

## **I INTRODUCTION**

### **VISION STATEMENT / DEPARTMENT FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

The Vision for the Department for Catholic Schools is to promote and to sustain Catholic Schools of unparalleled quality, which integrate faith into every aspect of life and culture, producing graduates who continually strive for human and Christian perfection.

### **MISSION STATEMENT OF DIVINE MERCY ACADEMY**

Divine Mercy Academy exists to form each child by instilling Catholic values and developing his/her own uniqueness in a quality educational environment.

### **PHILOSOPHY OF SCHOOL**

It is the aim of Divine Mercy Academy to provide a Catholic, educational setting in which our students and their families can integrate Gospel values in daily living. We strive to create a climate in which each child can develop spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally, and socially, and in turn, enhance the world.

Each child will develop an understanding of Catholic Doctrine, Liturgy, the Sacraments, Sacred Scripture, and Personal Prayer to build a personal relationship with Christ.

All children will be provided with challenging, yet realistic goals to achieve their full potential. Individual learning styles and rates of achievement will be recognized.

Each child will receive guidance in developing sound attitudes and habits for both mental and physical health.

Each child will develop a Christian awareness of responsibility to God, family, parish, community, nation and world.

### **MIDDLE STATES ACCREDITATION**

The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools accredits Divine Mercy Academy. Middle States accreditation is an expression of confidence in Divine Mercy Academy's mission, goals and objectives, performance and resources and validates publicly the excellence in education.

The Middle States Evaluation is an ongoing process requiring the submission of updated plans every three years. After ten years the school is re-evaluated for continued accreditation. We were re-accredited in May 2008.

## **GOALS**

At Divine Mercy Academy, we strive to build the Kingdom of God on earth. We endeavor to create a strong spirit of unity between the parish and the school, and with the Beaver Falls community. We look forward to the changes that each school year brings and will continue to minister to the needs of each child and foster a deep understanding and belief in our Catholic faith.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To promote Catholic values in all areas of the school curriculum.
2. To provide a superior academic background which will enable each child to excel.
3. To recognize the dignity, needs and talents of each child and to promote acceptance of their uniqueness.
4. To develop a sense of responsibility to self, parish, community, country and world, with an emphasis on peace and justice.
5. To assist children and families in times of need through recognition, intervention and referral to proper support agencies.

## **CATECHETICS (Religious Education)**

Catechetics is the center of the Catholic school. A conscious effort is made to create a Christ-centered atmosphere by stressing Christian values in the classroom as well as throughout the school. A conscious effort is made to integrate catechetics into every aspect of the school curriculum.

Our belief in Jesus has drawn us to this school community. Our beliefs are expressed in and strengthened by daily communal prayer. Students develop skills and a love for the Church's daily worship. Prayer includes a prayer service each morning with simple prayers for before and after lunch and at the end of the day.

An introduction each morning briefly sketches the saint or feast of the day or some aspect of the liturgical season. Attention is also given to the seasons of the year, to the anniversaries of historical figures and peacemakers of our time, and to the civil holidays that have significance for our children.

Faith experiences are an integral part of catechetics. Opportunities for Eucharistic Liturgies, Reconciliation, Stations of the Cross, classroom prayer and service to others are to be included. Community is at the heart of Catholic education, not simply as a concept to be learned, but as a reality to be lived.

The principal, in conjunction with the Pastor and the Director of Religious Education, work with the teachers in the religious development and sacramental preparation of the students. Parent Preparation Programs for Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation are held during the year. These are parish programs and involve all eligible children and parents of the parish.

## II. DAILY PRACTICES AND POLICIES

### ADMISSIONS/REGISTRATION POLICIES

Divine Mercy Academy admits students of any race or national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to all students formally accepted into the school. We do not discriminate on the basis of race or national or ethnic origin in the administration of our educational policies, admission policies, athletic or other school administered programs. Children who are not Catholic are expected to participate in religion classes and to attend all religious functions of the school/church.

A student entering Kindergarten must be five years of age by August 30<sup>th</sup>. Official certificates of birth and baptism are required at the time of registration. Those registering for grades 1-8 must fulfill the age requirement for the desired grade and present letters of recommendation from the previous school. A mini-battery will be administered to all new students to verify placement. Grade level and academic group determinations are made on the basis of school records.

Immunization records must be complete before any child may enter school. The requirements are as follows:

- 1 dose of chicken pox vaccine
- 4 doses of diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (one dose must be after the fourth birthday)
- 3 doses of oral polio vaccine
- 2 doses of measles vaccine after the first birthday (or proof by blood test of having had measles)
- 1 doses of mumps vaccine after the first birthday (or proof by physician's letter of having had mumps)
- 1 dose of rubella vaccine after the first birthday (or proof by blood test of having had German measles)
- 3 properly spaced doses of hepatitis B vaccine (K-4)

### ABSENCES/TARDINESS

Regular attendance at school is a major factor in determining academic success. Students who are absent for more than thirty days during the academic year may be denied academic promotion.

Absences from school are defined as either **Excused** or **Unexcused** according to guidelines from the Pennsylvania School Code. Excused absences include illness, quarantine, impassable roads, recognized religious holidays, and urgent reasons, such as a death in the family or a court appearance. The state guidelines also permit an **Excused Absence for Educational Trips** if a request is sent to the school **prior** to the dates of the trip. If no **prior** notice is received, the absence is classified as **Unexcused**.

Parents should call the school office on the first day that a child is absent from school. Give the child's name, homeroom teacher, and reason for absence. Unless the absence will be for an extended period of time, please make arrangements with another child to have assignments brought home.

Upon returning to school from an absence, a student must submit a **written excuse** to his/her homeroom teacher as required by state law. If this excuse is not submitted within three days following the absence, the absence will be classified as **Unexcused**.

