



## LIFE IN THE MIDDLESEX SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Our life together as a school of 400 students, 92 faculty, and 70 staff is busy, productive, and fun. We all choose to be part of an intense, shared experience that creates life-long bonds of friendship. At its best, living and working together in the very close proximity of a residential school means that we trust each other in the daily practice of honesty, respect, kindness, responsibility, and good sense. We have confidence that each one of us understands the community’s values and expectations and incorporates them into his or her own life to bring out the best in everyone.

The School has rules to help define the boundaries of living and working together; however, it is the spirit of “*fides, veritas, labor*” by which we would rather define ourselves. **While all of the disciplinary elements of major school rules are outlined in the gray pages of our Handbook, which we ask all students and parents to read and acknowledge, the following areas of life at Middlesex are important enough to highlight as we begin another school year.**

### Responsibilities as a student

First and foremost, we are a school. To be a member of this community, one must be ready to engage fully in school life and to meet one’s daily commitments. We expect students to come to each class prepared – homework completed, all necessary materials at hand, on time, and ready to contribute. Being a student in the Middlesex classroom is a privilege that carries with it the responsibility of bringing one’s best efforts to class each day, for the benefit of all classmates and faculty as well as for one’s own sake.

1) *Attendance*: Being present and on time to class and other required commitments and events is a mandate for belonging to the Middlesex community. We expect all students, from the time they first arrive on campus until their graduation, to know and live by the rules regarding attendance at class and other required events, as well as the rules governing dormitory sign-out and weekends.

Because participation is at the heart of the Middlesex experience, faculty keep careful track of student attendance, and we have linked timely attendance to the disciplinary system. All absences, even excused, must be kept to an absolute minimum. Please be aware, as outlined in the Handbook, that “tardies” and absences can result in detention and a

conversation with parents to alert everyone to the seriousness of the situation, and ultimately can become grounds for a meeting with the Discipline Committee and dismissal.

2) *Illness*: When a student is unwell, the Health Center is an important resource for assistance and advice, and we encourage students to use the Health Center whenever appropriate. However, we also encourage students to use the Health Center during free periods or other openings in the day, rather than missing class or other commitments. The Health Center staff works with students and faculty to make sure students get the care they need while minimizing the number of commitments they miss.

### Integrity and accountability

Our school community thrives on integrity and trust. Integrity means that we unify our actions with our beliefs and our statements; trust means that indeed we have confidence that we will honor our commitments to each other. We believe that we can trust each other to tell the truth, to respect boundaries, and to live up to shared expectations, let alone to live within the rules.

We talk regularly about honesty, gratitude, kindness, respect, and courage as community values, and our school rules support these values. In pertinent part, our Handbook states: “Students, faculty, staff members, and others connected with Middlesex School should expect to be treated with consideration and respect.” Important elements of consideration and respect include:

- 1) *respect for differences in race, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual orientation of others*: We are a community that values the diversity of our human experience and encourages each member to tell his or her story. Intolerance divides us and breaks trust.
- 2) *respect for other peoples’ property and their possession of it*: Vandalism and theft create suspicion and distrust. We must be able to trust each other to respect property when no one is watching.
- 3) *respect for the school rules and for faculty and staff*: At all times the faculty and staff are responsible for student safety and well-being; students are responsible for heeding the rules and requests of those who are responsible for them.

Integrity is the backbone of any school community and is of the highest value at Middlesex. We trust each other to tell the truth and to take responsibility for our own actions. Intellectual honesty requires us to attribute ideas, words, and images to their proper sources, even as we appropriate them for our own use, and to stand on the strength of our own preparation. With particular regard to on-line research, we note the need to be careful of the speed and ease of finding information, keeping track

of sources, and making sure that information is coming from a creditable source.

