

Dear TCS Families,

One of the highlights of last year was the series of workshops with the Brazelton Touchpoints Center on enhancing conversations between parents and faculty/staff at Touchstone. We have seen many positive ripple effects from the listening fostered in that pilot project with the Center. Among those developments are changes in this 2010-2011 family handbook.

The TCS board of trustees turned to the Diversity at Touchstone (DAT) committee to listen to the voices of faculty, staff, parents, and trustees about the school's core value for diversity and how that might best be expressed in fresh language. **The results are on page 5. The faculty and I are developing a corresponding statement about our approach to learning differences—to be released separately, after the publishing of this handbook.**

During the 2009-2010 school year, the faculty, staff, and I realized that our handbook language did not address changing circumstances in three arenas: absences/tardiness, carpool pick-up, and winter gear. We listened to the voices of students and parents and held small-group discussions among faculty and staff in order to respond to those changing circumstances. Please see the following pages for new handbook language:

**page 25 on absences/tardiness**

**page 28 on carpool pick-up**

**page 29 on winter gear**

As you may remember, Massachusetts passed an Anti-bullying law in the spring of 2010. After listening to the debate around the issue and to the voice of Massachusetts lawmakers, **we have changed our technology policy on page 20. In a separate document, we will also be publishing a legally required anti-bullying plan later in the school year.**

At the end of the school year, we asked current TCS parents to complete a Survey Monkey poll about our EDP program. After listening to the results of that poll, **we are making a number of improvements in that program, to be released in a separate EDP handbook later this summer** (the EDP handbook is no longer a part of this handbook).

We look forward to another year of close listening, effective communicating, and creative problem solving as a community, beginning (and not ending) with this new handbook.

Warmly,  
*Don Grace*  
*Head of School*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOUCHSTONE'S PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	4
<i>Mission</i> .....	4
<i>Philosophy</i> .....	4
<i>Statement on Diversity</i> .....	5
SCHOOL ORGANIZATION..	6
THE SOCIAL COVENANT OF THE SCHOOL...	7
<i>Guiding Principles</i> .....	7
<i>School Rules</i> .....	8
<i>Process for Maintaining our Principles and Ideals</i> ..	8
PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT.....	10
<i>Touchstone Committees</i> .....	11
<i>Finances and Fundraising</i> .....	14
<i>Annual Fund</i> .....	14
<i>Capital Campaigns</i> .....	15
GENERAL INFORMATION..	15
<i>Calendar</i> .....	15
<i>Curriculum Days</i> .....	15
<i>Communication</i> .....	16
<i>School Cancellations &amp; Delayed Openings</i> .....	16
<i>Schedule</i> .....	17
<i>Lunches and Snacks</i> ..	18
<i>Guidelines for Shared Food</i> .....	18
<i>School Events</i> .....	19
<i>Toy Guidelines</i> .....	20
<i>Student Phone Use</i> .....	20
<i>Computer/Internet Acceptable Use by Students</i> .....	20
<i>School Directory</i> .....	23
<i>Homework</i> .....	24
<i>School Use for Events</i> .....	24
<i>Alcohol Policy at School Events</i> .....	24
<i>Holidays</i> .....	25
<i>Absenteeism and/or Extended Vacations</i> .....	25
<i>Permission for School Trips</i> .....	26
<i>Field Trip Drivers</i> .....	26
<i>Dropping Off and Picking Up Children</i> .....	27
<i>Clothing</i> .....	29
<i>Lost and Found</i> .....	30
<i>Gifts for Teachers</i> .....	30
<i>Birthday Parties</i> .....	30

EDUCATION PROGRAM .....	31
<i>Integrated Arts</i> .....	31
<i>Physical Education</i> .....	31
<i>Spanish</i> .....	31
<i>Library</i> .....	31
<i>Peer Mediation</i> .....	32
<i>Community Meetings</i> .. .....	33
<i>Assessment, Conferences and Reports</i> ... .....	33
<i>Parent—Teacher Conferences</i> .....	33
<i>Grouping Policies, Process and Arrangements</i> .....	38
<i>Students Requiring Extra Attention and Support</i> .....	41
HEALTH POLICY .....	43
<i>Medical Records</i> .....	43
<i>School Emergency Forms</i> .....	44
<i>Allergy and Asthma Action Plans</i> .....	44
<i>Screenings</i> ... .....	44
<i>Use of Medication in School</i> .....	45
<i>Illness or Injury During School Hours</i> .....	46
<i>Communicable Illness</i> .....	46
TUITION AND FINANCIAL AID....	47
“SPEAKING” TOUCHSTONE .....	48
QUESTIONS.....	48

