



Handbook 2017-2018

Nondiscrimination Policy

The Sudbury School of Atlanta does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and national or ethnic origin regarding all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to all students at the school. This nondiscrimination policy includes all educational policies, admission policies, scholarship and loan programs, athletic and other school-administered programs.

Bright From The Start Exemption

The Sudbury School of Atlanta (SSA) is a private, non-public educational program using the Sudbury model of education, serving children ages four and older during the school term for the customary school day, as defined by Georgia Law. As such, SSA has received an exemption from the licensing, standards and jurisdiction of the Bright From The Start agency that oversees programs for children in Georgia.

Welcome to the Sudbury School of Atlanta!

We are so pleased that you have chosen the Sudbury School of Atlanta (SSA). We hope this guide will help you:

- Learn more about the Sudbury model of education;
- Understand what to expect from SSA, your student, and yourself;
- Answer common questions;
- Feel welcome as a valued participant at SSA.

If there is anything we can do to be of assistance, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

SSA Staff

We Are Committed to Transparency

We are committed to transparency in our processes and procedures. If there is something in this Parents' Guide that is unclear or completely absent, please contact us for clarification. We want to continually improve our materials, and your input - both positive and negative - helps us improve our communication. As such, we may update or change information in the handbook at any time. In addition, School Meeting may pass rules at any time that change items in this handbook. We try to keep this handbook as up to date as possible. We look forward to your feedback.

This handbook was last updated: **May 12, 2017**

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The Basics

School Hours:

Students ages 5-19 9am – 3pm, Monday – Friday

Students age 4 9am – 1pm OR 9am – 3pm, Monday - Friday

School Contact Information:

Phone or Text: 404-500-8680

Email: sudburyschoolofatlanta@gmail.com

Mailing address: PO Box 748, Avondale Estates, GA 30002

School location: 3260 Covington Hwy., Decatur, GA 30002

School Calendar for 2017-2018:

First Day of School **Tuesday, August 1**

Thanksgiving Break Wednesday, November 22 – Friday, November 24

Holiday Break Monday, December 18 – Friday, January 5

Last Day of School **Friday May 31**

What is the Sudbury model of education?

- Self-directed learning
- Democratic operating structure
- Mixed ages

What do you mean by “self-directed learning?”

Each student chooses what they do, where they do it, without judgment from the staff as long as it is within the rules established by the community. Students can follow their passions, create, explore, discover, and engage with the learning community at their choosing.

What is a “democratically-operated” school?

Staff and students work together to make decisions regarding the school. Each person gets one vote. There is no hierarchy at the school and everyone’s opinions are respected equally.

What do you mean “mixed-ages?”

We believe that all students learn from each other. We don’t separate our students by age or achievement or ability.

How the School Operates

School Meeting

School Meeting is the democratic governing body of the school. All students and staff are invited to participate, but attendance is not required. School Meeting happens every Thursday at 10:30 am.

This weekly meeting is where all the day-to-day business of the school is discussed and voted upon. Any policies, rules, or initiatives proposed by students or staff are handled through the School Meeting and meetings are conducted with Robert's Rules of Order. Staff contract renewals, student suspensions, and expulsions are also voted upon here.

Any student can add items to the School Meeting Agenda by writing their name and what they want to discuss on the agenda board. A student must be present for their agenda item to be addressed at School Meeting.

The School Meeting strives to reach decisions that address all concerns raised by members. Each student and staff member gets one vote, majority rules, and all decisions of the School Meeting are final.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is comprised of members of the larger Atlanta community who support the mission of SSA and maintain the public trust. They make strategic decisions for the school, like the school calendar and budget, but are not involved in the day-to-day operations.

Other governance structures at Sudbury Schools

Some Sudbury model schools have an Assembly made up of parents, students, and board members to make strategic decisions for the school. SSA does not have an Assembly. All strategic decisions are made by the Board.

School Rules

All of the rules of conduct of the school are created by the students. Students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the rules of the school. If your student cannot read yet, please assist them in reviewing the rules before the first day of school.

Every student is empowered to talk with other students and staff members about abiding by school rules, and any student may write up a request for mediation as necessary.

Mediation

Any student or staff member may complete a mediation request form related to any problems, challenges, or conflicts that arise within our community. Mediation is not about anyone "being in trouble." Mediation is about communication, connection,

collaboration, community, and finding meaningful solutions.

Note: Students are equally empowered to write a mediation request about a staff member as they are for fellow students. Staff are equally part of the learning community and do not receive special treatment within the community for their roles as staff members.

