any questions about our Title I Program or about your child's teacher, please feel free to contact the PDLCS Chief Academic Officer, 2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100, Sewickley, PA 15143, by fax 1.866.977.3527, or by telephone at 888.997.3352.

### **Parents' Right to Know**

As stipulated in ESSA, parents/guardians may request information regarding the professional qualifications of their child's classroom teacher(s). Specifically, individuals have the right to ask for the following information:

- Whether the student's teacher has met state qualifying and licensing criteria for the grade level or subject they are teaching;
- Whether the teacher is teaching under emergency or other provisional status;
- The teacher's college major, the baccalaureate degree, and/or any advanced degrees earned by the teacher;
- Whether the child is provided services by paraprofessionals and, if so, their qualifications.

To obtain this information, please submit your request in writing to a PDLCS Administrator who oversees teacher/paraeducator certifications/qualifications. Each request should include the child's name, and the Teacher's names. Please be certain to include your name, address and a telephone number at which you can be contacted during the day.

**Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School**

**Attn: Right to Know Officer, Leigh Anne Lord**

**2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100**

**Sewickley, PA 15143**

**888.997.3352**

# **Surrogate Parents for Students with Special Needs**

## **Surrogate Parent Program**

Federal law establishes the right of a free and appropriate public education for all children with disabilities. To ensure that this right is realized for all such children, procedures are written into the laws to ensure that children with disabilities who are wards of the state, or whose parents are unknown, unavailable, or have had their parental rights legally terminated, have appropriate representation when educational programming decisions are made. This is provided through the recruitment, training and assignment of volunteer surrogate parents who represent the child during the educational process. In Pennsylvania, Intermediate Units have been given the responsibility of recruiting, training and assigning parents to children meeting the qualifications listed. PDLCS works with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit #3 in providing this service.

## **Identification of Children Eligible for Surrogate Parents**

Special needs preschool and school-aged children receiving a free and appropriate education in a public school or an approved private school, who meet one of the following criteria, are eligible for the assignment of a qualified surrogate parent:

1. No IDEA parent can be identified;
2. The local educational agency, after reasonable efforts, cannot locate a parent;
3. The child is a ward of the State as defined by State law (Pennsylvania does not have a state law definition of ward of the State so this provision does not apply in Pennsylvania); or
4. The child is an unaccompanied homeless youth as defined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (i.e., a youth who lack a fixed nighttime residence and are not in the care of a parent or guardian).

To be identified as being in need of a surrogate parent, the preschooler or school-aged child must have special needs, or be thought to have special needs, and be in need of special education services at PDLCS.

## **Qualification for Surrogate Parents**

Surrogate parents must meet the following qualifications:

- Be a person of good character,
- Be at least 18 years of age,
- Possess reasonable abilities to make decisions regarding a child's educational needs,
- Be willing to acquaint themselves with the child's educational needs and with the special education system in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,
- Have no vested interest that would conflict with the primary allegiance to the child they are representing. The surrogate parent should not be an employee of the agency responsible for the care of the child,
- Foster parents may be considered if they meet all other qualifications,
- Have Act 33 and Act 34 clearances from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,
- Be willing to complete a training program conducted by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit.

## **Responsibilities of the Surrogate Parent**

The surrogate parent is expected to act in place of a parent for the student concerning their educational program. This involves:

- Attending a planning conference to develop an individualized educational program
- Being familiar with appropriate procedures for due process and confidentiality of school records
- Receiving and responding to requests and notices concerning the evaluation and/or educational placement of the assigned student
- Making self familiar with the unique educational needs of the assigned student

The surrogate parent takes on certain quasi-legal responsibilities in order to serve the best interests of the child. The primary function is to represent the student in those circumstances in which decisions need to be made concerning the student's educational program or placement. It is necessary for the surrogate parent to receive considerable training to familiarize themselves with all aspects of the



surrogate parent role. The demands of the role may be extensive and require the volunteer to make a significant commitment of time and learning in order to serve the best interest of the child.

If you are interested in being a surrogate parent for a child/youth with disabilities, please contact the Director of Special Education or Principal, at 2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100, Sewickley, PA 15143, by fax 1.866.977.3527, by telephone 1.888.997.3352.

## **English as a Second Language Services (EL)**

In accordance with federal law and state regulations, the PDLCS must identify all students who have “limited English proficiency” (LEP). These students typically have a primary language other than English that is used in their homes. Students identified with a limited English proficiency are eligible for ESL instructional services to help them attain proficient skills in their use of the written and spoken English language.