A written excuse should be given to the teacher/principal for the following reasons:

- Following an absence
- Excused from gym class
- Permission for out of school appointments (child is expected to return when possible)
- Attending funerals
- Vacation
- Change of plans in leaving school (bus, ride or walk)
- Early Dismissal

According to the Pennsylvania School Code, Section 1332, "The absence of any pupil who remains out of school with or without his parent's permission, and is not absent because of illness or for other urgent reasons, as defined in the School Code, shall be unexcused. Such absence will be recorded as 'unlawful-unexcused' for a pupil who is under the compulsory attendance age." Section 1333, "Any such child who has been absent three days, or their equivalent, during the term of compulsory attendance, without lawful excuse...shall be given written notice. If, after such notice is given..., attendance is again violated by the person, such person shall be liable... for referral to the magistrate."

Parents and guardians of students who acquire excessive absences may be required to provide documentation from a physician indicating that the absences are relating to an existing medical condition.

## **CAFETERIA**

**Breakfast:** Because of the importance of good nutrition for learning as well as health, Divine Mercy Academy offers a breakfast program each day between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. Children may choose from a variety of menu items. Those eligible for free or reduced lunches may receive free or reduced breakfast.

**Lunch:** All students must bring or buy a lunch. Those bringing lunch may purchase milk and/or other beverages.

**Rules:** The use of good manners is encouraged and, therefore, the following cafeteria rules are to be observed:

- Remain seated unless disposing of garbage, etc.
- Refrain from abusing food; your own or that of others.

- Always walk while in the cafeteria.
- Refrain from shouting or screaming; enjoy the company of those nearby.
- Be courteous and respectful to all those helping during the lunch period.
- Do not take food from the cafeteria.

The cafeteria is operated in accordance with U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, handicap, religion, or national origin.

## **CANCELLATION OF SCHOOL**

Cancellation of school takes place only during extraordinary circumstances such as extreme weather, equipment failure, or public crisis. Since Divine Mercy Academy follows the Beaver Falls School District schedule school closings will coincide with theirs. Announcements of school cancellations are made over KDKA, WBVP and WPXI radio and KDKA, WTAE and WPXI television. If a child is a bus student, it is the parent/guardian's responsibility to see that the child attends our school when in session regardless of the status of the local public school district. Students are legally excused only if Divine Mercy cancels.

## **CLOTHING IDENTIFICATION**

Parents are strongly urged to mark their children's personal belongings with their names. Since children do not readily claim lost items, proper identification helps us to find the owner and save parents the cost of replacement. The lost-and-found area is located in the school office. Parents and children are encouraged to look for lost clothing items there. Other lost items, such as glasses, watches and purses, if found, are to be turned in to the office. Items that are not claimed by the end of each school year are donated to charity.

## **DETENTION/SUSPENSIONS (In-school/Out-of-school)**

Discipline is the key to good conduct and to respecting the rights of others and is essential to learning. Classroom standards and expectations for student behavior vary according to age and are determined by the individual teacher. If behavior warrants action, a student may be issued detention by any member of the faculty. Depending on the severity, this detention may be served either during recess or after school hours. If the detention is after school, parents are responsible for transportation. (See V DISCIPLINE)

In the event of a serious act of misbehavior or repeated acts of misbehavior, a student may serve either an in-school or out-of-school suspension. If misconduct continues, a student may be asked to leave the school. These decisions rest with the administration and may be necessary for the benefit of the total program.

## **DRESS CODE**

Divine Mercy Academy is a Catholic elementary school that maintains the right to establish a uniform dress code for its students. It is recognized that proper school attire and good grooming are conducive to a student's educational and social development. This Dress Code was developed:

1. to promote a Christian atmosphere
2. to free children for academic concentration
3. to de-emphasize competition among children regarding clothing
4. to allow more economical dress for school, and
5. provide some choice to accommodate individual differences.

This Dress Code is required of all students in grades one through eighth. Kindergarten is optional. This policy is intended to maintain a standard of dress that is neat, economical, modest and attractive.

### **Boys & Girls**

TOPS: Soft collar polo or turtlenecks in red, white, blue, yellow/gold.

Oxfords in white, blue or yellow

SWEATERS: Long sleeve cardigan, pullover, crew, v-neck, or sweater vests in red, white, yellow/gold, navy blue. DMA sweatshirts are also permitted.

BOTTOMS: Navy blue or khaki pants, capri pants or knee length walking shorts

SOCKS: Navy blue, black, and white.

IN ADDITION, GIRLS MAY WEAR: Navy blue, plaid, or khaki scoop neck uniform jumper, skirt, skirt, or knee length shorts. White blouses, long or short sleeve.

All shirts must have collars and be solid colors (no stripes or prints).

No bandannas or hair scarves are allowed.

Shirt tails are to be tucked in.

No denim of any color is to be worn except on the two "jean days" held each month.

No tee shirts permitted except on jean days.

No baggy jeans allowed.

Clean and neat footwear must be worn and shoelaces must be tied.

### **EARLY DISMISSALS**

Parents should make every effort to schedule appointments at a time that school is not in session. However, if a child must have an early dismissal, he/she must have a written note for the principal's approval. For these dismissals, parents or an authorized adult must meet the child at the office and sign him/her out at the authorized time. **Children who arrive later than 10:00 a.m. will be marked as absent in the morning. Children who leave school before 1:00 p.m. will be marked absent in the afternoon.**

## **EMERGENCIES**

### **Emergency Cards**

At the beginning of each school year, parents are required to complete a Student Emergency Card. It is imperative that the school be able to reach you to inform you of illness or an emergency situation. It is also important to list the names of others who can be contacted should you be unavailable. Please keep the card updated by notifying the office.

### **Emergency Closings and Delays**

If inclement weather or some other emergency requires that the school be delayed or closed, this information will be announced on KDKA and WPXI radio / television and WBVP radio. PLEASE DO NOT CALL THE SCHOOL OR RECTORY FOR THIS INFORMATION. In the event of a two-hour delay, morning preschool will be on a modified schedule, which is 10:00-12:00. If the announced delay does not specifically mention Divine Mercy, but does name Beaver Falls or Blackhawk, children should follow the announcement

### **Emergency Dismissals**

In the event that we would be required to dismiss school early, that information will be announced on the same stations noted above. Homeroom coordinators will initiate a phone chain to notify parents as soon as possible. However, because phone service may be interrupted in the school, some emergency situations may not allow for this option. Children will be dismissed as parents are notified and transportation is arranged.

## **EXTENDED CARE**

Divine Mercy Academy offers before school and after school programs for parents who need child care. Afternoon extended days are available from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for a fee. This service is available on a daily, weekly or yearly basis. Parents should contact the school office for the fee schedule and contact person if they plan to use the service.

## **FIELD TRIPS**

Every class is permitted field trips during the year. Each student must have a signed permission slip before he/she is permitted to participate. Transportation is usually provided by bus, and a fee is charged to cover costs. No 8<sup>th</sup> grade students may participate in the end-of-year field trip unless tuition is paid in full.

## **FUNDRAISING**

The Diocesan policy for funding elementary Catholic schools calls for each school to have fundraising activities to generate 10% of their total operating budget. School parents are expected to participate in these fundraising activities to the best of their ability through monetary donations, purchases and/or volunteer work.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

1. Divine Mercy Academy follows the Beaver Falls School District schedule with exceptions according to the Diocesan calendar. Parents will be notified of any schedule changes as soon as possible.
2. The school day begins at 8:00 a.m. for all students in Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
3. The four year old preschool program meets Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8:30 to 11:00 a.m.
4. The three year old preschool program meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00-11:00a.m.
5. Breakfast is served every day from 7:30 a.m. to 7:55 a.m.
6. Our lunch period runs from 11:30 to 12:10 p.m.

## **GYM CLOTHING**

Physical education class is a required part of our state curriculum. Attendance and participation is necessary for a passing grade. Gym clothes (either shorts of appropriate length or sweats; no jeans) are to be carried to school on gym day. No jewelry is to be worn for safety reasons. The school is not responsible for jewelry items lost or stolen. If a child forgets his/her gym clothes, he/she will not participate in gym class. A child will not be excused from gym without a written request from a physician.

## **HOMEWORK**

A reasonable amount of homework, according to grade level, is of great educational value and so is assigned every day. Each teacher will have a communication portal for parents that can be accessed through the Divine Mercy Website. This portal includes announcements and homework posts. Assignments are not always written. Study and memory work are frequently assigned. Homework is assigned on a regular basis to:

- enrich school experiences
- provide practice and review
- develop good study habits
- teach responsibility, and
- foster originality.

Parents can assist students with home assignments in the following ways:

1. Provide a quiet spot away from the television, telephone, or other distracting elements;
2. Check to see what was accomplished during the designated study time regarding completeness, neatness, and correctness;
3. Be willing to listen to reading, spelling, and math facts and to explain procedures, but never do the assignment;
4. Consult the teacher if the child uses the excuse "no homework" too often.

If for some reason the child cannot complete an assignment, the parent should inform the teacher by written note stating the reason. Arrangements should be made as soon as possible to make up incomplete assignments. The Diocese recommends the following time schedule for home study:

Primary (levels 1-3)	30 minutes
Intermediate (levels 4-5)	45 minutes
Upper Elementary (levels 6-8)	1 – 1-1/2 hours

In addition, the children are strongly encouraged to spend a portion of each evening in independent reading. In case of a student's absence, requests for homework should be made by 11:00a.m.

## **LIBRARY**

The school library is open daily. In all grades, books are checked out for one week. Lost or damaged books must be paid for.

## **LOST AND FOUND**

If your child is missing an article, the lost and found will be located in the office. We will have the "lost and found" at the PTG meetings and other special events for easier accessibility.

## **PARENT ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Athletic Association:**

All sport programs are the responsibility of the Pastor/Principal. The Athletic Director is accountable to the Pastor/Principal. Coaches are selected by the Athletic Director and approved by Pastor/Principal and serve on a volunteer basis. The Diocesan Guidelines for Elementary Catholic Schools Sports programs guides the policies.

## **Parent Teacher Guild**

The Divine Mercy PTG works for the advancement of Catholic education and for the welfare of all the children of Divine Mercy Academy. This organization offers an excellent opportunity for parents to become involved in their child's education. Meetings are scheduled on the third Wednesday of September, November, January, March and May at 7:00.

## **Parent Advisory Committee**

The Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meets regularly to discuss various school issues. The committee is made up of the PTG officers and representatives from sports boosters, social committee, homeroom mothers and long range planning. Everyone is welcome to attend both PTG and PAC meetings.

## **PARTIES**

The PTG sponsors parties for Halloween and Valentine's Day during the school year. No other instructional time should be used for parties without the principal's permission. Birthday treats should be distributed during lunch or recess. A note should be sent to the homeroom teacher the day before the treat will be sent to school.

## **PARTY INVITATIONS**

Please do not send party invitations to school to be distributed for your child's birthday. This may cause hurt feelings among the students who are not invited. The only exception to this is if every boy or every girl or all students in your child's room are invited.

## **RIGHTS OF NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act gives full rights to each parent, unless the school has been provided with evidence that there is a court order, States's statute or legally binding document relating to such matters as divorce, separation or custody that specifically revokes these rights. Such an order is to be on file in the school and those persons responsible for the child(ren) are to be informed of the circumstances. Every effort is made to keep the non-custodial parent appraised of the progress of the child(ren) through reports, report cards and parent/teacher conferences.

## **SCHOOL SUPPLIES**

Students provide their own school supplies but are expected to comply with individual teacher requirements. Items not easily available elsewhere, such as primary tablets, will be sold at school. A small number of basic items will be available for sale during morning homeroom period. The supplies needed by the students vary at each grade level and are determined by the needs of the subject. Teachers will inform students of specifics during the first week of school.

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

### Assemblies

Assemblies are held for children throughout the school year. The assemblies are planned in conjunction with the principal, faculty, and the PTG with a focus on education.

### Altar Servers

Students in grades 4 through 8 have the privilege of serving on the altar. Students who choose this privilege are expected to fulfill assigned responsibilities and be on time. Servers are expected to be in the sacristy 10 minutes before the Liturgical service.

### Sports

Basketball is offered at all levels, beginning with instructional teams in the primary grades and continuing with separate boys' and girls' developmental, junior varsity and varsity teams at upper levels. Cheerleading is available at all these levels as well. Soccer is open to students from Kindergarten through third grade and cross-country is to students in grades 2-8. Fund raising for all teams is provided almost entirely through refreshments sold at games and during the summer programs and tournaments. A general organizational meeting is held in the fall to acquaint parents and students with the athletic program.

### Band

Band instruction is available for a fee for interested students from grades 4-8. The Diocesan Program dictates the monthly fee annually. The instruments are rented with the option to buy. Small group lessons are provided one period a week and practice is held once a week. The periods are rotated so the same classes are not missed too often. However, it remains the responsibility of the student to make up missed work. A meeting is held at the beginning of each school year to provide more information for interested parents.

### Steelman and Percussion Ensemble

Students in grades 5 through 8 will have the opportunity to participate in a steelpan and percussion ensemble through an outreach program with Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center.

## TELEPHONE

No child is permitted to use the telephone except for important matters. Forgotten homework, books, lunch, gym clothes or changes in afternoon plans are not sufficient cause to call home. In all cases, the office will make the phone call home. **Students are not permitted to have cell phones in school.** If they must have a cell phone for a particular reason, they must leave it in the office during the day. **Digital cameras are not allowed either.**

## TESTING

Standardized tests, textbook tests, teacher-made tests are administered to students throughout the year. These assessments require students to synthesize information, apply what they have learned and demonstrate their understanding of what has been taught.

**Achievement Tests:** Students in grades 2-8 are administered a standardized test to measure progress from one year to another. A component of the standardized testing program is an aptitude test that helps to define the ability of a student in relationship to the results of the standardized test. If a child should be absent due to illness, every attempt will be made to enable the child to make-up the tests. However, since the tests must be mailed on the last scheduled test day, make-up testing often necessitates taking more tests daily than is ideal. To prevent this, **we ask that you do not schedule trips or appointments during the time of standardized testing.**

**Performance Assessment:** Each child in grade K-8 participates in a Performance Assessment. This task allows students to respond to open-ended questions and to demonstrate their ability to use higher order thinking skills.

**Teacher-made:** Tests which are constructed by teachers to measure, evaluate and determine what students have learned.

**Textbook Tests:** Tests which accompany textbooks adopted for use with students in a particular area and are administered at the conclusion of a chapter and/or unit.

## TEXTBOOKS

Divine Mercy Academy participates in Pennsylvania's Act 195/90 whereby the state purchases textbooks and instructional materials of non-religious items. A parent form with permission to have their child use these books is kept on file in the school office. All books are to be covered at all times. Students are responsible for the condition of the books given to them at the beginning of the year. Students will be required to pay for the book if it is damaged or lost. Books taken to and from school are to be placed in a bookbag.

## TRANSFERS

When a student transfers to another school, parents should notify the school office as soon as possible. Academic records will not be forwarded until all financial obligations to the school have been met.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

It is important that we know the ordinary means by which each child arrives and departs daily. A note is to be sent when a change is necessary. For reasons of safety and insurance, each child is to ride his/her assigned bus.

### **Bus**

Students who live more than a 1.5 mile radius from Divine Mercy Academy are eligible to be bused to the school. Those who live along a route that has been declared "hazardous" are also eligible for busing. The Board of Education Transportation Division determines "hazardous route" claims. The student transportation policies and procedures of the local educational agencies responsible for busing students are applicable to all students in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Students are expected to maintain appropriate behavior while in route on the bus. Every bus follows the guidelines that are within our own discipline code. If the bus driver/company recommends that a student be removed from the bus, the principal will support it. This will result in the student losing bus privileges. The student/parent will then be responsible to make other arrangements for transportation.

Students are expected to remain in their seats at all times. This insures their safety and the safety of others. If improper conduct occurs, the driver prepares a report which is sent home to alert the parents to the problem. If the behavior persists, the bus company has the right to ask the school district to suspend the student's privilege of riding the bus, temporarily or permanently.

The following bus rules are to be obeyed:

1. Remain seated at all times until the correct stop has been reached. If the driver has assigned seats, these seat assignments are to be honored
2. Keep head, hands and feet inside the bus.
3. In vehicles where seat belts are available, use them properly.
4. Do not ask to ride a bus other than the one to which you have been assigned or ask the driver to let you off at another stop. Only the Department of Transportation can authorize such changes.
5. Observe the same conduct as in the classroom. Quiet talking is permitted. Loud talking, etc. may distract the driver, prevent students from hearing instructions, or prevent the driver from hearing signals from emergency vehicles.
6. Be courteous; use no profane language.
7. Do not eat, drink, or chew gum on the bus.
8. Keep the bus clean
9. Cooperate with the driver.
10. Do not put anything out the window of the bus.
11. Do not be destructive
12. The driver is in charge. Any directives of the bus driver are to be followed.

## **Car/Walkers**

At dismissal, students walking or riding in cars are dismissed shortly after the bus riders. These students will be escorted by a teacher to the parking lot across from the park to meet their rides.

## **TUITION**

Parents who register a student in the school enter into a contractual obligation with the school. The tuition rate for Catholics for the 2009-2010 school year is \$2,900 for the first child, \$1,900 for the second child and \$1,250 for each additional child enrolled in the school. Non-affiliated tuition is \$3,700 for the first child and \$2,550 for the second. Preschool is \$75 per month for the four year old program and \$65 per month for the three year old program. In order to qualify for parish school subsidy, you must be a registered member of Divine Mercy Parish at least six (6) months prior to starting at Divine Mercy Academy. Full tuition would be your responsibility for the first year if you do not meet this criteria. The tuition scale listed is subject to yearly change depending upon current cost per pupil and the Diocesan Policy for Funding Catholic Schools.

Payment is due in full by the first day of the school year. However, the school has implemented the F.A.C.T.S. Tuition Management Plan to assist families desiring to make monthly payments on tuition. Contact the school office for enrollment information. Parents whose tuition is in arrears will receive a notice indicating the past due amount.

Registration for the next school year, final grades, and transfers of academic records will not be processed if there is an outstanding balance on tuition or if money is owed to the school from fundraising programs.

## **Scholarship Monies**

Scholarship monies are available for eligible families. The Private School Aid Service (PSAS) application is used. These applications are assessed by an independent evaluator. This one application is used for Scholastic Opportunities Scholarships, Bishop's Education Fund and Divine Mercy Academy's Angel Fund and must be filed by March 15<sup>th</sup>. Application forms are available in the school's office.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

The help of volunteers is always in the school and at school-sponsored events. Please consider using some of your time and talent to help enhance our quality program. The possibilities are endless. At Divine Mercy Academy, parents play an integral role in the education of their children through the Parent Teacher Guild, Parent Advisory Council, athletics, fund-raising activities, homeroom parents, playground/lunchroom monitors and field trip chaperones. This partnership is invaluable to the success of our school.

### **III CURRICULUM**

Divine Mercy Academy offers a strong traditional curriculum. In the "Continuous Growth Program" of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, students advance through a defined curriculum according to their individual needs and abilities. In addition to meeting all the requirements of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the curriculum gives special attention to the integration of Gospel values.

Curriculum Guidelines for all subject areas are utilized by the Catholic elementary schools and provided through the Department for Catholic Schools. The guidelines endeavor to give continuity to the teaching/learning process, and are geared to meet the individual needs of students and to guide the teaching/learning process.

All textbooks have been selected from the list of recommended texts devised by the Curriculum Directors of the diocese. They are approved because the philosophy is consistent with the Catholic philosophy of education, the subject matter is adaptable to the Continuous Growth Program and because there is sequential, consistent development of material.

#### **Catechetics**

A formal catechetical program is taught daily. The Diocesan Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines, "Growing in God's Covenant" contains a balance of doctrinal content, scriptural understanding, faith formation, and prayer and worship experiences. A variety of materials and resources are used to foster both spiritual growth and moral development.

#### **Computer**

The computer curriculum in the primary grades develops familiarity with functional uses of the computer through the use of programmed software. In the upper grades, skills such as word processing, database, composition and entry, and the use of spreadsheets are emphasized.

#### **Fine Arts**

Instruction in the Fine Arts contributes to the development of the whole person; promotes individual expression; allows experimentation with diverse materials and elements; enables exploration and appreciation of the works of other students and major artists; develops an awareness and sensitivity toward the environment and finally promotes a deeper understanding of heritage and culture.

The Fine Arts curriculum provides a holistic approach to education, which incorporates many aspects of the core curriculum and can be integrated into the total educational experience.

## **Health and Physical Education**

Health education, which leads to the total well being of each student, is the goal of the Diocesan "Health for Success" program. The program is a complete, comprehensive approach to developing our students physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. A health text along with current periodicals such as "Current Health" are used. Guest speakers are invited to speak to the students about various health related topics.

A quality Physical Education program recognizes the value of teaching students to stay physically active and develop skills needed for present and future leisure. To achieve this goal, Divine Mercy Academy incorporates the Department for Catholic Schools Curriculum, "Fit for Life" into the program. This program assists students in identifying their strengths, to build on their strengths, and to achieve personal goals.

The health and physical education curriculums strive to establish health, active students so that each child can develop to his or her full potential. Students learn to respect the rights of others and to follow rules through games and to be physically active. Learning to constructively channel energies helps the student to develop a good self-image. The skills, habits and attitudes developed within the program provide opportunities for greater success in the students' lives.

## **Language Arts**

The Elementary Language Arts Curriculum for the Diocese of Pittsburgh has been developed to enable each student to be introduced to language as a viable form of communication, as an invaluable skill, and an art to be enjoyed. English classes center on improving writing, grammar and speaking, as well as expanding vocabulary and improving spelling.

Language, as a skill, provides the student with the important tools to speak fluently, to read and comprehend, to compose, to write legibly and to spell correctly. An awareness of the history of language and the continuous development of vocabulary also are important phases of skill development.

Students in grades K-6 center on an integrated approach to Language Arts developing the necessary skills essential for success including phonetic skills of the student. Students in grades 7-8 learn an appreciation of literature with skillful authors who vicariously open new worlds of adventure of far off places, times long past, and modern trends of good reading. Having developed a love for good literature, this aesthetic element overflows into the student's personal, oral and written expression.

## **Library**

The school library exists primarily to support and enrich the curriculum. It is a service and teaching agency as well as a place of purposeful learning.

## **Mathematics**

The mathematics curriculum is designed to help students meet the mathematical needs of the present and future, to provide practice in logical reasoning, and to develop the ability to find patterns and recognize structure in mathematics. Basic facts are taught in the lower grades and must be memorized. Concepts are taught sequentially. In primary grades, students are introduced to many ideas that are foundational to an understanding of algebra. Algebraic topics are taught in the older grades and a full year of algebra is offered in the eighth grade to students recommended for the program. Teachers promote problem solving skills and an exploratory inquisitiveness in all students to assure critical thinking skills. Cooperative learning in the classroom is essential to heighten student awareness in the value of cooperation in group situations, to strengthen communication skills in mathematics, and to promote a mathematically literate society.

## **Science**

The science curriculum is specifically designed to develop a student's understanding of science in human experience and the individual's role in the community and in society. Examples of scientific phenomena are explained and demonstrated. Students become scientists as they learn to understand and use the scientific method to organize ways to solve problems, and to seek the answers to the wonders of God's world. Sixth, seventh and eighth grade students study the basics of chemistry, biology and physical science with hands on participation.

## **Social Studies**

The Social Studies curriculum begins with an introduction to community helpers. It progresses to the study of family and friends, and later encompasses a more in-depth study of the community. Beginning in fourth grade, the curriculum focuses on the study of the United States land regions and Pennsylvania history. At the fifth grade level, United States history through the Civil War and a study of the United States geographical regions is covered. Sixth grade students study World Cultures and World Geography with an emphasis on the countries of the Eastern Hemisphere. Seventh grade studies United States history to the Reconstruction and eighth grade studies United States history beginning with the Reconstruction to the modern day. Map and geography skills are taught at all levels. Values such as social justice, peace, cooperation between states and governments' opposition to the "isms" such as racism, sexism, and materialism are integrated in the Social Studies program.

## **Steelpan Project**

Due to a partnership with Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center, students in grades 5 through 8 have an opportunity to participate in a Steelpan and Percussion Ensemble.

## **World Language**

Language students learn the sounds and syntax of the language. Students are also introduced to culture. A variety of materials and methods are used for instruction.

Students in grades K through 8 receive instruction in the Spanish language. Students are working toward proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing of the Spanish language. Most students qualify for year two of Spanish in high school.

## **AUXILIARY SERVICES**

The following services are offered through the Intermediate Unit and/or the local school district.

### **Remedial Reading and Math (Title I)**

The Title I program is designed to provide additional assistance to students who are not demonstrating grade level proficiency in reading and/or math. Funding for these services comes through the local public school district. Referrals for the program are based on teacher referrals, standardized test results, and parent approval. Alternate strategies are planned for students in accordance with individual instructional goals and in support of the classroom curriculum to help students develop mastery of basic skills.

### **Act 89 Services**

Intermediate Unit personnel work with and provide support to students in remedial math and reading. These teachers, in collaboration with the classroom teacher, identify educational needs and design educational interventions and strategies to help a child succeed.

### **Speech/Language**

Speech and language services are also provided through Act 89 funding. This is a special service offered to students to enhance communication skills which directly impact social and academic interactions.

### **Psychological Testing**

A certified psychologist is assigned to our school. Psychological testing is available by parent request or at the recommendation of the teacher in consultation with the principal. Parents make the final decision. Results are formally reported to parents, principal and teachers along with a list of recommendations made by the psychologist. **THIS INFORMATION IS KEPT CONFIDENTIAL** and not shared with anyone without parent permission.

### **Counseling**

A certified counselor provides individual and small group counseling sessions to children in grades K-8. Children are referred by parents, principal, teacher and through self-referral. Individual counseling requires parent permission.

### **Student Assistance Program**

The Student Assistance Program (E-SAP) is mandated in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by Act 211 of 1990. It is a comprehensive program of prevention, intervention, and support for students in grades K-12. The members of the Team are the principal and faculty members of the school who have received special training through Approved Agencies.

The program exists in order to promote the growth and development of the child. The team members work with students who are experiencing behavior difficulties which impact their social, emotional, and educational progress.

Referrals for the program are made by faculty and/or parents. Once a referral has been received by the Team, classroom teachers are asked to complete a form which helps identify the behaviors. The Team then makes informed assumptions as to what is needed to help the student, conveys this information to classroom teachers, parents/guardians and evaluates the results. If necessary, after consultation with parents, appropriate referrals are made to outside agencies.

Team members must maintain all information regarding students and their families under **safeguard of privacy and confidentiality**. Access is limited to those who have a legitimate educational interest.

## IV COMMUNICATIONS

A communication folder will be sent home every Thursday with messages and information from the school. The parent should sign and return the folder with their child preferably by the next day. In addition to the Thursday folder, each teacher will have a communication portal for parents that can be accessed through the Divine Mercy website. This portal includes announcements and homework posts. The monthly newsletter will be sent home the last Thursday of each month with the youngest child in every family. Please call the school if you do not receive the newsletter by the first of the month. Any information or fliers, etc. that a parent may want to distribute must be approved by the principal. The newsletter is also posted on our website, [www.dmacademy.com](http://www.dmacademy.com).

The "School News" section of Divine Mercy Parish's Sunday bulletin also contains information for parents and includes special times for children's Masses. Parents and friends are welcome to join in these liturgical celebrations.

Any questions concerning your child should be directed to the teacher. Please call the school office and the teacher will be notified to contact you. Positive communication between teacher and parent is vital to our total educational program. Parents are asked not to call teachers at their homes. Any concerns may also be referred to the principal.

Parents are informed of the student's progress and other school information as follows:

- ✓ Interim Reports
- ✓ Quarterly report cards
- ✓ Parent/student/teacher conferences
- ✓ Conferences on request
- ✓ Conduct referrals
- ✓ School Newsletter
- ✓ Parent Teacher Guild meetings

In addition to the quarterly report cards, parents can access on-going grades by accessing the electronic gradebook. Parents will need access to a computer and a web browser. "Parents no longer have to wait for mid term progress reports or report cards to find out about missed assignments or failing grades. They can see exactly what scores their children have received so far – and what's coming in the future. Studies show that this type of participation (and intervention) can positively impact math and reading scores." (RVS Gradebook site) Parents will be given a secure login and password in the beginning of the school year.

## V DISCIPLINE

### **Introduction**

Divine Mercy Academy's administration and faculty are committed to teach and model Gospel values to encourage students to live their lives as a reflection of Christ. The philosophy of the school strives to recognize and respect the dignity of each person and to offer a positive, Christ-centered, safe learning environment based on the Social Teachings of the Church. Discipline is considered an element of moral guidance not as a form of punishment.

Every teacher and staff member shares the responsibility to model appropriate behavior and to support the structure necessary for learning self-discipline. Students are encouraged to assume responsibility for their actions, develop self control, and accept responsibility and consequences for inappropriate behavior.

A Christ-centered school environment fosters the following behaviors:

1. Recognizing and fostering the uniqueness and dignity of each individual
2. Nurturing respect in all relationships involving school and parish community
3. Developing a sense of rights and responsibilities and commitment to the entire school and parish community.

Social skills, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, are taught, modeled, practiced, and infused into the daily life and experience of the school family.

### **Guiding Principles**

The following seven principles are the basis of Catholic Social Teachings and are the principles that guide us in all of our interactions.

- We believe in the life and dignity of the human person. Each person is sacred.
- We believe we are called to family, community, and participation. It is our duty to support each other by our actions.
- We believe that we have rights and responsibilities. Every person has the fundamental right to life and responsibility to and for one another.
- We believe that we have an obligation to the poor and vulnerable. We are called to put the rights of others before our own.
- We believe that we are called to care for God's creation. We are all stewards of the earth..
- We believe that solidarity is our call. We are one family regardless of our differences.
- We believe that workers have rights and that work has dignity. Work is a form of participating in God's creation.

## **Expectations**

Christian action and speech are required at all times. As a matter of safety, students are expected to behave in the following manner:

### Before school

1. to arrive after 7:30
2. to gather in the designated area (cafeteria)
3. to engage in quiet conversation

### In school

1. to walk quietly through the halls
2. to use proper language at all times
3. to follow the dress code for school days and dress up/down days
4. to respect school property and the property of other students
5. to have a note from their parent/guardian if they change their mode of school transportation

### In the classroom

1. to follow the classroom rules of each teacher
2. to be responsible for submitting homework on time and making up assignments missed within a reasonable amount of time
3. to have a respectful attitude toward teachers and one another
4. to be responsible for appropriate supplies
5. to be honest in all communications
6. to use computers and school equipment appropriately
7. not to chew gum
8. not to remain in or enter a classroom at any time without a teacher or designated adult present
9. not to have food or drink in the classroom (this includes water bottles)

### During recess

1. not to re-enter the building unless for an emergency
2. to display good sportsmanship and exercise self control
3. to play in assigned areas only
4. to stay on school grounds at all times (This includes not retrieving a ball that has gone off school grounds.) To obey the directives of playground monitors, courteously and promptly.

### During lunch

1. to remain seated until finished eating and the "recess" bell rings
2. to clean up, pick up all papers, scraps of food, etc., and dispose of them properly
3. to obey supervisors at all times

#### After school

1. to follow dismissal procedures
2. to walk to assigned place to wait until bus or car ride arrives
3. not to run or play games on the school grounds
4. to leave the school grounds immediately
5. to sign in at the extended care program if not picked up

#### At athletic events and assemblies

1. to practice good sportsmanship as spectators and participants
2. to show respect towards coaches, referees, and visiting teams
3. to maintain an appropriate silence during special performances

#### Outside school

1. to behave responsibly off school property  
(If the principal is made aware of misconduct off school property of a child recognized to be a student in Divine Mercy Academy, parents may be contacted; however, it is important to note that the school is not responsible for students actions that occur off school property.)
2. Principals will forward disciplinary notices given by public school bus drivers to parents to support the disciplinary report of the bus driver. (See page 10 for Bus Expectations.)

### **Consequences**

Please be aware that any disrespect, destructive act, or inappropriate behavior will be dealt with accordingly. If an individual student does not meet his/her personal responsibility for good conduct, the school may discipline the student.

The severity or repetitive nature of non-compliance to the above expectations will determine the appropriate consequences. To remediate unacceptable behavior, the following actions may be taken:

1. Teacher/student conference to develop a plan for remediation
2. Notification to parents
3. Administrative referral
4. Referral to the E-SAP Team
5. School service required
6. Loss of recess
7. Detention
8. Denial of participation in school activities, including sports
9. School probation
10. Suspension.

The following behaviors will result in immediate administrative referrals and can result in referrals to law enforcement or other government agencies:

- Violations of weapons policy
- Violations of the drug/alcohol policy
- Any purposeful action that results in bodily harm to another

**Weapons Policy (Diocesan Policy #630)**

Any person carrying a weapon onto school property, including, but not limited to, a school building, outdoor areas, outdoor facilities, vehicles used to transport students, or school related activities poses a clear and present danger to other students and staff. For the purpose of this policy, a weapon is defined as a gun, knife, or any other article which could be used to cause injury.

If a student is found to be in possession of a weapon, his/her parents will be immediately notified. The matter will be referred to local police authorities if in the sole discretion of the school administration such a referral is appropriate. After a review of the facts concerning the particular incident, the administration of the school will decide upon the appropriate disciplinary measures to be taken. The disciplinary action may result in expulsion.

## **Guideline for "Internet Use Policy" Implementation and Practice Divine Mercy Academy**

This guideline is established to ensure understanding and application of Divine Mercy Academy Internet Use Policy. Divine Mercy Academy reserves the right to amend these guidelines at any time. It is understood that the administration of Divine Mercy Academy will inform parents/guardians of any changes made in these Guidelines via the school's monthly newsletter. **Students' parents and/or guardians are required to review these guidelines with their child(ren) and complete and return the attached parent/guardian consent form.**

This guideline includes, but is not limited to, the following areas:

1. Information and news from a wide variety of sources and research institutions
2. Public domain and shareware software of all types
3. Discussion groups
4. Access to any educational institutions and libraries.

### **Etiquette**

1. Be polite when sending written messages to others
2. Appropriate language is expected in all messages
3. Anything pertaining to illegal activity is expressly forbidden
4. Do not reveal access information, personal or otherwise
5. Do not disrupt others' use of the internet access
6. All users should remember that deleted materials can be retrieved.

The following actions, which are not inclusive, are considered unacceptable actions by the administration of Divine Mercy Academy:

1. Placing unlawful information on the Internet
2. Using the Internet for non-school related activities
3. Sending messages that are likely to result in loss of the recipients work or systems
4. Using the Internet for commercial purposes
5. Using the Internet for political lobbying that does not support the expressed philosophy and tenets of the Catholic Church
6. Sending or receiving copyrighted material without permission.
7. Plagiarism
8. Using Internet access to send or retrieve pornographic material, inappropriate file text, files dangerous to the integrity of the system, violent or threatening material or messages
9. Circumventing security measures on school or remote computers or networks
10. Vandalism
11. Falsifying one's identity.

**Individual Student Internet Use Contract  
(Sample – Do Not Return)**

Parents/Guardians:

Be advised that your child(ren) will not be permitted to access Divine Mercy Academy's Internet access until this agreement is signed, dated, and returned.

**Student(s) Agreement:**

I have read the Divine Mercy Academy Policy on Internet Access and the guidelines established from that policy. I understand fully and agree to abide by the policy statement and the guideline statements expressed or implied.

Each child in the household who attends Divine Mercy Academy, grades 2-8, must sign this agreement.

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

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

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

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

**Parent/Guardian Agreement:**

I have read the Divine Mercy Academy Internet Access Policy and the guidelines established from that policy. I understand fully the information that is contained therein. I agree to not hold school administration and faculty responsible for materials my child(ren) acquires as a result of inappropriate Internet use.

I accept full financial responsibility if and when my child(ren) access the Internet without an account on equipment provided on the school site.

**Parent/Guardian Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Return this document to Divine Mercy Academy via your oldest child's homeroom teacher.

## **VI HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **Illness**

It is often difficult to decide if your child should stay home from school when complaining of illness. An objective sign is an elevated temperature.. It is recommended that a child be kept home from school until the temperature has remained normal (below 100°) for 24 hours.

If a child has a temperature of 100° or more, skin rash, diarrhea/vomiting, strep throat, or evidence of lice, the child will be sent home. Parents are asked to use discretion in sending their children to school if they display any of these symptoms. Please inform the school office if your child becomes sick with a contagious illness.

### **Accident and Injury**

In the case of accident or illness at school, parents are contacted to take the child home, to the doctor, or hospital. It is important for your child's safety and comfort, as well as the effective operation of the office, that emergency information needed to locate parents is available for each child and that this information is kept up-to-date by parents.

Parents of children who have any type of physical disorder should contact the principal, school nurse, or teachers to make them aware of the problem. All cases of head lice should be reported immediately.

### **Medication**

Whenever possible, medicine is to be given at home, and parents are to request the physician to adjust the schedule for administration so that it can be given before and after school hours.

If medicine must be administered at school, the following guidelines apply:

1. The medication must be delivered to the school by a responsible adult along with a physician's written request for distribution by school personnel.
2. Medication brought to school must be in a container labeled by a pharmacist or doctor. The label must include the student's name, the name of the physician, date of prescription, dosage, and frequency of administration.
3. Parents must sign an Indemnity Agreement which has been prepared by the Legal Office and distributed through the school office.

### **Security**

All doors to the school will be closed and locked during school hours. Parents and visitors should use the buzzer on the main school door to gain entrance to the building.

## **Fire Drills**

Fire drills are held monthly. Exit directions, which are posted in prominent places in each room, are to be followed. No one--teacher, student or other personnel--may remain in the building during fire drills. When the students hear the bell, they are to leave the room quickly and quietly in single file. Students remain outside until summoned back to class.

Students are to remain in absolute silence during all fire drills. Misconduct of any nature is to be reported to the principal. This is a very serious offense and will be dealt with immediately.

## **Weather Emergency Drills**

Weather emergency drills are practiced twice a year. Teachers follow the policy governing weather emergencies for student safety. Students must maintain silence at all times during a weather emergency drill. Staff assists handicapped students.

## **School Nurse/Nurse Practitioner**

One school nurse from Beaver Falls School District is assigned to Divine Mercy Academy and is present in the building two mornings per month. She is available in any emergency situations. The responsibilities of the school nurse include:

- Keeping updated health records for all students.
- Screening students for hearing—grades K, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Assuring the completion of a physical examination before entrance to school and in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Screening students for vision—yearly.
- Scoliosis screening—grade 7.
- Recording height and weight for students—yearly.
- Recording required immunizations. (Seventh grade: Hepatitis B and 1 dose chicken pox vaccine.)

## **Dentist/Dental Hygienist**

The Dentist/Dental Hygienist makes routine visits to our school and is responsible for maintaining all dental records. The Pennsylvania School Health Law requires dental examinations for students entering grades K, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. These grades were selected because they represent critical periods of growth and development in a child's life.

We recommend that your family dentist do these examinations. School dental health evaluations will be provided for students who do not furnish proof of a private dental examination within the last six months. These forms are given out to the students before school ends so that appointments can be scheduled over the summer.

## **Visitors**

For security reasons, anyone entering Divine Mercy Academy is to report to the office immediately regardless of the purpose of the visit. Communication with teachers and students will be handled by the school office and will be done in a manner that does not disrupt the educational process in the school.

Any articles or items to be left for a student will be left in the school office. This will eliminate any unnecessary interruptions to classes and instruction.

Divine Mercy Academy

609 Tenth Street

Beaver Falls, PA 15010

It is important that parents/guardians, students and staff know the policies and procedures of Divine Mercy Academy. To ensure that the process of communication is complete, please review the revised Parent/Student Handbook with your children.

When you have reviewed the contents, please sign and return this form to the school office via your child's homeroom teacher.

**Family Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Children's Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**I have reviewed and understand the contents of the Parent/Student Handbook of**  
\_\_\_\_\_ **School.**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Furthermore, please sign and return the Divine Mercy Academy Internet Use Policy. This signed document will permit your child access to the computer lab Internet system.

Thank you.