## **TOUCHSTONE'S PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS**

### **Mission**

We envision a world of life-long learners, participating in communities in which each member cares for the social, emotional, physical and intellectual well being of all in the community. We envision communities working together to care for, appreciate, and protect the earth and universe we inhabit.

Touchstone's mission is to gather families that share this vision and to offer a child-centered educational program and environment that will nurture competent, thoughtful and enthusiastic life-long learners.

Touchstone believes that education must be transformative. The educational experience should reveal to all students their unique qualities and capabilities and their responsibility to put their uniqueness at the service of society and the earth.

### **Philosophy**

The heart of Touchstone is the education of the whole child. We believe that the social, emotional, intellectual, physical, ethical and creative aspects of children's development are inseparably entwined. We strive to achieve our mission in the following ways:

#### **An Integrated and Interactive Curriculum**

Touchstone encourages students to create meaning and actively engage in their learning. The skills and strategies of literacy, mathematics, social and physical sciences and the arts are taught in an integrated manner that enables students to engage more deeply in the content and processes of learning. Students interact with each other and their environment in both physical and abstract ways and are encouraged to take initiative and make choices in the active pursuit of knowledge.

#### **Child Centered Teaching Methodology**

Touchstone empowers teachers to develop meaningful curriculum and methods of assessment consistent with the school's commitment to excellence in developmental teaching practice.

**Educational Partnership**

Touchstone cherishes and seeks to build on the inherent motivation for learning that children bring from home to school. Teachers, parents, and staff share their respective knowledge of the child and view each other as partners in the child's educational development. In addition, the generous and active involvement of all community members in volunteer roles sustains and develops this educational community.

**Respect for Individuality**

We respect and value the individuality and uniqueness of each child, and instill respectfulness in each student. This focus on the uniqueness of each child is evident throughout the educational program, in relationships between families and staff, and in the organization of the school. Touchstone acknowledges, celebrates, and teaches to many different learning styles within the classroom.

**Diversity Philosophy**

Touchstone believes that it is essential for our students to be able to interact positively within a diverse range of people, both as individuals and as a group. We recognize that diversity encompasses a wide range of social, political, religious, familial, sexual, cultural, and ethnic/racial backgrounds. We celebrate and nurture the diversity within our community and in the world around us. We endeavor to respect each individual while also respecting the TCS community. We are committed to an education – and ultimately a world – free of all forms of prejudice. We all share responsibility for creating an environment in which everyone feels safe and included.

**Diversity in Practice**

We are a welcoming community consisting of students, teachers, staff, volunteers, and families. We practice mutual respect, fairness and equal access to all available resources.

We value the individuality and uniqueness of each child and strive to instill respectfulness in each student. This focus on the uniqueness of each child is evident throughout the educational

program, in relationships between families and staff, and in the organization of the school. Touchstone's distinctive learning environment allows us to acknowledge, embrace, and teach to many different learning styles within the classroom.

We are a school without any religious affiliation. We teach to a scientifically accepted view of the universe as supported by the National Academy of Sciences. We expect that all children will fully and respectfully participate when classroom activities lend themselves to discussion of various religious or cultural beliefs.

## **SCHOOL ORGANIZATION**

All parents of children in the school and all staff are members of the Touchstone Community School Corporation. Members of the Corporation can elect at least 15 and not more than 21 individuals as members of the school's Board of Trustees. A majority of the Board's members must be parents or legal guardians of children presently enrolled as students of the school at the time of their election. New Board members are elected at the Annual Meeting of the Corporation on the second Thursday of March of each year.

For all but two Trustees, the term of office for Trustees is three years or until his or her successor is elected. The terms of the Trustees are so arranged that approximately one third will stand for election each year.