All students must have a Home Language Survey completed by their parents prior to admission into the school district. This survey allows the PDLCS to identify possible LEP students. Our EL Coordinator will conduct a family interview as indicated by EL regulations of any student identified as possibly having a limited English proficiency and will facilitate services to students based on their level of need.

Parents or guardians who feel that their child may have a limited English proficiency should the EL Coordinator, 2605 Nicholson Road, Suite 4100, Sewickley, PA 15143, by fax 1.866.977.3527, or by telephone at 1.888.997.3352 for more information.

## **Title I Performance Report**

The PDLCS receives Title I funds annually. This funding is used schoolwide to assist students who are below basic or basic in reading and math skills. Families will receive parent reports following each benchmark and state assessment period to help ensure transparency with regards to student achievement.

## **Title I Home-School Compact**

The Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School, and the parents of the students agree that this compact outlines how the parents, the entire school staff, and the students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement. This will serve as the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership that will help children achieve the State's high standards.

### **School**

The school understands the importance of the school experience to every student and their role as educators and models. Therefore, the school agrees to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of their ability.

- Provide high quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables the children served under this part to meet the challenging State academic standards
- Address the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis through, at a minimum quarterly parent check-ins facilitated by the child's homeroom coach and school counselor. All parents may request a conference at any time to discuss their individual student.
- Frequent reports to parents on their children's progress: All students in grades K-8 will receive quarterly report cards. Students in grades 9-12 will receive quarterly progress reports. Benchmark and standardized assessment results will also be communicated and reported to parents.
- Reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's class and observation of classroom activities. Specifically, staff will be available for consultation with parents Monday – Friday between the hours of 7:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. by phone or email. Parents may participate in their child's class by having access to the Portal/Learning Management System for communicating with school staff, accessing daily lessons and recorded live lessons and having access to their child's School Counselor course.
- Ensuring regular, two-way, meaningful communication between family members and school staff and, to the extent practicable, in a language that family members can understand (ESSA, Section 1115(d)(1-2))
- Treat each child with dignity and respect
- Strive to address the individual needs of the student
- Acknowledge that parents are vital to the success of the child and school
- Provide a safe, positive and healthy learning environment

- Assure every student access to quality learning experiences
- Assure the school staff communicate clear expectations for performance to both students and parents:

**Parent:**

The parent understands that participation in a student's education will help the achievement and attitude. Therefore, the parent will continue to carry out the following responsibilities:

- Ensure that my child is ready for school each day.
- Develop a schedule to monitor my student's attendance and participation on a daily basis
- Communicate with classroom teachers concerning my child's academic progress
- Volunteering in my child's classroom
- Supporting my child's learning
- Participating, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of my child and the positive use of extracurricular time
- Create a home environment that supports learning
- Attend school functions and conferences
- Encourage my child to show respect for all members of the school community and school property
- Review all school communications and respond promptly

**Student**

The student realizes education is important. Students are the one responsible for individual academic success. Therefore, the student agrees to carry out the following responsibilities:

- Login to school each day to complete lessons in all of my courses.
- Attend live learning on a regular basis.
- Believe that I can, and will, learn.
- Develop a positive attitude toward school
- Be cooperative by carrying out the teacher's instructions and ask for help when needed
- Be respectful to all school members and to school property
- Let my teachers and family know if I need help
- Give my parent/guardian any notice or information received by me from the school

Please sign the Title I Home-School Compact on the appropriate line below, acknowledging that you have read and agreed with the above compact. Return this signed form to your teacher as soon as possible.

_____	_____
School	Date
_____	_____
Parent/Guardian	Date
_____	_____
Student	Date

## SIGNATURE PAGE

### **Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School PARENT/STUDENT INFORMATION HANDBOOK**

The Parent/Student Handbook is available to all families who are enrolled in PDLCS. Please take the time to review the content with your child/children. We provide you with a copy of the handbook, but it is also available electronically.

The intent and the spirit of the handbook is what will help us create an emotionally and physically safe environment for all our children.

(Please call your child's teacher or Principal if you need any clarification or explanation).

"We have reviewed the PDLCS 2023-2024 Parent/Student Handbook received from the school. We have discussed the content with our child/children."

**PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN THIS FORM TO THE ENROLLMENT DEPARTMENT.**

Thank you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Parent/Guardian Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature