



**Parent/Student Handbook
2020-2021**

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Tall Pines STEM Academy is to provide an option for families where STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) is intertwined in the school's culture and prepares middle school students to become the next generation of ethical leaders. Tall Pines STEM Academy will provide a combination of classroom and outdoor learning experiences to engage students, promote wellness and physical fitness, inspire creativity, foster critical thinking and problem solving skills, and cultivate citizenship and leadership skills through rigorous and relevant content and projects in a natural setting.

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

Tall Pines Academy 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 non-discrimination policies: Tall Pines STEM Academy Special Programs Coordinator, 82 Camp Long Rd, Aiken, SC 29805.

PARENT RIGHT TO KNOW

In compliance with the requirements of the Every Students Succeeds Act, the Tall Pines STEM Academy would like to inform you that you may request information about the professional qualifications of your student's teacher(s) and/ or paraprofessional(s). The following information may be requested:

- Whether the student's teacher—
 - has met State qualification and licensing criteria for the grade levels and subject areas in which the teacher provides instruction;
 - is teaching under emergency or other provisional status through which State qualification or licensing criteria have been waived; and
 - is teaching in the field of discipline of the certification of the teacher.
- Whether the child is provided services by paraprofessionals and, if so, their qualifications.

If you wish to request information concerning your child's teacher and/or paraprofessional's qualifications, please contact Brad Siedschlag at (803) 502-1692.

STUDENT RECORDS

TPSA will treat each student's educational records as confidential. Parents have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Parents have the right to request that a school correct records that they believe to be inaccurate or misleading.

Schools must have written permission from the parent in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions:

School officials with legitimate educational interest; other schools to which a student is transferring; specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes; appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student; organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school; accrediting organizations; to comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena; appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and state and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

ATTENDANCE

Tall Pines STEM Academy's Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend school each day in accordance with the approved school calendar. Any student who misses school must present a written excuse, signed by a parent/guardian, or the medical professional who treated the child and the absence will be considered **LAWFUL**. The maximum number of days that will be recorded as **LAWFUL** absences with parent notes will be **TEN** per school year. If a written excuse is not turned in within **FIVE** days after the child is back in school or is without acceptable cause, the absence will be considered unexcused and **UNLAWFUL**.

<p>Children will be considered lawfully absent when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· They are ill and their attendance in school would endanger their health or the health of others and can provide a written excuse from a medical professional.· There is a death or serious illness in their immediate family – with proper documentation (i.e. bulletin, death notice, obituary, etc.)· There is a recognized religious holiday of their faith and it has been pre-approved by the school principal.· They are participating in sanctioned school activities.· The student is suspended from school.· There is a necessary medical or legal appointment that cannot be scheduled during non-school hours.· They are absent due to activities that are approved in advance by the principal.	<p>Children will be considered unlawfully absent when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· They have exceeded the TEN days that may be excused with a parent note.· A student is absent without acceptable cause with or without knowledge of his/her parents.· They are out of town on trips or vacations.
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Parents will be notified daily when their child is absent from school via the school messenger system (email). Attendance letters will be mailed home when children have accrued **FIVE**, **SEVEN** and **TEN UNLAWFUL ABSENCES**.

TRUANCY: After **THREE CONSECUTIVE** or **FIVE** total **UNLAWFUL ABSENCES** have been accrued; South Carolina State Law R 43-274 identifies a child (between the ages of 6 and 17) as **TRUANT**. It also requires that school officials enter a discipline/incident report in the student's permanent record and report the truancy status to the State of SC. Parents will receive a letter when their child has been identified as truant and an attendance conference will be scheduled with a school administrator. The purpose of this conference is to identify the reasons for the child's absences and complete a Student Attendance Intervention Plan (SAIP) to develop actions to ensure regular student

attendance. In the event of continued unlawful absences after the SAIP has been documented, the child/family may be referred to Aiken County Family Court and/or the Department of Social Services.

If you have any questions regarding the Tall Pines STEM Academy's attendance policy, please call the school office at (803) 502-1692.

TARDY POLICY

School begins at 8:00 am, at which time all students should be in their classrooms ready to begin the day. Announcements and pledges begin at 7:50. Students arriving after 8:00 am must be accompanied to the office by a parent or guardian. Records of these occurrences will be kept and tallied. Frequent tardies constituting absences from the same class/subject may jeopardize promotion to the next grade.

APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

TPSA expects all students to behave appropriately in school, to be responsible and to be accountable for their actions. We expect students to act with respect toward each other and toward all faculty and staff, visitors and guests. Teachers set forth expectations and classroom rules to their students at the beginning of the year, and these are emphasized throughout the school year. TPSA also expects all students to behave appropriately on field excursions off campus.

Behavior that disrupts the learning of others will not be tolerated at TPSA. Repeated disruptions will be cause for suspension and/or dismissal. TPSA follows a three-strike plan. If a student is referred to the office for a discipline issue the administrator has the right to issue a strike. 3 strikes = possible expulsion. Strikes do not carry over. In the Fall, all students start with a clean slate.

Students eligible for protections under IDEA and Section 504 are subject to the same disciplinary procedures as their non-disabled peers in accordance with the regulations specified by IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

(See PACKS behavior plan at the end of this handbook.)

FIELD TRIP POLICY

At Tall Pines STEM Academy, our students will have the opportunity to take several excursions during the school year. At all times during these excursions, students are expected to have excellent behavior. If a student has had serious disciplinary infractions during the school year prior to one of these trips, the school administration will determine if a student is disqualified from participating based on the student's record of behavior. If a student has incurred school fees, lunch fees, or after school fees in excess of \$100 then that student/family must meet with administration to discuss payment plan before being permitted to attend a field trip.

BULLYING/INTIMIDATION POLICY

TPSA is a bully-free school and exercises a ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY regarding any form of bullying and/or intimidation. Bullying may be defined as any gesture, electronic communication, written, verbal or physical act that takes place on school property or at any school-sponsored function that:

1. will have the effect of harming a student (physically or emotionally) or damaging the student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm or damage to property; or

2. has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students in such a way as to cause substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the school.

If a student receives a referral for bullying, s/he will automatically receive 1 strike. 3 strikes = possible expulsion.

WEAPONS OF ANY KIND (including replicas) are not to be brought to school. Violation of this ordinance may result in suspension or expulsion.

DRESS CODE POLICY

Students should come to school in clean clothes daily. Clothing should not be too low, high, tight, loose or transparent or have the potential to distract from learning. Students should dress for physical activity daily. An example of acceptable dress would be t-shirt, active pants (or shorts of reasonable length) and athletic shoes.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

Tall Pines STEM Academy does not tolerate sexual harassment of any kind. Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted sexual or gender-based behavior that occurs when one person has informal power over the other. This behavior may be verbal, non-verbal or physical. Mr. Siedschlag serves as the Title IX coordinator in cases of sexual harassment. Any concern by parents, students, and/or staff should be directed to Mr. Siedschlag. Any complaints that are directly related to the Title IX coordinator will be made to Lori Mastromonico. Investigation of all complaints will be handled promptly and equitably.

Examples of Sexual Harassment include:

- Behavior that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a student's school performance or that creates an intimidating, hostile or abusive school environment;
- Sexual innuendos, gestures and/or comments;
- Humor or jokes about sex or females/males in general;
- Displays of pictures, calendars, cartoons or other materials with sexually explicit or graphic content.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

Generally, TPSA will follow the same schedule as Aiken County School District. Anytime Aiken County Schools are closed, dismissing early or delaying opening, TPSA will do the same. We reserve the right to dismiss, close or delay beyond Aiken County's decision if we feel it is the best decision for the safety of our students. Tune in to any local TV or radio station for information regarding school closings or delays in case of inclement weather conditions. An e-mail, text message, and/or phone message will be sent if school is dismissed, delayed or cancelled.

EMERGENCY DRILLS

South Carolina State Law requires that we conduct fire drills and they are to be conducted without warning. The drills are very important to help teach students how to react in cases of emergency. Instructions are also given in preparation for tornadoes, earthquakes or severe weather warnings.

VISITORS

NOTICE: Visitors will be limited during the Covid-19 Pandemic!

All visitors and parents must obtain a visitor's pass from the office when visiting the school. Be prepared to show your driver's license or picture identification. Parents are asked to set up appointments to talk with teachers in advance. Teachers have responsibilities before school and are ready to begin the day at 7:45. We welcome notes in the morning, but visits should be scheduled in advance. If a parent has a problem that needs immediate attention, please see an administrator first.

TRANSPORTATION RESPONSIBILITY NOTICE

Parents are responsible for having their children to school every day and on time. TPSA does not provide transportation for students. Parents are also responsible for transporting students for participation in extracurricular activities at their locally zoned schools.

CAR UNLOADING/DROP OFF PROCEDURES

Students may arrive at school between 7:30 and 8:00 am each morning. Flags and pledges will begin at 7:50, and we encourage all students to try to take part in this. No one will be available for supervision before 7:30. Drop off is located at the loop, outside the gym area. Staff will be on duty to assist students. Never unload students in areas other than the approved drop off area.

CAR LOADING/PICK UP PROCEDURES

Dismissal begins at 3:00 pm. Any student(s) not enrolled in afterschool care should be picked up promptly. At 3:30, any student remaining at school will be checked in to afterschool care and charged accordingly.

SICK STUDENTS

If a student is sick, the call home must be through the office. Students should not use their cell phones to call home to be picked up!

Students should remain home or will be sent home from school if they have any of the following symptoms:

1. Fever, defined as temperature of 100 degrees or higher, with or without symptoms
2. Any communicable disease
3. Undiagnosed rash or skin eruptions
4. Vomiting/diarrhea
5. Untreated head lice or scabies
6. Students with diagnosis of strep throat must be on antibiotics for 24 hours and be fever-free before returning to school.
7. Please see Covid-19 Information for additional safeguards during the Pandemic on pages 9-12.

REGISTRATION/ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES

Open enrollment is held in January for students entering school in the Fall. Any student currently enrolled in TPSA does not need to apply again. Presently enrolled students will be required to submit a Letter of Intent. Failure to turn in a Letter of Intent will be interpreted as a withdrawal. Open enrollment will be used to enroll students in the upcoming fifth grade class. If more rising fifth graders apply than

we have spaces available, a lottery will be held to determine placement. The lottery will be duly publicized and held at an evening meeting open to the public. Available slots in existing student cohorts will be offered to those on the waiting list. New registrations for existing cohorts will be added to the end of the waiting list in the order they are received.

GRADING SCALE

Report cards and transcripts will show numerical grades. The grading scale will be as follows:

A	90-100	Excellent
B	80 - 89	Above Average
C	70 - 79	Average
D	60 - 69	Below Average
F	59 & below	Failing
I		Incomplete

Report cards are issued four times a year with interim reports being sent home in between.

INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

Each student is responsible for his/her actions and activities involving Tall Pines STEM Academy's computers, networks and Internet services, and for his/her computer files, passwords and accounts. These rules provide general guidance concerning the use of computers and examples of prohibited uses. The rules do not attempt to describe every possible prohibited activity by students. Students, parents and school staff who have questions about whether a particular activity is prohibited are encouraged to contact the principal.

A. Consequences for Violation of Computer Use Policy and Rules:

Student use of Tall Pines STEM Academy's computers, networks and Internet services is a privilege, not a right. Compliance with policies and rules concerning computer use is mandatory. Students who violate these policies and rules may have their computer privileges limited, suspended or revoked. Such violations may also result in disciplinary action, referral to law enforcement and/or legal action. The principal shall have the final authority to decide whether a student's privileges will be limited, suspended, or revoked based upon the circumstances of the particular case, the student's prior disciplinary record, and any other pertinent factors.

B. Acceptable Use:

The Tall Pines STEM Academy's computers, networks and Internet services are provided for educational purposes and research consistent with its educational mission, curriculum and instructional goals. All policies, school rules and expectations concerning student conduct and communications apply when students are using computers. Students are also expected to comply with all specific instructions from teachers and other school staff when using the school's computers.

C. Prohibited Uses:

Examples of unacceptable uses of Tall Pines STEM Academy's computers that are expressly prohibited include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Accessing Inappropriate Materials - Accessing, submitting, posting, publishing, forwarding, downloading, scanning or displaying defamatory, abusive, obscene, vulgar, sexually explicit, sexually

suggestive, threatening, discriminatory, harassing and/or illegal materials.

