Parent/Student Discussion Guide

Before attending Sudbury School of Atlanta's Admissions Conference, please print and complete the following materials at home with your student. We would like you and your student to:

- Familiarize yourselves with the Sudbury model.
- Write down any questions you may want to ask at the conference.
- Understand SSA's philosophy and operation so you feel confident in your decision to enroll.

Both parents/guardians (if applicable) should review this material with the student and also attend the Admissions Conference together. In the event that any interview needs to be repeated for the benefit of a second parent/guardian, an additional $50 fee will be charged.

Last updated: July 10, 2016

SSA's philosophy and operation are based on the following:

1. SELF-DIRECTED EDUCATION

- Students Pursue:
  - What they want,
  - When they want,
  - With whom they want,
  - For as long as they want,
  - To the depth of their interest,
  - In the way that best suits them,
  - As long as the chosen activities are respectful, responsible, and reasonable and within the rules of the school.
- SSA does not dictate a prescribed curriculum.
- SSA does not provide any form of assessment unless requested by a student.
- SSA does not impose homework, grades, classes or tests. However, students may choose to create classes or take "work" home whenever they are interested.
- Students have unlimited access to the outside.
- Students have open access to books, art supplies, games, Legos, internet, Dekalb county library books and more. Students can vote to purchase other materials that interest them through School Meeting.

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2. ADJUSTMENT PERIOD and the VALUE of UNCERTAINTY

- Because SSA is different from traditional school, some students and parents go through an adjustment period when they come to SSA.
- Students experience short or extended periods of uncertainty about what they "should" do. Parents may wonder what their children do every day.
- At SSA, we celebrate this uncertainty because it forces students to look within and determine who they really are, what truly interests them, and what they want to do with their time.
- SSA does not make value judgments concerning how students choose to spend their time.
- Parents find it helpful to ask their children direct questions like, "what was the most exciting thing you did today?" "What was one important thing you did today?" Vague questions like "what did you do today?" or "what did you learn today?" will likely receive an answer of "Nothing." Or "I don't know."

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3. ATTENDANCE POLICY

- Georgia state law requires that enrolled students age 5 and up attend school 4.5 hours each day. 4 year olds attend from 9am – 1pm.
- If a student's lack of participation in the school community becomes an issue, it will be referred to Judicial Committee or School Meeting for resolution.
- Contact the school by phone or email no later than 10:30am if you are not going to be in attendance on any particular day.

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4. SCHOOL MEETING

- School Meeting is held every Thursday at 10am.
- Meetings are run with Roberts Rules of Order.
- All students and staff in attendance at the meeting get one vote.
- Students learn to make motions, debate issues, and vote.
- An agenda is posted prior to the meeting. Students and staff are free to list any item they wish to bring up with the school community.
- Attendance at School Meeting is voluntary. There is no vote by proxy, meaning students must be present in order for their vote to count.
- Although each person has an equal vote, this does not guarantee that an individual will always get what s/he wants, as the majority rules.

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5. RULE BOOK

- The School Rule book consists of rules created by the School Meeting since our opening in 2012.
- If rules are broken, any student and staff member can "write-up" the issue and request a hearing at the Judicial Committee.

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6. JUDICIAL COMMITTEE (JC)

JC Basics:

- JC is a small, rotating group of students and one staff member who have the authority to resolve disputes and determine solutions when issues arise or rules are broken.
- JC meetings are held daily as needed.
- Every student enrolling at SSA is expected, and must be willing, to serve on the JC.

JC Process:

- A student or staff fills out a JC Solution Request Form because s/he feels someone has broken a school rule and mediation is insufficient.
- At the JC meeting, the person who wrote the report and others involved tell their sides of the story. The JC clarifies exactly what happened to the satisfaction of both parties.
- Everyone shares ideas on possible solutions for the issue.
- JC votes on a solution and any actions that need to happen to resolve the issue.
- Any decision by the JC may be appealed at School Meeting.
- Parents may request to see JC forms for their children.

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7. CLERKSHIP AND OFFICER POSITIONS

- Many tasks have to be performed to keep the School running smoothly.
- Some jobs may only be done by staff members; all other positions can be taken by willing students.

- Students and staff are nominated to positions by School Meeting. All positions are then voted upon and held for a duration defined by School Meeting.

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8. CHORE RESPONSIBILITIES

- All SSA students and staff help clean the school at the end of every day.
- Newly enrolling students must be willing to complete chores as part of their responsibilities to the learning community.
- Each person must make sure his/her chore is completed each day, even if they leave school early.
- Requirements for completion of chores are defined by the Chore Committee.

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9. COMMITTEES and CERTIFICATION

- Committees are groups that take responsibility for the materials and equipment that support particular student interests. They are formed by students as the need arises.
- Examples of Committees include Music Committee, Animal Committee, Lego Committee, Electronics Committee, etc.
- Students create Committee guidelines and determine certification procedures.
- Students new to the school are responsible for finding out from a Committee how to become certified if they want to use materials belonging to a Committee.
- It is the job of the Committee to make materials available for students.

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10. ROLE of STAFF

- Staff's primary role is to support the students and conduct the business of the school. Staff respond to student needs as they arise but otherwise students have the freedom to find and create their own way.
- At SSA, students are respected and trusted as competent decision makers and are expected to follow the rules they have created. Staff members are not responsible for the constant and direct supervision of students although they will intervene immediately where safety or legality is an issue.
- Staff will not encourage, enforce or remind students to do any "homework" sent from home or otherwise, as it interferes with students' freedom to choose. We strongly discourage sending anything with a student to do at Sudbury that the student has not chosen for themselves.

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11. STAFF ELECTIONS

- Every spring, all current and potential staff members' names go on a secret ballot, and students vote to determine which staff members' contracts will be renewed for the following year.
- Staff are elected based on their usefulness to the students, how well they fit within the School's philosophy, and how well they help to manage the school's affairs.
- Staff are elected by students because only the students of SSA can determine who best serves their needs and their school.

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12. VOLUNTEERS, MENTORS, and APPRENTICESHIPS

- When students express an interest in subjects outside the staff's scope of expertise, staff are available to help students find the resources they need to pursue their interests.
- Volunteers may be brought in to work with students at the request of the student, or students may connect with a mentor via phone, e- mail, Skype, etc.

- Students may also want to work off-site with a person who specializes in their area of interest; in this case, where possible, an apprenticeship will be arranged with the help of staff and in consultation with the parents/guardians.

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13. ROLE of PARENTS

- ***Support your child****:* At SSA, students are empowered to make decisions about how they spend their time and how they interact with others. It is important to support and empower your child as they wrestle with decisions and situations at school, whether you think they are making "good" decisions or not. Listen to them without judgment and voice your support for them as they think through situations. "I know you can do this," and "what do you think you should do next?" goes a long way to let our students know that we trust them as decision-makers.
- Conferences with staff may be requested by parents, students, or staff and may be scheduled at any time during the year. Students are required to be present at these meetings.
- Students are always invited to be present if staff speak with their parents about them.
- When dropping off and picking up students, parents are welcome to come into the school, help their child get settled, and talk with other students or staff. While on school property, parents are asked to defer to the rules and disciplinary procedures set forth by the School Meeting. Like any other school, parents are not permitted to "hang out" at school beyond pick-up and drop-off time.
- ***Support the school:*** Volunteer and spread the word.
    - *Volunteering:* We welcome you to get involved with us as a volunteer. Most volunteer opportunities with SSA happen outside the classroom. We have fundraisers, host craft tables and sponsor public relations booths at local festivals.
    - *Tell Others*: Most new families at SSA find out about us through currently enrolled families. We have an active Facebook page. Re-post our updates and pass the word about Info Sessions. You are our best spokespeople.
- ***Support yourself:*** Learn about the Sudbury model. Our web site has many resources, articles and videos to help you explore more about Sudbury. You will have questions and you will go through times of uncertainty. Talk to the staff.

Talk to other Sudbury parents. We all have had the experience of letting go of traditional models of education. We are here to support you.

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14. DIPLOMA PROCEDURE

- At SSA, students graduate when they decide they have received all they can from the school and are ready to pursue their interests in the greater community. Students must be 16 years or older and have attended the Sudbury School for at least three years to receive a diploma.
- Students may choose to go through the SSA Diploma procedure or not; it is fully optional, and at this time, **the SSA diploma is not accredited by a certifying organization**.
- The diploma process at Sudbury schools typically require a written thesis demonstrating responsibility and future plans.
- The draft is reviewed by the Thesis Committee (interested students, staff and board members), and then a final copy is written.
- A copy of the thesis is emailed to all Assembly members.
- SSA embraces many paths and definitions of success and happiness.

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Student Parent Discussion Guide
& SSA Handbook Acknowledgement

I have read and understand the policies and practices of the Sudbury School of Atlanta as described in the SSA Handbook and Student Parent Discussion Guide.

Signed:_____ Date: _____ (student)

Signed:_____ Date: _____ (student)

Signed:_____ Date: _____ (parent/legal guardian)

Signed:_____ Date: _____ (parent/legal guardian)