It is important to note the clarity of the rule regarding academic dishonesty as it appears in the Handbook: “**The Discipline Committee’s response to cases of academic dishonesty on exams, tests, and papers will be a grade of zero on the assignment, a four-day suspension from school and six months full probation. Any student who fails a major assignment in a course for reasons of academic dishonesty will be ineligible to receive honors or high honors during that semester. A second breach of honesty during a student’s career will result in dismissal unless there are extraordinary mitigating circumstances.**” (*emphasis in original*) We take these issues very seriously. *It is always better to be honest and accept the consequence of one’s actions; in the academic realm, it is clearly better to take a poor grade on any single test or paper than to cheat.*

### Living Together

A residential school gives students the benefit of the intense intellectual and social experience of living and working with faculty and fellow students. We know each other as colleagues, teammates, and friends, and the bonds we forge are strong and deep. Because we live and work together so closely, it is very important that we respect each others’ privacy and safety and that we clearly understand the School’s expectations regarding the way we treat each other.

While the Handbook clearly spells out the rules, here are some highlights:

1) *Conduct*: In all aspects of school life, from the classroom to the athletic fields to our social interactions, we should treat others the way we want to be treated ourselves: with courtesy, respect, and kindness. We can be an enthusiastic and energetic community without engaging in behavior that detracts from our strengths, and we value good citizenship and good sportsmanship as integral to our way of life together.

There are some specifics worth noting. At games, the simple rule is that we “cheer for, not against.” At dances, “grinding” is not appropriate conduct, and students should face the person/people with whom they are dancing. Words are important; using language in any context that is homophobic, misogynistic, or in any way racially-oriented is clearly unacceptable. There are clear boundaries and gray areas in these areas, and as a community we should keep mutual respect front and center in all elements of our lives together. Good judgment is important.

Humor, in jokes or teasing, is often a welcome part of our interactions; however, sometimes boundaries can become an issue, and we try hard to make sure that humor does not morph into a hurtful kind of interaction. As our Handbook states, “To preserve and protect the health of the community and differences among people, the School will not tolerate harassment or bullying of any kind.” The School’s stance on bullying and harassment applies to on-line conduct as well.



“Harassment is uninvited and unwanted physical or verbal behavior that creates an intimidating, hostile, or detrimental environment for education or employment; such behavior is detrimental to the community.” However, “harassment is not to be confused with honest and constructive criticism or a respectful and energetic expression of differences of opinion; such behavior is of value to the goals of the School.”

Please review the sections in the Handbook regarding hazing and bullying; we have included the provisions from Massachusetts law as reminders that there are sharp legal boundaries around what can be considered pranks and jokes and that the School has mandatory reporting responsibilities in these areas.

***It is impossible to run afoul of expectations if one’s behavior is based on respect, honesty, and kindness, and all members of the community should understand the importance of these values in our daily interactions.***

2) *Dormitory life:* While living in dorms is fun, living in the company of peers and friends can try the patience and blur the boundaries of appropriate conduct for even the best-intentioned among us. We expect students to follow the rules set forth in the Handbook with regard to where they are supposed to be or not supposed to be. *Specifically, students should not be in each others’ rooms without the room’s occupant present. In all situations – even when it might seem redundant to ask or inconvenient to wait for approval – one must get the owner’s permission for borrowing or taking anything from someone else’s room, locker, computer, etc.* While it can be tempting to treat a dorm mate like a sibling and hold property in a family-common kind of way, in fact dormitory life requires more conscious and careful respect for other people’s habits and property than living at home might require. All students should be aware that **stealing is considered a major offense; students can be dismissed after a first offense.**

Further, life at school creates its own set of logistical rules, and *among the most important of those rules is the sign-out procedure students must follow when they plan to be off campus or even in a different part of campus than would be expected.* The ability to live within these rules shows that students have the personal accountability and maturity needed to live in a residential school community.

3) *Sexual intimacy:* As our Handbook spells out, “because intimate sexual contact carries potential health and emotional risks for adolescents, and is prohibited by Massachusetts law for persons under 16, the School strongly discourages all students from engaging in intimate sexual contact. If students are discovered engaged in intimate sexual contact or if the circumstances imply intimate sexual contact, the School will respond to any such incident by informing the parents or guardians of the students, by requiring counseling and, if appropriate, by imposing discipline up to and including dismissal.” Students of different genders should not be in each others’ rooms except during appropriate visitation

hours. Our stance towards sexual activity applies throughout the campus and its environs. This stance receives further support from Massachusetts state law, which prescribes strict definitions of statutory rape. Again, these provisions should be reviewed in the Handbook, as the School must act on its legal obligations as well as its overriding concerns for students’ safety and well-being.

### **On-line Life and Work**

On-line socializing, communication and work have become important parts of our lives; and yet, they are instantaneous and incredibly time-consuming. Particularly in such a busy and intense environment, students must self-monitor their on-line time so that their personal relationships and other responsibilities are not short-changed. Beyond the restrictions that the School imposes during study hours and when the Internet is turned off, students are responsible for regulating their own use of the Internet, social media, and e-mail. In sum, technology use of any kind while a member of the Middlesex community is subject to all School rules, procedures and discipline.

As you can see from reading our Acceptable Use Policy (“AUP”) found in the Handbook, we are very sensitive to the potential hazards surrounding the ease and informality of on-line behavior and communications. We urge everyone to be very careful about the tone and content of messages and photos sent electronically. ***Network use is considered a privilege and not a right. All information that appears on-line, regardless of how it is sent, should be considered public, and there can be no expectation of privacy for users.*** The school rules and expectations that apply to in-person behavior and communications apply to on-line behavior and communications. It is important to note, as well, that unauthorized use of someone’s password, screen name, or identity in an electronic communication constitutes violation of the major school rules regarding integrity and stealing; **there is no such thing as on-line anonymity.**

The School makes use of a filter to protect members of the community from illegal, pornographic, or otherwise inappropriate materials; it is our goal that this filtering does not inhibit legitimate academic uses of the system. The AUP is explicit, in the Handbook, in articulating violations and in making clear that first offense infractions can require discipline responses including suspension and dismissal. Perhaps the best general rule regarding on-line life is that any and all communications of materials should be able to be posted on the Eliot Hall bulletin board, in terms of appropriate tone and content. **Members of our community are as responsible for their conduct on-line as they are in day-to-day in-person interactions at School.**

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

In the spring of 2004, the faculty developed the following statement:

*Middlesex School strives to be a healthy, vibrant school that supports academic curiosity, creative endeavors, personal responsibility, and a*

*developed sense of community. We believe that student alcohol and drug use on our campus is detrimental to both the spirit and the soul of the Middlesex experience. For many students, alcohol and drug use can contribute to declines in health, intellectual vigor, athletic ability, personal integrity, and good decision-making. Besides risking severe disciplinary consequences, drug and alcohol use by students divides the community and compromises relationships. As adults in this community, we are committed to your positive development and promise. We will act with clarity and conviction to support your choice not to use, provide, or be involved with drugs and alcohol on this campus.*

Please note that the Handbook spells out specific guidelines and prohibitions regarding the procurement, distribution, sale, and use of prohibited substances – including prescription drugs by non-prescription holders -- as well as rules against facilitating or enabling such use by others.

***We do not subscribe to the theory that drug and alcohol misuse among teenagers is a natural part of students’ lives, and we believe that to be a healthy, vibrant, fun community we must insist that our students recognize the School’s commitment to provide a substance-free environment.***

*Prescription drugs:* there are many reasons for students to need prescription medications while at school, and the Health Center in its pamphlet presents clear guidelines for delivering those medications to the Health Center for monitored usage. The guidelines apply to both boarding and day students who need prescription medications while they are at school. Students should understand that prescription drugs are carefully calibrated and monitored for individual use and cannot be shared indiscriminately with others without creating a danger. In the event a student for whom medication is not prescribed uses another student’s prescription medication, both students are at risk medically and as participants in an infraction of a major school rule.

***The Health Center must be aware of all prescription medications that all students are taking. Regardless of whether they belong to a boarding or day student, certain prescriptions must be kept in the Health Center both for monitored usage and to avoid the dangers of sharing or loss that present themselves to students.*** While managing prescription drug use from the Health Center can present an inconvenience to parents and students, it is absolutely necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the student body.

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We hope that this summary of how we shape our community experience is helpful to students and parents as we begin the school year. The Handbook contains all of the details necessary to understanding our rules and regulations; we hope that by reading through this material, as well as through the Handbook, students and parents gain a better understanding of the ethos of our School.