The Board of Trustees oversees the work of the school. The Head of the School is responsible to the Board for the daily operations of the school and the carrying out of Board policies. The Board creates ad hoc committees to oversee the work of the school. The Chair of an ad hoc committee shall be ex-officio members of the Board for the duration of the committee's existence.

## **THE SOCIAL COVENANT OF THE SCHOOL**

Believing that it was important for the school to have a written statement of behavior and expectations, the Touchstone community adopted the following statement.

### **Guiding Principles.**

We believe that the purpose of the school is for learning and for personal, social and intellectual growth. As a community we've agreed that there are four general principles that guide us at the school:

**Our community is based on mutual respect.** We expect that everyone - students, staff and parents - in the Touchstone community will demonstrate respect and treat others and the environment with respect.

**We expect all members of the community to be aware of and value difference.** We all share responsibility for creating a community in which everyone feels safe and included.

**We believe students learn from each other and have a responsibility to help others learn and develop.** No student has the right to interfere with the learning of another student or the purpose of an activity.

**We expect social, emotional and academic progress and development from all members of the community.** As students grow and spend time at the school, they are expected to take more and more responsibility for their behavior and their learning.

We recognize that these principles need ongoing presentation and discussion by the full community to insure that they are meaningful, understood by all and vital.

### **School Rules**

In addition to these general principles, we believe that some rules - relatively few in number and clearly stated - are needed to make sure that the school and the grounds are pleasant and safe places for us all. These rules are reviewed

at the beginning of every year at an all-school assembly, and added to in the course of the year, as needed.

- Fighting, clear disrespect of another person, use of abusive or aggressive language and aggressive physical behavior are not tolerated.
- Rock throwing and threatening play with sticks are not allowed.
- No weapons of any kind, real or toy, may be brought to school at any time. Students may not use any item with the intent to injure, threaten, or scare any person at any time.
- Going down the slide head-first is not permitted.
- Pushing the ten-tire bouncer is not allowed.
- There will be no trading, bartering or selling of personal possessions between students of the older and younger classes.

### **Process for Maintaining our Principles and Ideals.**

Our principles are ideals which we all struggle to maintain and support. We therefore believe it is important to have a process - a process that is understood by everyone in the community - for dealing effectively and respectfully with disrespectful, unsafe or disruptive behavior. Our process has the following steps.

1. When a student exhibits disrespectful, unsafe, or disruptive behavior, a faculty or staff member will address this behavior directly with the student.
  - a) Whenever a teacher or adult observes disrespectful, or unsafe or disruptive behavior, that adult will speak to the student or community member about it. The adult will seek clarity about the situation and will ask each child or person involved to accept responsibility for his/her part and to be sympathetic to other people's feelings about the situation. All involved are given an opportunity to share their views of the situation. A student who observes inappropriate behaviors is encouraged to speak to the student or community member directly, and/or to ask for assistance in doing so from the adult in charge.



- b) Often conversation and clarification are sufficient to address questionable behavior. When appropriate, however, the adult will also take action, and whenever possible will make consequences logically related to the inappropriate behavior. We may ask the student to apologize, to clean up or repair a situation, to sit out and calm down for a short while, or to use a recess to make up for wasted classroom time, as examples. The purpose of the consequence will be to allow the student to make amends for an action that showed disregard for any of the four principles, and to bring clear and quick closure to the situation for all involved.
  - c) The teacher or adult dealing with any recurring problematic behavior will notify the student's teacher of the problem. It is the child's teacher who best knows the child at school and is the child's counselor and advocate. She will make sure that communication is clear and that the student understands the problem. As noted above, we expect that as children grow older, they will take more responsibility for their behavior and need less teacher explanation or intervention. The teacher will notify parents when appropriate.
2. When disrespect or rule-breaking is repeated, we expect parents to join with the school to send the student even clearer signals that the behavior must change or stop. The school uses two signals to alert students and parents that a situation is serious: a first and a second alert.
- a) *First Alert* - A first alert means that the disrespect or rule-breaking has been serious or repeated and needs to be addressed. The parents of the student will be notified, and they and the student's teacher will address the issue directly to make sure that expectations are clear and parents and teacher are working together with the child to address the issue. Both student and parent should understand that the behavior must change, for if the behavior continues, the student will be put on second alert.