Judicial Committee (JC)

The Judicial Committee (JC) is a small, rotating group of students and one staff member who hear complaints, resolve disputes, and collaborate on solutions when mediation has not been effective for solving problems. The JC uses steps of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) in a restorative justice model that seeks solutions and rebuilds relationships.

If a person disagrees with the JC finding, the decision can be appealed to the weekly School Meeting, where both sides present their cases and all students and staff who are present collaborate and vote on solutions. All decisions of the School Meeting are final.

Suspension and Expulsion

The School Meeting has the authority to suspend and expel students who do not choose to act safely and responsibly in the school community. Suspensions provide an opportunity for students to reflect on whether they are able and willing to meet the personal responsibilities required at the Sudbury School of Atlanta. When a student is suspended by the School Meeting, a conference is held with the student and their parents to discuss the reasons and expectations of the suspension. The conference provides a time to both clarify the limits of acceptable behavior and explore ways to support the suspended student. A suspension can be a positive experience for some students, in that it emphasizes the importance of assuming personal responsibility for one's actions. All decisions of School Meeting are final.

The Role of Staff

SSA does not have "teachers" who are responsible for delivering daily "academic" content to the students. Everyone who works at SSA is referred to as staff. Our staff's role is to support and facilitate learning in the school.

The staff assists with the operation of the school and supports students in reaching their goals. In general, the staff may have discussions with students that generate ideas and keep the students moving along their paths. As much as possible, we avoid telling students what to do, what to study, or how to study it.

Staff members also help support the democratic process at the school. They are present at School Meetings, Mediation Sessions, and the Judicial Committee; they vote; and they provide clarification for rules and procedures.

All staff members are trained in First Aid and CPR.

Empower Your Student

This is the most important thing parents and staff can do for students. At traditional schools, adults routinely jump in and fix problems for students. At SSA, we want to empower and support students to work through their own challenges. We treat them with respect and trust as fully independent persons. Even if they fail in the process, we want parents and staff to be there to support the students as they find the path that works best for themselves.

Parent Toolbox

- **Reflect**
- **Empathize**
- **Empower**

These are the three tools that staff use daily when working with students. We don't try to solve problems for them. We support them as they decide their own best course of action.

Reflect:

This means listening to what students say and reflecting back to them exactly what you heard. Just like a mirror, we share back to them what they share with us, without interpretation.

Sentence starters:

- It sounds like you are excited about...
- I heard you say you are frustrated with...
- You said you have some questions about...

Listen to what the student says. Don't judge what they say and don't offer to "fix it" for them. Most of the time, they just want someone to listen.

Empathize:

Connect with the emotions your student is expressing to you.

Sentence starters:

- You did it! How exciting for you...
- That sounded like it was sad for you...
- It seems like you are really puzzled about that.

Here again, we are listening and supporting them without judgment.

Empower:

What does the student want to do about this issue?

Sentence starters:

- So, what do you want to do about that?
- What are some solutions you can think of?
- What do you want to do different next time?
- I know you can do this!

Most of the time, students are just processing their day, and they want someone to listen. If they are having trouble coming up with concrete steps, you can always pull out the SSA Student Toolbox.

SSA Student Toolbox

If a student experiences something they don't like at school, we will often pull out the SSA Student Toolbox. These are concrete choices students can make to address things they don't like:

- 1. Walk away.**
- 2. Tell the person "I don't like that" and talk it out with them.**
- 3. Fill out a Mediation Request Form.**
- 4. Propose a new rule at School Meeting.**

The focus here is on empowering the student to address their own concerns. They become good decision makers by having the freedom to make decisions and seeing the results of those decisions.

De-schooling

If your student has been in a traditional school, or even a preschool, for a number of years, they will likely go through a process called, deschooling: the natural transition from the highly structured, do-what-you-are-told environment of traditional schools, to the structured-by-choice, empowering environment of Sudbury.

There will be a range of emotions and experiences that your student may go through from euphoria to boredom to longing for their "old friends." This is a natural process as your student begins to discover their interests.

Boredom and uncertainty is perhaps the most important and also when they will be the most vocal in their discomfort. Boredom and uncertainty is your student standing on the precipice of creativity and initiative. It is the recognition that no one will tell them what to learn. They must engage in learning themselves. As empowering as it is, it can also be scary for a person, of any age, who has never been given the time or freedom to choose what interests them. As such, you can be supportive of your student as they work through the process.

