



FAMILY HANDBOOK

2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR

Mountain Discovery Charter School
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MDCS STAFF 2021-2022

Interim Assistant Director - Tracy Wharton	Kg Teacher - Jessica Ray	Kg Assistant - Melissa Ellersick
Instructional Coach- Billie Clemens	1st Teacher - Jennifer Harbers	Title I - Sarah Rave
Operations Mgr - Crim Bassett	2nd Teacher - Nicole Zmuda	Math Assistant - Lisa Murphy
Dean of Students - Amy Jo Harvey	3rd Teacher - Alexandra Nichols	Reading Assistant - Betty MacAvoy
Art Teacher - Krista Skrede	4th Teacher - Londa Bohl	STEAM - Melissa Doughty
Music Teacher - Sarah Songbird Burkey	5th Teacher - Valerie Feathers	Office Assistant- Lisa Monnat
EC Director - Tracy Wharton	MS Science - David Doughty	After School- Amanda Singley
EC Assistant Director- Emily Herndon	MS Math/PE - Brook Stillman	Bus Driver - Bruce Hawkins
EC Teacher - Sarah Mwaniki	MS ELA/SS - Angela Danforth	Bus Driver - Michael Crew

Welcome

Welcome, Mountain Discovery Charter School Families!

We're happy you have made a commitment to our school. With your active involvement and support, MDCS will continue to be an exceptional school.

To better participate in the MDCS community, it is important that you fully understand the school, its mission, its philosophy, and policies. This handbook is designed for that purpose. After reading this document, please feel free to contact the school with any questions. Your input is greatly appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

MDCS begins with the assumption that every child has not only the natural ability to learn, but also the desire to learn. Our primary responsibility is to recognize the ways in which students learn, and in turn, provide instruction tailored to their learning styles. It is our belief that in a school where different learning styles are addressed, children will readily achieve academically ambitious expectations.

MDCS MISSION STATEMENT

Vision

All students are actively engaged in learning that has value and consequence beyond the classroom.

Mission

To inspire students to enjoy and lead their own learning

Guiding Principles

- **We value experiential learning and believe that adventure and the unexpected promote personal growth through perseverance, fitness, craftsmanship, imagination, self-discipline, and teamwork; students acquire not only knowledge but deep experience.**
- **We value the outdoors and believe that fostering a curiosity of the natural world encourages a sustainable relationship between people and the environment.**
- **We value creativity and believe that individual and collective growth is sparked by innovative problem-solving.**
- **We value high personal and academic expectations, encourage accountability, and empower students and staff to follow their own interests and passions.**
- **We value a sense of belonging and purpose within a community that honors multiple perspectives, fosters mutual trust, and ensures emotional and physical safety.**

MDCS EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

MDCS will create an educational environment where students are inspired to academic discovery and excellence through an emphasis on experiential learning designed to honor individuality and diversity, nurture respect for self, others, and the environment, and to foster a lifelong love of learning.

MDCS COMMON ANCHORS (With clarifying language from the charter application)

A Committed Circle of Educators

We expect our teachers to commit every day to serving and challenging the whole child, emotionally, mentally, socially, and physically.

Academic Excellence

We expect students to develop a core body of shared knowledge providing a solid, coherent foundation of learning, while allowing flexibility to meet the varying needs of each individual. Parents, who we acknowledge as a child's first and foremost teachers, will be expected to contribute life experience, knowledge, and talents.

Experiential Learning

Our instructional approach provides real-life applications for newly-presented material, and places skills in context. Children acquire not only knowledge, but also a deep experience related to the world around them.

Maximize Use of Our Geographic Location.

The neighboring Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Nantahala National Forest and Qualla Boundary of the Cherokee Indian Nation offer unparalleled opportunities for learning experiences that integrate our comprehensive curriculum. At MDCS we make full use of our natural history, southern Appalachian heritage, and multi-cultural resources.

Service Learning

Through our curriculum and instructional approach we offer many opportunities for our school community to contribute to the welfare of the larger community. We want MDCS to add value not only to our students' lives but also to the lives of others.

Foster a Sense of Pride in Accomplishment. If children are to become productive, active citizens, they need the confidence and the capacity to take risks and meet the increasingly difficult challenges of our world. Our instructional approach is designed to meet this goal.

Let us know if you'd like to read the entire MDCS Charter Application.

The MDCS Board of Directors

By law, Mountain Discovery Charter School operates independently of Swain County Schools. The MDCS Board of Directors is **the** governing body of the school. Its primary role and responsibility is to ensure the financial and legal stability of MDCS. The board employs the school director to manage school operations. Board members serve on a volunteer basis. New board members are voted onto the board at its annual meeting in September of each year. Officers are also elected at this time.

Meetings are open to the public and are announced in the weekly “Trailblazer Happenings” newsletter, posted in the school lobby, and on our website. Board meeting minutes are available in the lobby of the school and are posted to the MDCS website. Parents or other members of the school community wishing to place an item on a board meeting agenda should place a written request in the board mailbox (located in the school office) at least 10 days before the date of the meeting. The board chair will make the final decision regarding agenda items. Parents with questions about board policies and procedures should contact the school director or the board chair.

Frequently Asked Questions

To whom does MDCS answer?

MDCS operates independently of the local Board of Education. The MDCS Board of Directors is the school’s governing body. This board, in turn, is accountable to the North Carolina State Board of Education.

Do MDCS students take the End of Grade (EOG) tests?

All North Carolina public schools participate in EOG testing, as required by the state. However, we are not a test-driven school. The MDCS philosophy is that effective teaching will naturally result in high test scores. For a detailed discussion of our excellent test results, visit our NC EOG Results page at <http://mountaindiscovery.org/EOG-Scores.php>.

What is the MDCS curriculum?

MDCS has adopted the Common Core as its curriculum foundation. We use experiential learning as our instructional approach.

Experiential learning:

- promotes hands on learning,
- includes high-level, critical thinking skills,
- promotes local and global community service,
- embraces thematic and integrated instruction,
- integrates the Arts into all areas of curriculum,
- includes curriculum-related field expeditions on a regular basis.

Does MDCS offer Exceptional Children’s Services?

The Director of EC Services/teacher, two EC teachers, and a behavioral support specialist serve our EC students in both resource and inclusion settings.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

Parent-Educator Partnership

Mountain Discovery Charter School is designed to nourish and facilitate the natural and individual abilities of each child in reaching ambitious academic goals in a multifaceted hands-on course of study. For that design to succeed, it must extend beyond the classroom walls to recognize and incorporate the home and family as vital parts of the process. Mountain Discovery Charter School recognizes that:

- parent and family participation maximizes student learning,
- early involvement of parents in their child's education is essential and establishes patterns and practices that will last a lifetime,
- home and community are vital extensions of the learning environment,
- families bring culture, language and values that connect home and school,
- parents are empowered when involved as full partners in ongoing relationships with teachers,
- partnerships between schools and families benefit the child, the family, and the school.

Parents are asked to sign the **Parent-Educator Partnership** Agreement. The PEP Agreement is designed to promote full partnership between families and the school for the benefit of our children. It cements the family-school connection.

If at any time either party believes the other to be falling short of its responsibility, a conference may be called. The purposes of this conference will be to ease misunderstandings and promote successful interaction between parent and school. It is Mountain Discovery's goal to empower parents in empowering their children.

“Parent involvement is the key to unlocking the potential of students and schools; when parents, students and teachers sit down together the learning curve rises and education becomes part of the student's whole life.”

Peter W. Cookson, Center for Educational Outreach and Innovation

The Family-School Connection

The Mountain Discovery Charter School program is designed to nourish and facilitate the natural and individual abilities of each child. For that design to succeed, it must extend beyond the classroom walls to recognize and incorporate the home and family as vital parts of the process. By virtue of enrolling a child in MDCS, parents automatically become a part of the Parent-Educator Partnership.

Mountain Discovery Charter School pledges to:

- Provide a program of academic excellence that fulfills the goals expressed in our mission statement.
- Provide a safe and supportive learning environment which models respect, courtesy, and compassion.
- Communicate regularly with parents regarding their child's progress and needs.
- Assist parents in meeting their obligation to their child's educational needs and their responsibilities to the school.
- Continually reflect on, evaluate, and develop the learning environment.

Students agree to:

- Attend school as scheduled, arrive on time, and deliver notes in the event of an excused absence.
- Complete class work and homework in a timely fashion.
- Ensure that any work they turn in is their best effort.
- Obey the rules and regulations of the school.
- Be courteous, cooperative, and respectful to everyone in the community.

Parents pledge to:

- Read, understand, and support the MDCS mission and expectations of my child.
- Provide a home environment that nurtures a love of learning.

- **Ensure my child is at school on time with appropriate materials.**
- Send excuse notes in the day following any absence for an **excusable reason**.
- **Provide my child with a nutritious lunch each day.**
- Attend parent/teacher/student conferences, and be available for contact with staff on a regular basis.
- Encourage reading every day.
- Volunteer 6 hours per quarter, in whatever way possible.
- **Send my child on all school field trips, including overnight camping trips.**
- Follow teacher direction and stay with the class when attending field trips.

Suggestions for Meeting the Parent Volunteer Commitment:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ● Offer clerical assistance | ● Serve as parental involvement coordinator |
| ● Participate in family workdays | ● Serve as community volunteer coordinator |
| ● Help maintain grounds | ● Tutor students |
| ● Bring special talents to the classroom
(music, art, sports, foreign language, etc.) | ● Coordinate/support fundraising efforts |
| ● Assist with transportation & field trips | ● Volunteer in the classroom |
| ● Organize recycling program | ● Support your child’s community service efforts |

Parent/Guardian Volunteers/Visitors in the Classroom

We greatly appreciate assistance in the classrooms. The following procedures exist to ensure that all volunteers understand our guidelines for helping in the classrooms. To ensure a safe environment, all parents, guardians, or guests who visit our campus must wear a “visitor/volunteer” badge at all times. To obtain a badge, please check in at the office.

Volunteers/Visitors will:

- **Schedule volunteer and teacher conference time in advance so that the teacher can plan accordingly.**
- Sign in at the office prior to going to a classroom.
- Wear a “volunteer” badge at all times when at school.
- Become acquainted with classroom rules, expectations, and consequences.
- Adhere to MDCS dress code and conduct policies.
- **Refrain from having parent/teacher conferences during volunteer time.**
- Record volunteer hours in the log kept in the office.

Parent/Guardian Volunteers on Field Trips

Due to the fact that MDCS staff are ultimately responsible for the safety of our students at all times, parents are requested to follow the direction of the classroom teacher when volunteering on field trips. In addition to the volunteer guidelines listed above, we ask that you:

- Abide by state law regarding children riding in vehicles.
- If you are a volunteer driver, submit a copy of your driver’s license, insurance card, and registration to the office.
- Stay with the class as directed by classroom teacher.
- Refrain from consuming any alcohol or illegal drugs prior to or during the volunteer activity.
- Refrain from smoking **anything** around our students. (This includes vaping.)