2. **Illegal Activities** - Using school computers, networks and Internet services for any illegal activity or in violation of any policy or school rules. Tall Pines STEM Academy assumes no responsibility for illegal activities of students while using school computers.
3. **Violating Copyrights** – Copying, downloading, or sharing any type of copyrighted materials (including music or films) without the owner’s permission. Tall Pines STEM Academy assumes no responsibility for copyright violations by students.
4. **Copying Software** - Downloading software without the express authorization of the principal. Unauthorized copying of software is illegal and may subject the copier to substantial civil and criminal penalties. The Tall Pines STEM Academy assumes no responsibility for illegal software copying by students.
5. **Plagiarism** - Representing as one’s own work any materials obtained on the Internet (such as term papers, articles, music, etc.). When Internet sources are used in student work, the author, publisher and web site must be identified.
6. **Non-School-Related Uses** - Using Tall Pines STEM Academy computers, networks and Internet services for non-school-related purposes not connected with the educational program or assignments.
7. **Misuse of Passwords/Unauthorized Access** - Sharing passwords, using other users’ passwords, and accessing or using other users’ accounts.
8. **Malicious Use/Vandalism** - Any malicious use, disruption or harm of/to Tall Pines STEM Academy’s computers, networks and Internet services, including but not limited to hacking activities and creation/uploading of computer viruses.

D. No Expectation of Privacy:

Tall Pines STEM Academy’s computers remain under the control, custody and supervision of TPSA at all times. Students have no expectation of privacy in their use of school computers, including e-mail, stored files and Internet access logs.

G. System Security:

The security of the Tall Pines STEM Academy’s computers, networks and Internet services is a high priority. Any student who identifies a security problem must notify his/her teacher immediately. The student shall not demonstrate the problem to others or access unauthorized material. Any user who attempts to breach system security, causes a breach of system security or fails to report a system security problem shall be subject to disciplinary and/or legal action in addition to having his/her computer privileges limited, suspended or revoked.

Tall Pines STEM Academy’s Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy cannot be amended or modified other than by written approval of the Director of Information Technology.

CELL PHONE POLICY

Students may possess cell phones while at school; however, personal use of cell phones is strictly forbidden. Failure to follow this policy will result in the prompt seizure of cell phone by the teacher. Cell phones should be turned off from 8:00 – 3:15. At 3:15 phones can be used to communicate about

transportation, but only for this purpose. First offense of this policy will result in teacher taking cell phone until the end of the day. Second offense will result in taking the phone for three days and detention . Third offense will result in the loss of privilege to have a phone on campus and a possible strike.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

As part of TPSA’s charter application, parents are required to invest in their students’ educational experience. During the 2013-14 school year, a points system was tested at our sister school, requiring each family to earn 500 volunteer points during the school year. The vast majority of parents earned far beyond 500 points, and only 10 families fell short. Families earned an average of 563 points each, with many families earning over 1000 points. We will incorporate the point system this year, with a few changes. All points will be determined by the school. The PTO will provide opportunities for earning points, but will not be responsible for setting point values or keeping records – they have plenty to do!
☺ It is the responsibility of each parent to be sure participation in activities earning points are turned in for recording to the front office.

Before volunteering at the school a background check has to be successfully completed through Clemson University, and volunteers must attend a volunteer training.

PTA MEETINGS

Parents will have the opportunity to join the PTA for Tall Pines STEM Academy for \$10 annual membership. Meetings are held monthly at the discretion of the PTA Officers. The TPSA PTA has been crucial to the success of the school, raising many dollars which have gone directly back to students to help with field trip expenses.

BOARD ELECTIONS

Information will come to all families this fall regarding the election of Tall Pines STEM Academy Board members. Ballots will be sent to all families in October.

CALENDAR OF BOARD MEETINGS

The present TPSA Board meets each third Tuesday of the month at 4:30pm, at Tall Pines STEM Academy. These meetings are always open to the public.

Present Board Members:

Board Member	Email
Jobina Wiemer, Chair	jwiemer@tallpinesacademy.com
Mandy Sims, Vice-Chair	msims@tallpinesacademy.com

Tim Meesseman, Secretary	tmeesseman@tallpinesacademy.com
Maureen Carrigan, Treasurer	mcarrigan@tallpinesacademy.com
Bridget Coleman	bcoleman@tallpinesacademy.com
Tara Heuberger	theuberger@tallpinesacademy.com
Michelle Lorio	mlorio@tallpinesacademy.com
Russell Stillinger	rstillinger@tallpinesacademy.com

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

The TPSA Afterschool Program will operate daily from 3:00 pm until 6:00 pm. Students will sign in, then sign out when picked up. Parents will be billed at the rate of \$5.00 per hour, capped at \$50 per week. Students not picked up at 6:00 will be charged at the rate of an additional \$5.00 for each 5 minutes past 6:00. Of course, we understand that emergencies happen, and those cases will be handled on an individual basis. Times between 3:00 and 6:00 will be rounded to the nearest half hour, with \$5.00 as the minimum daily charge. Parents will be billed monthly and should pay by the 10th day of the following month. Families with past due balances will be notified and may be denied access to the Afterschool Program. Students will be served a snack and have the opportunity to work on homework and/or read, as well as enjoy some physical activity time, at the discretion of the Afterschool Director. Tall Pines STEM Academy teachers may also use this time to work with students who are having difficulty and/or who need assistance with a particular project or concept.