How to support your student through de-schooling:

- 1. Reflect, Empathize, and Empower** – They have feelings that need to be validated

and heard. Do not tell them what to study or learn. This will only complicate matters. Reflect, empathize, and empower. Communicate your unwavering support for them: “You’ll make it through. I know you can do this.”

2. **Trust the process** – De-schooling is a natural process of change and adjustment. It may take a year or more. Be patient. Your student is making progress.

Sudbury Parent FAQs

What do you mean when you say “No grades, no tests, no homework, and no classes?”

We do not *impose* classes, grades, homework, or tests on the students. However, if a student requests a class or similar resource, we are happy to assist them in finding or acquiring what they want. At times, students will choose to do “homework” because they are excited about learning more about something they are learning at school. We support whatever activities students choose to further their path to learning.

We do not provide grades or evaluations of students because we want students to discover their own passions and interests rather than try to “please the teacher.” There is a famous quote, “Education is not about filling a bucket, it is about lighting a fire.” We want every student to discover their inner fire. That happens best in an environment free from judgment and evaluation. However, if a student wants to take a test or receive an evaluation, we are happy to assist them in finding or acquiring the resources they seek.

What does my child do all day? Are they progressing?

When asking a student, “What did you do today?” regardless of the school or educational model, you will get responses like, “Nothing” or “Stuff” or “I don’t know.”

Learning is a natural process for young people. It is like breathing. It does not seem special or notable to them. Imagine if someone asked you, “How was your blinking today?” It is just something you do without thinking about it.

The answer is yes, your child is progressing, and they are fully engaged throughout the day in an organic flow of learning, play, study, and exploration. They are discovering their inner fire. They are trying things that interest them and seeing if they want to continue. They are learning how to be respectful, responsible, and reasonable within the learning community. They are learning how to communicate, mediate, and negotiate with others. They are thoroughly immersed in the learning process which is completely natural to them.

Here is a short video that explains a parent’s perspective on the learning path of Sudbury students. Many of our families resonate with these sentiments.

<http://youtu.be/Y9KvitLX3sc>

Can I meet with the staff to hear about what my child is doing?

The staff is always happy to meet with a parent AND their student together. The goal is always to empower the student, so it makes sense that a student should always be present. In general, staff do not hold meetings with a parent only.

Typical parent/teacher discussions that happen at a traditional school do not apply here, like evaluations, grades, progress reports, or other adult interventions. SSA is unique in that the staff has a non-judgmental relationship with the students where they work to empower the students. We want the parents also to have a relationship where they work to empower the students.

Can my student do ANYTHING they want?

No. Definitely not. The SSA community has an all-encompassing and very important rule: “We are responsible for taking care of our school through actions that contribute to freedom, order, respect, and trust (FORT).” We also have many specific policies, procedures, and guidelines that have been created by School Meeting to govern our community. The difference between SSA and other schools is that the SSA students and staff create the rules of conduct together. Other schools simply impose rules on students without giving them a voice or a vote. So, the answer is that SSA students have tremendous freedom to choose what they want to do as long as they work within the established rule and guidelines.

What about pick-up or drop-off?

The school day begins at 9 am. If you will be dropping off later than 10:30 am, please notify a staff member. For pick-up, please arrive before 3:15 pm (or 1:15 pm if you have a 4-year-old attending a partial day). Families who arrive after 3:15pm (or 1:15 pm) will be assessed a \$20 late pick-up fee.

Can I volunteer for the school?

Yes. We encourage all families to work for the success of our school. Please speak with a staff member if you are interested, and we will connect you with volunteer jobs related to our areas of greatest need at that time.

We do not set a minimum or maximum volunteer requirement, however we will only be as strong as our efforts. We welcome your energy, talents, ideas, and abilities, and we hope you will join us in creating a thriving and abundant community.

How should I stay connected?

Sudbury School of Atlanta’s Facebook page offers relevant articles, photos, and videos.

Monthly parent meetings, community events, and fundraisers also offer opportunities for parents to get to know and support each other. Parents are always welcome to organize social activities and events.

Day-to-Day Information

Health

We understand that many students want to come to school even when not feeling 100% well, and that, especially in the winter months, many students and staff will attend school with minor colds. In general, students who feel well enough to care for themselves through the day are welcome at school. However, we ask each member of the school community to help us minimize the spread of contagious diseases as much as possible.