- Refrain from leaving any child unattended.
- Wear an orange or blue MDCS t-shirt (can be purchased in the school office).

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Conferences should be scheduled at any time the need arises. Please don't hesitate to contact your child's teacher if you feel the need to meet with them for any reason.

Parent/Guardian/Student Concerns

Anyone who has a concern regarding the school in general should contact the school director to set up a meeting in order to resolve the problem. If the concern involves an individual staff member or specific class, the staff member(s) or the classroom teacher should be contacted directly. If after this meeting, the grievant does not consider the issue resolved, the involved parties should bring it to the attention of the school director. In the event that the grievant is still unsatisfied, he/she can follow the MDCS grievance policy as outlined in the MDCS Policy and Procedure Manual, located in the front office.

Anyone who believes that Mountain Discovery Charter School has violated Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 or the Americans with Disabilities Act can submit a grievance with the Section 504/ADA Coordinator pursuant to Mountain Discovery Charter School's 504 Grievance Procedures. A copy of the 504 grievance procedures can be obtained by request through the Section 504/ADA Coordinator, Tracy Wharton. They also appear in Appendix D of this handbook.

School Safety

The safety of students, staff, and the public is paramount in all school operations. All MDCS employees are responsible for school safety and will report or correct unsafe conditions when and if they exist. Safety will not be sacrificed in the interest of time or money.

Student Attendance

Students must attend school in order to receive an education. Chronic absences and tardiness are undeniably linked to poor academic performance. NC Compulsory Attendance Law (115C-378) requires that we notify all parties potentially responsible for a child's attendance at 3, 6, and 10 unexcused absences. Students will be allowed no more than **10 unexcused** absences per academic year. Any days over this limit will result in a report to the district attorney and per MDCS Student Conduct Policy, **the student will be a candidate for suspension for a period of one day up to the remainder of the school year.**

Student Absences

Definitions of excused absences **and tardies** are listed below.

Excused absences are defined as:

- Illnesses or injuries
- Quarantine
- Death of immediate family member
- Inclement weather
- Medical or dental appointments
- Court or administrative proceedings

- Religious holidays or observances
- Valid educational opportunities with school director's **prior** approval (Please follow the procedure outlined below.)

Please send a note explaining the absence on the **first** day your child returns to school. **Absences will be recorded as unexcused if you do not send a note.** The demands placed on office staff by state attendance reporting requirements dictate that we make no exceptions to this policy.

Educational Absences

Travel that has educational value can sometimes be counted as an excused absence. The School Director must pre-approve all educational absences.

To qualify:

- Parents need to make a written request to the classroom teacher for an excused **absence three weeks** in advance of the trip. Request forms are available online and in the school office.
- The teacher will discuss expectations of the student while gone, i.e. journaling, reading, trip report, or other assignments the teacher deems appropriate.
- Final approval from the school director must be **received two weeks prior** to the first day of the absence.

Student Tardies

Students are expected to be **in their classroom** by 8:15am. Drop off begins at 8:00. A casual stroll from the parking lot to 4th grade takes 1 minute. Allow time for your child to get to class when planning your arrival time. Students who are tardy must be signed in at the office by a parent or guardian.

Tardies for reasons other than those listed above will be unexcused.

A student will be marked tardy if s/he arrives at the classroom after 8:15. Should tardiness be a continued problem, Mountain Discovery Charter School will invite parent/guardian(s) and the student for a Tardiness Mediation Session in order to resolve the problem. Conferences will be sought once a student has 10 unexcused tardies. **Per MDCS Student Conduct Policy, students with 20 or more unexcused tardies will be considered for an out of school suspension of a period of one day up to the remainder of the school year.**

Early Leave Procedures

When checking a child out of school early, the parent or guardian **must come into the office** and sign the student out. Just as multiple tardies negatively affect the school's learning environment, so do continuous incidents of checking students out of school prior to dismissal. Students may **only** be checked out before the regular school dismissal time for the reasons listed as excused absences. Students checked out before 1:30 will receive an excused absence. If a parent/guardian checks a student out early for any other reason, the student will be given an unexcused absence for that school day.

Student Dress Code

Students are expected to wear clothing that is modest, clean and appropriate. The nature of our school requires our students to be outside on a regular basis. Please dress children accordingly and ensure that they wear shoes suitable for outdoor activities. Students who do not adhere to the dress code will be required to wear an MDCS shirt over his/her inappropriate clothing or parents may be called to bring appropriate clothing for their child.

The hem of shorts and skirts should not be shorter than the student's finger tips when her/his arms are **hanging naturally** at his/her side. Parents will be called to bring in appropriate clothing in the event that their child attends school wearing clothing that is too short.

Students are not permitted to wear the following:

- Shoes with wheels, high heels, or flip flops
- Midriff, tube, or halter tops
- Tank tops
- Clothing with inappropriate messages on them (including but not limited to: drug or alcohol messages, messages or pictures that promote violence, messages or pictures with sexual connotations)
- Any other clothing deemed immodest or inappropriate by MDCS staff.

On field trips, all students are REQUIRED to wear an orange or blue MDCS shirt, available for purchase at the school office. Teachers will communicate additional clothing requirements for specific trips if needed.

Student Conduct

The MDCS Student Conduct Policy requires students to show respect for self, others, and the environment. In this context, “environment” first and foremost refers to the classroom and school learning communities in which all MDCS students participate. In order to provide an optimal learning environment for everyone, all students are required to follow classroom and school-wide rules. Students who violate these rules are subject to consequences determined by the teacher or school director.