TALL PINES STEM ACADEMY BEHAVIOR PLAN

A major part of the mission of Tall Pines STEM Academy is to prepare our students to become the next generation of ethical leaders. The choices that students make during adolescence impacts who they will become in the future. To become ethical leaders, students must be able to learn how to treat others while respecting their values, dignity, and rights.

Members of the Tall Pines STEM Academy educational community should use the school's PACKS Values to build a positive culture of growth at the school. These values include:

- ❖ Practice Patience
- ❖ Act Responsibly
- ❖ Convey Respect
- ❖ Know and Care for my Community
- ❖ Strive for Greatness

These values serve as an ideal for members of our educational community to strive towards. Everyone may not live up to these standards 100% of the time but, we should encourage one another in our pursuit of excellence in behavior. However, some breaches of these behavior standards should be considered egregious and warrant the imposition of disciplinary measures to correct unacceptable behavior. Examples of unacceptable behavior include behavior that is harassing or bullying.

Definition of bullying, harassment, and hazing stated in Law 59-63-120 Definition.

(1) "Harassment, intimidation, or bullying" means a gesture, an electronic communication, or a written, verbal, physical, or sexual act that is reasonably perceived to have the effect of: (a) harming a student physically or emotionally or damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of personal harm or property damage; or (b) insulting or demeaning a student or group of students causing substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the school.

The school's priority is to teach appropriate behaviors and to instill a sense of community between all students where everyone is ready to stand up for each other and seek assistance when they feel that another member of the educational community needs help. As an educational community, members of the Tall Pines STEM Academy will be held accountable when there is evidence of bullying or harassment toward another member of the Tall Pines STEM Academy educational community.

This plan is effective during the following times, at the following places, and/or during the following actions:

- on school grounds before, during, or after school hours
- on school grounds at any other time when the school is being used by a school group
- off the school grounds at a school activity, function, or, event
- if the student's conduct reaches into the school and is detrimental to the good order and best interest of the school (including social media and other digital platforms)
- en route to and from school
- at any time or any place where student conduct will have a direct effect on the school's ability to maintain an orderly and safe learning environment
- conduct or communication initiated and/or created off-campus including but not limited to the inappropriate use of the Internet or web-based resources if such conduct poses a threat or substantially interferes

with or disrupts the environment, work and/or discipline of the school, including discipline for student harassment and bullying.

Behavior that disrupts the learning of others will not be tolerated at TPSA. Repeated disruptions will be cause for suspension and/or dismissal. TPSA follows a three-strike plan. If a student is referred to the office for a discipline issue the administrator has the right to issue a strike. 3 strikes = possible expulsion. Strikes do not carry over. In the Fall, all students start with a clean slate.

In order to avoid any disciplinary measures, the school believes that the Tall Pines STEM Academy community should follow the values in our PACKS System (examples of appropriate behaviors).

❖ Practice Patience

1. Working well in a group
2. Waiting patiently for pick-up
3. Waiting patiently for help from a teacher

❖ Act Responsibly

1. Turning in assignments on time
2. Bringing materials to class regularly
3. Arriving at school on time
4. Ready to begin class on time
5. Contributing to extra-curricular projects

❖ Convey Respect

(yourself, others, property)

1. Practicing healthy habits (physical activity, healthy diet)
2. Standing up for a kid being bullied
3. Helping someone clean up their space
4. Reminding a peer who forgot materials
5. Complimenting a friend
6. Helping with classroom management
7. Cleaning up in classroom

8. Picking up trash
9. Straightening a room
10. Sweeping after lunch
11. Leaving your space better than you found it

❖ Know and Care for my Community

1. Leading pledges
2. Volunteering in community
3. Caring for flags
4. Participating in PACK council events
5. Representing TPSA with pride

❖ Strive for Greatness

1. Good grades
2. Entering competitions
3. Extra-curricular activities
4. Service to others