Please remember that staff are not able to provide special care for students who do not feel well. We expect students who are feeling ill and students who are considered contagious to stay at home. Individuals who are experiencing fever, diarrhea, or vomiting can spread their illness to others and should stay home from school. (People with fever should stay home until they have been fever-free for 24 hours.) If your student develops any of these symptoms while at school, we will contact you to pick him/her up as soon as possible.

We follow community public health guidelines during outbreaks of contagious illness. We may issue further instructions, provide resources, or limit student attendance at school in case of illnesses like chicken pox, measles, lice, or flu. We will provide email notification of health-related concerns that reach our attention.

Missing School

If your student will be late or absent, please email, phone, or text us to let us know.

Dress Code

There is no dress code at this time. If students determine a need for a dress code in the community, they can propose new rules at the School Meeting.

Food in School

Students are responsible for bringing their own meals and snacks, as well as utensils, plates, cups, and bowls. It is also a good idea to provide your student with a water bottle for daily use. Perishable food may be stored in the kitchen refrigerator. Perishable food is thrown away every Friday.

We do not have a “lunch hour.” All students and staff are free to eat whenever they like throughout the day. It is important students have enough food to last through the day.

For those students who have strong allergies to particular foods, we will send out an allergen list to all parents and students so that those foods will not be brought to the school.

Personal Items

We encourage storing a change of clothes, shoes, and towel at school (particularly for younger or more active students).

School Supplies

We provide a selection of games, toys, sports equipment, electronics, books, musical instruments, art supplies and more. Students are encouraged to bring personal belongings and materials to school, such as musical instruments, books, cards, balls, electronics and games. Students may not bring items that are illegal by law, such as weapons, fireworks, or look-alike toys.

Technology Usage

We embrace technology usage and have wi-fi. It is part of our everyday world. It helps us learn. It helps us communicate. Your student is welcome to bring technology to school.

If you want parental control over your child's cell phone, tablet, or laptop, it is your responsibility to install the software and controls you want. We do not restrict student access to technology, cell phones, internet, YouTube, video games, etc. unless the students vote on community restrictions through the School Meeting.

Phone Calls

Students may use personal cell phones to make personal calls to parents or friends. The staff personal phones may not be used for personal calls.

Cleaning Policy

Students and staff are required to help clean up the school each day. Parents are not responsible for whether their students complete their cleaning, but can help by informing their students if they will be leaving early or allowing time for jobs to be completed when picking up students.

Certification

Students and staff may need to become certified to use certain items at school that are either delicate or valuable (e.g., computers, music equipment, Legos), potentially dangerous (e.g., tools, cooking equipment), or require a high degree of responsibility to use and maintain (e.g., art and sewing materials).

To become certified, a student agrees or demonstrates that he/she can use resources in a safe and responsible manner. Some certifications only require that a student read and understand the rules, while certifications for dangerous or valuable equipment or complex procedures may require that someone who is already certified to certify that person. Once someone is certified, he/she is free to use the resource. Certification may be revoked by the Committee, JC, or School Meeting if a person does not follow the rules of the certification. However, a person can become re-certified later.

School Boundaries

On Campus: All SSA students have the right to move freely throughout designated school areas without constant, direct supervision. Students and staff are expected to follow school rules and policies at all times and places. The School Meeting will determine the established boundaries for students given the constraints of the lease with the church and our liability.

Off-Campus: SSA recognizes the importance of providing education in the context of the larger community. Therefore, we allow students to go off campus during the school day when escorted by a parent, guardian, or staff member. We also have an off-campus policy for older students to leave campus without supervision. Off-campus privileges will require parental approval and details on the policy can be provided upon request.

Events Outside School Hours

Parents are expected to take responsibility for their students at all meetings, work parties, and other school-sponsored events that take place after school hours. You may arrange with another parent to supervise your student in your absence. Staff members may be able to help clarify rules and address issues that arise, but are not expected to take responsibility for supervising students.

For student-initiated activities outside school hours, the staff requests two-weeks advance notice if their presence is needed.

Special Events, Holidays, and Traditions

We encourage special events in the school that recognize life events, traditions, and transitions. Students are free to celebrate or observe family, cultural, or religious traditions at school.

Immunization Records

The Georgia Department of Health requires that we collect immunization records for every student. Upon enrollment, you must provide a form for each student that includes a record of immunizations received, or a notarized statement of exemption from immunizations for religious reasons. We will ask for updated immunization forms annually.

Any other questions or comments?

Contact us any time. We are happy to help.

info@sudburyschoolofatlanta.org