Infractions that could result in suspension or expulsions may include, but are not limited to:

- **Excessive unexcused absences or tardies as defined by G.S. 115C-378 and MDCS Absence and Tardy Policy (Reprinted in Appendix B)**
- Defacing school property
- Engaging in a physical altercation with another student
- Threatening an employee of the school, a parent volunteer, or another student
- Possession of a weapon on school campus
- Leaving a classroom or school grounds without permission
- Swearing at a teacher or another student
- Stealing or cheating (including plagiarism)
- Smoking or using a vaporizer
- Sexual harassment or inappropriate touching of another person (see Appendix A for more information)

Students Receiving Medication

When your child needs to receive medication during the school day, you must have your physician complete a **Request for Medication Form, (please obtain form in the front office)**. We cannot give your child medication without your physician's signature on this form. The same policy applies to over the counter medication. All medications must be distributed by the office. Students are not allowed to be in charge of any medication, including over the counter medications.

Communication from the School

Parents/Guardians should expect to receive information from the School in the following ways:

Written Form:

- Weekly: “*Trailblazer Happenings*” are posted to the website, www.mountaindiscovery.org on Friday afternoons. **This is the single most important communication from the school.** Email and text notifications with a link to the newsletter are sent to parents who have provided the school with an email address. You’ll miss something important if you fail to read “Trailblazer Happenings.”
- Classroom teachers will send home newsletters and/or assignment sheets and post them to their Google Classrooms.

By Phone Regarding:

- Inclement weather school closings or delays once school is in session
- Certain upcoming events
- Individual or group meetings
- We do not make phone calls about everything. You must read “Happenings” to be fully informed.

IMPORTANT NOTE: We must have a reliable phone number and email address for our parents. Remember, if your information changes during the school year, you are required to notify the office. We cannot communicate with you if you do not provide us with current contact information.

Daily Drop-Off and Pick-Up Procedures:

MDCS drop-off and pick-up procedures are intended to ensure the safety of our students and prevent traffic congestion. We greatly appreciate your cooperation regarding these procedures.

Morning Drop-Off Procedure (8:00 – 8:15 a.m.)

When dropping off your child in the morning, please follow this procedure:

- Please do not allow your child to exit your vehicle until you are at one of our three drop off stations.
- If you wish to accompany your child to their classroom, please park on the right hand side of the road as you start **down** the driveway or in one of the gravel lots.
- **Do not attempt to pass other cars.**

Students arriving after 8:15 a.m. will be considered tardy and must be accompanied by the parent/guardian to the school office. (Please see section on Tardy Procedures).

Dismissal Procedure (3:00 – 3:15 p.m.)

Students will remain in their classrooms with their teacher while awaiting dismissal. If there is someone whom you do not wish to pick up your child, you must inform the school office. Any changes in your child’s afterschool plan for the day must be communicated **directly** to the school office **prior to 2:00 pm**. Do not text your child and assume that the change will be made. A lot of confusion is caused by late changes in dismissal instructions. **We will forward our phones to voicemail some time after 2:30 to eliminate this confusion.** Please help us ensure a safe, smooth and quick dismissal by following the dismissal procedures listed below.

When picking up your child at the end of the day:

- Remain in a single line of traffic as you approach the school entrance. **Do not pass other cars.**

- Do not pull up to the school entrance if the buses are still in the parking lot.
- Once adjacent to the school entrance, please stay in your car. An MDCS employee will bring your child to you.

School Schedule (Fridays are shortened days, dismissed at 1:30 pm.)

Standard school hours are as follows:

Monday- Thursday

- 8:00 am to 8:15 am Student arrival time
- 8:15 am School begins
- 3:00 pm to 3:15 pm School dismissal

Bus Schedule

All times are VST (Verizon Standard Time).

MORNING (Mon. – Fri.)

Bus will arrive at:

- 7:10 Sylva (public parking lot behind Dr. Mault’s office)
- 7:35 Qualla (Moore Ins. Parking lot across from the Budget Inn on Hwy. 441)
- 7:45 Whittier Methodist Church

AFTERNOON (Mon. – Thurs.)

Bus will arrive at:

- 3:20 Whittier Methodist Church
- 3:30 Qualla (Eastern End of Gateway Flea Market Parking lot on 19/74)
- 3:45 Sylva (public parking lot behind Dr. Mault’s office)

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

Bus will arrive at:

- 1:45 Whittier Methodist Church
- 1:50 Qualla (Eastern End of Gateway Flea Market Parking lot on 19/74)
- 2:05 Sylva (public parking lot behind Dr. Mault’s office)

HALF DAY (11:30 AM) DISMISSAL

Bus will arrive at:

- 11:45 Whittier Methodist Church
- 11:50 Qualla (Eastern End of Gateway Flea Market Parking lot on Hwy. 19/74)
- 12:05 Sylva (public parking lot behind Dr. Mault’s office)

Buses will depart stops no later than 5 minutes after arrival and will not make special stops to pick up late arrivals. Parents arriving late will need to meet the bus at the next stop.

Inclement Weather School Closure Announcements and Procedures

Students come to Mountain Discovery from an area with a radius of forty miles and an elevation range of 2000 to 3500 feet above sea level. The school director makes decisions regarding closings or delayed openings due to inclement weather based on input from several reliable sources. However, there is no way to know exactly what the conditions are in your personal mountain microclimate. If you have **any** concerns about your ability to get your child to and from school safely, please keep your children home, even if school is open. If weather should set in during the school day and you have the same concerns, please pick your children up from school. **All tardies and absences due to inclement weather are excused if you send in a written excuse.**

VERY IMPORTANT: *Please note that MDCS does not follow Jackson, Graham, Swain, Haywood, or Macon Counties' decisions regarding school closings.*

MDCS Inclement Weather Process

Early Morning Decisions: All decisions regarding school closing or delayed opening are phoned and emailed to you via our automated notification service. Every attempt is made to communicate the decision before 6:15 a.m.

Decisions regarding the school schedule will be one of the following:

- School will open on a regular schedule (**no announcement made**).
- School will be closed (announced).
- School will be open on a delayed schedule (announced).

Early Dismissal: If a decision is made to dismiss early, the office will notify parent/guardian by automated phone messaging when closing.

Please wait to receive your phone call; do not call the school.

When an early dismissal happens, all parents and guardians must be reachable. We must have a reliable phone number or other means of contacting you. Remember, if your information changes during the school year, you are required to notify the office.

Inclement Weather Make-Up Days

In the event of a significant number of closures, we will add days to the end of the school calendar. If make-up days are deemed necessary, notice will be given well in advance via the “Trailblazer Happenings” newsletter. Make-up days are considered school days and do affect your child’s attendance record.

Lunch

MDCS does not offer a lunch program. Parents/Guardians are responsible for providing a packed lunch each day for their children. Lunch should be nutritious and well balanced. Parents are encouraged to pack fruits and vegetables rather than fried or sugary products. Please do not send soda, energy drinks, candy, or other foods containing caffeine and/or ridiculous amounts of sugar. These items will be confiscated by the staff.

Due to varying schedules and time constraints, each classroom teacher will decide whether or not they will allow children to heat lunch items in the microwave and will inform parents in their individual classroom newsletters.

Report Cards

Report Cards will go home with students at the end of the first three quarters. The 4th and final report card will be mailed to the home. **Parent conferences may be scheduled at any point in the school year.** Please do not hesitate to contact us about any concern you might have. Parents are asked to notify the teacher in order to schedule a time that is convenient for both parties.

Exhibition and Production Nights

Our Exhibition and Production Nights are an opportunity for parents and the general public to experience what students have learned. All students are expected to participate in these activities, so please plan to attend these important events. We hope to have the opportunity to host these special events this year.

Student Records

MDCS adheres to NC procedures regarding the safe keeping and confidentiality of all student records. No individual or organization other than the legal guardian or school personnel working directly with the student is allowed access to a student's record without specific written consent of the parent or guardian, except in limited instances as specified by the state regulations governing student records. Student records include, but may not be limited to a student's school transcript, health record (including immunizations), emergency contact information, approved driver transportation information, EOG testing information (if applicable), Discipline Referrals and Suspension Notices, retention letters, and attendance information. A student's parent or guardian has the right to inspect all portions of the student record upon request to the school director. The record must be made available to the legal guardian or eligible student no later than two consecutive workdays after the request is made, unless the parent or guardian consents to a delay. The legal guardian may request copies of any part of the record. A fee may be charged for the cost of copying.

Cold Weather PE

PE classes are held outside even on cold days. Please send your child dressed in layers on cold days. They will need to shed layers as the exercise warms them up. If they complain about being cold during PE, send more layers or tell them to pick up the pace. Less motivated students tend to use the cold as an excuse.

Student Cell Phones/Personal Electronics

If a student brings a cell phone to school, it is to remain off and in their backpack when they are on school property, including the buses. The same is true for any personal electronic device with internet connectivity. Game devices, MP3 players, and other devices may be used on the bus if they do not have internet connectivity and are **permitted by the driver**. E-readers without a camera or internet access may be used during school hours. Unauthorized device use will result in immediate confiscation of said device. We reserve the right to hold devices overnight.

Internet Acceptable Use

Technology, the quintessential double-edged sword.

Used with integrity, it increases productivity and affords wonderful learning opportunities. Abused, it can bring individual, and even organizational, productivity to a grinding halt. The 2015-16 school year saw an unprecedented amount of the latter. An inordinate amount of staff time and energy was spent trying to “plug holes” in the state content filter which were being exploited by students as young as nine years old. We cannot afford to continue in this manner. We are asking all MDCS families to sign our new Acceptable Use Policy (Appendix C).

Student “digital misconduct” will result in temporary loss of network access and zeros on related assignments. Qualifying infractions include, but are not limited to:

- Tampering with another user’s files.
- Using proxy servers to bypass the internet filter.
- Changing permissions on folders.
- Tampering with any other user account. This includes attempting to login on any other account.
- Excessive time off task (gaming, random searches, music management, etc.).

Multiple infractions will result in permanent loss of network access privilege which will seriously compromise a student’s ability to satisfy the academic requirements for grade advancement. Please take the time to read the entire policy before signing and returning the signature page to the school office.

Families with multiple children attending MDCS need to send a separate signature page for each student older than second grade. We will not allow a student to access the network until we have a signature page on file.

AHERA Notification

The US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) requires all schools to inspect building materials for the presence of asbestos. AHERA excludes schools from the inspection requirement if the school was constructed after October 12, 1988, and has a signed statement from the architect or project engineer responsible for construction the school stating that no asbestos-containing building materials were specified for use in the construction of the school. **Our school has been provided such a statement, and is, therefore, exempt from the requirement to conduct an asbestos inspection.**

Appendix A

A. Equal Opportunity/Nondiscrimination

Mountain Discovery does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the School's nondiscrimination policies:

Carter Petty, Interim Director
890 Jenkins Branch Rd, N.
828-488-1222

MDCS prohibits and will not tolerate any such discrimination or harassment by any member of its community.

B. Definitions of Harassment

Harassment or ridicule on the basis of any protected characteristic is construed as bullying and is strictly prohibited. Such harassment can be defined as conduct that shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of his or her protected characteristic and that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive, or uncomfortable environment.

C. Consequences

Infractions will result in the following series of consequences*:
First infractions will result in a one day Out of School Suspension (OSS).
Second infractions will result in three days of OSS.
Third infractions will result in five days of OSS.
Fourth infractions will result in expulsion.

*Infraction count is cumulative across school years.

Approved by the Board of Directors, 10-27-11
Amended by the Board of Directors, 8-25-16

Appendix B

Policy Title: Absence and Tardy

Responsible Area: Instructional Policy

North Carolina State law requires that we collect and act on certain attendance information, including the number of absences for each child and whether those absences were excused. In addition to our legal obligation, the administration and staff of MDCS are committed to the belief that a child must be at school for the entire school day to receive the full benefit. Missed instructional time is often irreplaceable, even if the “work” is made up. There is no substitute for participating in the teachable moments which can only occur when a teacher and students are working together.

Excused absences can only be given for:

- a. Illness
- b. Death of an immediate family member
- c. Medical or dental appointment
- d. Religious observance
- e. Student is involved in a court proceeding
- f. Inclement weather

Travel that has educational value can sometimes be counted as an excused absence. The School Director must pre-approve all educational absences.

To qualify:

- Parents need to make written request to the classroom teacher and school director for an excused absence in advance. Requests should be made at least three weeks in advance of the trip.
- The teacher will discuss expectations of the student while gone, i.e. journaling, reading, trip report, or other assignments the teacher deems appropriate.
- The request should include the following information:
 - Date of trip
 - Location of trip
 - Homework from the classroom (as appropriate)
 - Date of return
- Approval must be **received** two weeks prior to the first day of the absence

After any absence, parents or guardians should send a signed note to the teacher the day they return to school telling him/her the date of the absence and why the child was absent.

If excuses are not received on this time frame, the absence will be considered unexcused.

Unexcused absences will result in the following actions from MDCS director:

After 3 unexcused absences the office will notify the parent by phone or in writing of the absences. After 6 unexcused absences the office will notify all adults responsible for transporting the child to school in writing of the absences and request a meeting to create a plan to address the attendance issue. In keeping with case law, separate letters will be mailed to each adult. The district attorney will receive

copies of the letter. After 10 unexcused absences the office will follow the same notification procedure used for 6 unexcused absences. Pursuant to NC GS 115C-378, a meeting will be held to determine if the parent/guardians have made a good faith effort to address the continuing attendance issue. If the school director believes this is not the case, legal action will be taken. Per MDCS Student Conduct Policy, students with ten or more unexcused absences will be considered for an out of school suspension of a period of one day up to the remainder of the school year.

The above procedures are taken from NC GS 115C-378. The school director should follow any additional steps required by the statute and remain abreast of any changes to the law.

Tardiness

A student will be marked tardy if they arrive later than 8:15. If tardy, parents should sign the child in at the office and fill out a tardy slip. The criteria for excused absences will be used to determine if a tardy is excused. Should tardiness be a continued problem, Mountain Discovery Charter School will invite parent/guardian(s) and the student for a Tardiness Mediation Session in order to resolve the problem. Conferences will be sought once a student has 10 unexcused tardies. Per MDCS Student Conduct Policy, students with 20 or more unexcused tardies will be considered for an out of school suspension of a period of one day up to the remainder of the school year.

Early Check-Out

Students may **only** be checked out before the regular school dismissal time for the reasons listed as excused absences. If a parent/guardian checks a student out early for any other reason, the student will be given an unexcused absence for that school day.

Promotion

Any child with 10 or more unexcused absences may be retained in his/her current grade level. A committee comprised of the classroom teachers, school director, and parent will make this decision.

Approved by the Board of Directors on June 18, 2004
Amended by the Board of Directors on July 6, 2005
Amended by the Board of Directors on Nov. 20, 2012
Amended by the Board of Directors on April 18, 2013
Amended by the Board of Directors on June 19, 2013
Amended by the Board of Directors on January 14, 2014
Amended by the Board of Directors on February 18, 2014

Appendix C

NON-EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

At MDCS, we expect all members of the community to model the Code of Conduct we ask our students to follow, including taking responsibility for our behavior and performance, acting with compassion, and being honest. We recognize that disagreements and conflict will occur, but we aim to resolve problems and grievances promptly and as close to the source as possible. We also understand that there are times when resolution may require further discussion and action at levels outside the immediate parties to the conflict. The grievance procedure provides a graduated process for resolution. The following principles guide the procedure:

- Individuals should seek to resolve questions and problems informally and directly whenever possible by having a face-to-face conversation with the person whom they have a grievance against
 - Complaints must be fully and clearly described by the grievant
 - Individuals should be provided with full details of any allegations against them, and must be given the opportunity to provide their side prior to resolution
 - The resolution procedure will be conducted promptly, honestly, fairly, and without bias. Generally, individuals are encouraged to seek resolution directly. The individual contacts the person against whom the grievance is held. This contact should be made personally or by phone. Arrange for a mutually convenient time to discuss the concern. If individuals are unable to resolve the issue informally, or in cases where an individual is uncomfortable handling the issue personally, the complaint proceeds through the following three-level procedure:
1. The grievant notifies the supervisor of the person against whom the grievance is filed. Notice may be made in writing or verbally. This level is still considered informal, but either party may request written statements and agreements. The supervisor arranges a meeting with both the complainant and the grievant to discuss concerns. This level should be handled promptly, generally within one week, and all parties should be informed of the resolution. If the matter cannot be resolved, it moves to Step 2.
 2. This step is a Formal Conference. The grievant should submit the grievance in writing. A copy must be provided to the person against whom the grievance is filed and that person's supervisor. The meeting and any and all previous informal steps taken to resolve the issue are documented on the Grievance Process Form. A copy of the form is filed in the personnel files of involved staff members. An appointment for the Formal Conference is made at a mutually convenient time and place. Attendees are determined prior to the conference and should include the supervisor of the person against whom the grievance is filed. If the matter is not resolved it moves to Step 3.
 3. This step is Third Party Mediation. If one or more formal conferences fail to resolve the issue, the supervisor will initiate the formal mediation process utilizing a certified mediator (Note: one source of free mediation is The Mediation Center in Asheville). If the issue cannot be resolved at this level, the grievant has a right to appeal to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors. See the "Grievances to be Reviewed" section for an explanation of what the Executive Committee will and may not hear.

Executive Committee REVIEW

The grievant must notify the Board Chair or designee in writing with a request for review and provide a copy of the written request to the Executive Director.

The Executive Committee will review all prior documentation and schedule a timely meeting(s) with the grievant, the person against whom the grievance is filed, the supervisor(s), and parties involved.

In all appeals to the Executive Committee, the Committee shall provide proper notice to all parties concerned and keep a record of any hearing conducted. In the case of hearings required by right, such hearings shall be conducted with all parties having the right to appear before the board, to be represented by counsel, to submit documentation, and to examine and cross examine witnesses.

The Executive Committee will bring a recommendation to the Board of Directors at the next regularly scheduled Board meeting after the review and meetings are complete.

The Board will vote to accept, accept with modification, or reject the recommendation. The board's vote on the committee recommendation will be based only on the evidence presented to the committee.

The Chair of the Executive Committee is responsible for communicating the decision to the grievant.

GRIEVANCES TO BE REVIEWED

Mandatory Reviews

The Executive Committee will review the grievance if the grievance is not resolved through mediation and is an appeal of any final administrative decision affecting a constitutional interest or an interest of the type listed below:

- Expulsion or suspension of a student for more than 10 days;
- An alleged violation of a specified binding federal law, State law, State Board of Education policy or other state rule, or local board policy;
- The loss or reduction of salary of a school employee under a specific term contract who is not employed at will; and
- Any other decision that by law provides for a right of appeal to the school board and for which there is not other statutory appeal procedure.

Discretionary Reviews

If the grievance is not resolved through mediation, but it is not an alleged violation of a specified binding federal or state law, federal or state regulation, binding State Board of Education policy or procedure or local board policy or procedure, the grievant may submit a grievance to the Executive Committee. The Committee has the discretion to respond or not to the grievance.

Issues related to employee performance are addressed in the Grievance process in the Formal Conference stage in which complaints are addressed by the person's immediate supervisor.

School staff and the Executive Committee of the Board will consider requests to hear grievances from a group of grievants, but staff and the Board have the discretion to respond to individual grievants.

Approved by the board January 23, 2019

Appendix D

INTERNET Acceptable Use Policy for Students

Purpose

MDCS recognizes the value of computer and other electronic resources to improve student learning and enhance the administration and operation of the school. To this end, MDCS encourages the responsible use of computers, computer networks, including the Internet, and other electronic resources in support of educational excellence. Employees and students are encouraged to develop the skills necessary to effectively utilize this data.

Because the Internet is an unregulated, worldwide vehicle for communication, information available to staff and students is impossible to control. Therefore, this policy delineates acceptable use of the Internet by MDCS employees and students while using this equipment, facilities, Internet addresses, or domain names registered to the Dept. of the Interior or to MDCS.

MDCS Rights and Responsibilities

It is the policy of MDCS to maintain an environment that promotes ethical and responsible conduct in all online network activities by staff and students. No employee, student, or other individual should engage in any activity that does not conform to the established purpose and general rules and policies of the network. Within this general policy, MDCS recognizes its legal and ethical obligation to protect the well-being of students in its charge. To this end, MDCS retains the following rights and recognizes the following obligations:

- To log network use and to monitor fileserver space utilization by all users.
- To remove a user account on the network.
- To monitor the use of online activities. This may include real-time monitoring of network activity and/or maintaining a log of Internet activity for later review.
- To provide internal and external controls as appropriate and feasible. Such controls shall include the right to determine who will have access to MDCS-owned equipment and, specifically, to exclude those who do not abide by MDCS's acceptable use policy or other policies governing the use of school facilities, equipment, and materials. MDCS reserves the right to restrict online destinations through software or other means. To provide guidelines and make reasonable efforts to train staff and students in acceptable use and policies governing online communications.

MDCS assumes no responsibility or liability for files deleted due to violation of fileserver space allotments.

Staff Responsibilities

Staff is to:

- Ensure that students do not use the Internet or any MDCS electronic equipment without adult supervision.
- Make reasonable efforts to monitor student network use to assure that it conforms to this policy and the goals of MDCS.

- Make reasonable efforts to become familiar with the Internet and its use so that effective monitoring, instruction, and assistance may be achieved.

When questions arise, it is the responsibility of the school director in cooperation with the classroom teacher to make the determination as to the appropriateness of the student's use of the Internet and other electronic resources while using MDCS equipment.

User Responsibilities

Use of the electronic media provided by MDCS is a privilege that offers a wealth of information and resources for research. Where it is available, this resource is offered to staff and students at no cost. In order to maintain the privilege, users agree to learn and comply with all of the provisions of this policy.

Acceptable Use

- **All use of the Internet must be in support of educational and research objectives consistent with the mission and objectives of MDCS.**
- Network accounts are only for the authorized account owner's use for the authorized purpose.

From time to time, MDCS will make determinations on whether specific uses of the network are consistent with the acceptable use practice.

Unacceptable Use

Unacceptable use includes but is not limited to:

- Sharing passwords. Passwords are personal and should not be shared with anyone.
- Seeking information on, obtaining copies of, or modifying files, other data, or passwords belonging to other users.
- Use of the network to disrupt network use by others.
- Hardware and/or software shall not be destroyed, modified, or abused in any way.
- Use of the network to develop programs that harass other users or infiltrate a computer or computing system and/or damage the software components of a computer or computing system.
- Distribution of hate mail, chain letters, discriminatory remarks, and other antisocial behaviors.
- The unauthorized installation of any software, including shareware and freeware, for use on MDCS computers.
- Use of the network to access or process pornographic material, inappropriate text files (as determined by the system administrator or building administrator), or files dangerous to the integrity of the local area network.
- Use of the network for any unlawful purpose.
- Use of profanity, obscenity, racist terms, or other language that may be offensive to another user.
- Playing games unless specifically authorized by a teacher for instructional purposes.

Disclaimer

- MDCS cannot be held accountable for the information that is retrieved via the network.
- MDCS reserves the right to change its policies and rules at any time.

User Agreement (to be signed by all adult users and student users above grade 2)

I have read, understand, and will abide by the MDCS Acceptable Use Policy when using computer and other electronic resources owned or operated by MDCS. Furthermore, I understand that any violation of the regulations above is unethical and may constitute a criminal offense. **Should I commit any violation, my access privileges may be revoked, school disciplinary action may be taken, and/or appropriate legal action may be initiated.**

Student Name (printed)

Student Signature

(date)

Parent Agreement

As parent or guardian of _____, I have read the Acceptable Use Policy. I understand that MDCS network access exists for educational purposes. MDCS has taken reasonable steps to control access to the Internet, but cannot guarantee that all controversial information will be inaccessible to student users. I agree that I will not hold MDCS responsible for materials acquired on the network. Furthermore, I accept full responsibility for supervision if and when my child's use is not in a school setting. I hereby give permission for my child to use network resources, including the Internet, that are available through MDCS. I understand that this permission is effective until my child is withdrawn from MDCS.

Parent/Guardian Name (printed)

Parent/Guardian Signature

(date)

Appendix E

Information on Section 504

If you have a child who may be struggling in school as the result of a disability, your child may qualify for a plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; one of the federal civil rights laws that prohibits discrimination against public school students with disabilities. Section 504 coverage includes students with learning-related disabilities and those with serious medical disabilities, for example, diabetes, life-threatening food allergies, cerebral palsy and clinical depression.

Much like an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a Section 504 plan can help students with disabilities learn and participate in the School's general education curriculum and School activities. A Section 504 plan outlines how a child's specific needs are met with accommodations, modifications and other services and aids. The School's provision of services to students with disabilities is also subject to North Carolina's "[Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities](#)."

We have initiated 504 plans where appropriate since we opened our doors in 2002 and will continue to approach parents when we think it might be best for a child to have a 504. Odds are, we've been in touch if your child might qualify. However, if you believe your child may be in need of a Section 504 Plan*, please contact:

Tracy Wharton, Director of Instruction and EC Services
(828) 488-1222

*Students with current IEP's do not require a 504 plan. We can address any concerns you might have with amendments to the IEP.

Section 504/ADA Grievance Procedures

If any person believes that Mountain Discovery has violated the regulations of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), he or she may submit a grievance with Mountain Discovery's Section 504/ADA Coordinator.

Grievances involving students who attend Mountain Discovery may be submitted to:

Tracy Wharton, 504/ADA Coordinator
890 Jenkins Branch Rd., N.
Bryson City, NC 28713

Grievances involving employees of Mountain Discovery or third parties may be submitted to:

Carter Petty, Interim Director
890 Jenkins Branch Rd., N.
Bryson City, NC 28713

The grievance procedures outlined below establish how grievances will be investigated and resolved. These grievance procedures are intended to provide for a prompt and equitable resolution of grievances. Mountain Discovery prohibits retaliation against individuals who file a grievance or participate in a grievance investigation.

Any person who believes they have been discriminated against based on disability, retaliated against for filing or participating in the investigation of a grievance, or otherwise wishes to contest Mountain Discovery's application of Section 504 or ADA may file a grievance by taking the following the steps.

Step 1

A grievance form must be completed and signed by the grievant and submitted to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator within thirty calendar days of the date that the discrimination or retaliation is believed to have occurred. A grievance form can be obtained from either of the individuals listed above, although that form is included at the end of these grievance procedures. The Coordinator will conduct an adequate, reliable and impartial investigation of the matters presented in the grievance, which will include an opportunity to present witnesses and other evidence, and will issue a written decision to the grievant within twenty business days of the submission of the grievance.

Step 2

If the grievant wishes to appeal the decision of the Section 504/ADA Coordinator, the grievant may submit a signed statement of appeal to the Director within ten business days after receipt of the Coordinator's response. The Director will review the grievance and all evidence obtained in connection with the grievance and issue a written decision to the grievant within fifteen business days of the submission of the appeal.

Step 3

The grievant may file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at any time before or after the grievance. The OCR regional office that has jurisdiction over schools in North Carolina is located at the following address: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, District of Columbia Office, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-1475 and can be reached at (202) 453-6020 (ph), (202) 453-6021 (fax) or by email at OCR.DC@ed.gov. The web addresses for OCR are <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr> (the Office) and <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html> (to file a complaint).

Approved by the Board, 8-25-2016