- b) *Second Alert* - On second alert, any unacceptable behavior will mean that the child will be sent home. Parents will be required to meet with the head of school and the student's teacher to decide what further steps will be taken to address inappropriate behaviors. Whether the child should continue at Touchstone, and under what conditions, will be considered at this time. The child may be suspended from the school while the conversations are taking place. The duration of a second alert status will be determined by the head of school.

Finally, consistency of expectations is important if our system is to be a fair one. It will be up to the teacher or adult in charge to determine whether disrespect is being shown or rules being disregarded. There are bound to be individual differences in interpretation, and an opportunity to present these differences is built into our process. For safety reasons alone, however, the judgment of the person responsible for the children at the time must be respected by community members - students, parents and staff.

## **PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

It is through the involvement of parents (and grandparents) that Touchstone has accomplished so much since its founding in 1982.

Parents play an integral role at Touchstone. Parent participation in all levels of the school organization is an inherent part of the school's philosophy. The Touchstone community believes that involved parents are an important component of a successful educational program.

A list of committees and special events, along with the chairperson for the committee or event, will be provided at the beginning of the school year. Parents should contact the chair of any committee or event that they would like to learn more about or support.

Touchstone offers many opportunities for parents to become

involved. Parents share their talents and interests and also may acquire new skills through their volunteer involvement. Parents are welcome in the classrooms. Each classroom will have different needs and schedules for parent involvement, usually surrounding a thematic study or classroom activities. Parents are also encouraged to volunteer in the office, and on one of Touchstone's many committees. Committees function in many capacities - from helping with the budgeting process to raising funds, to planning for Touchstone's future.

In Massachusetts all staff and volunteers in schools are required to have a CORI (Criminal Offenders Record Information) check. Parents will be asked at the beginning of each school year to have a CORI done if they have not had one at Touchstone within the last three years. Only the head of school, business manager and EDP director are authorized to view the results of the CORI.

Parents serve as members of the Board of Trustees (the By-laws stipulate that a majority of the members must be current parents in the school) and as such are involved in formulating school policy. Parent volunteers also serve on the committees listed below.

### **Touchstone Committees**

#### ***Ad hoc board committees***

**ACT (A Community at Touchstone)** The ACT Committee is charged with overseeing annually recurring activities at the school that are run by parent volunteers. The Committee is further charged with identifying opportunities throughout the school year to bring the community together for social gatherings and/or community service.

**Auxiliary Programs** The Auxiliary Programs Committee is charged with overseeing the evaluation of the auxiliary programs at Touchstone, providing board support to the Auxiliary Programs Director and with recommending major program changes. The scope of the work includes summer

programs, school-year enrichment activities for children and adults and the February & April vacation camps.

**Development** The Development Committee is charged with ensuring that the school reaches its annual development goals as laid out in the 5-year plan. The Committee is also charged with continuing the education of Trustees with regard to their role in development at the school and directing and supporting their engagement in development.

**Executive** The Executive Committee is charged with providing the head of school and the board chair with a sounding board for discussing day to day issues pertaining to the school. The committee provides a smaller forum than the full Board from which to gather preliminary opinions and advice, prior to discussion by the full Board. The committee also provides a forum for development of future Board leadership. The Executive Committee is not a voting body, and can not make any decisions on the part of the Board of Trustees.

**Grounds** The Grounds Committee is charged with identifying projects on campus where enhancement or repair of the grounds is necessary or desirable. The Committee is further charged with coordinating volunteer efforts to address grounds projects where feasible.

**Strategic Marketing Committee** The Committee is charged with continuing to refine our understanding of the communities we serve and the potential communities that we do not yet serve. The Committee is also charged with continuing to promote the school and increase awareness of Touchstone's offerings within those communities as well as within our current Touchstone community, based on the overall strategic goals for the school.

**Personnel** The Personnel Committee is charged with reviewing current employee total compensation structure and developing recommendations for a compensation structure, including salary and benefits, that is consistent with Touchstone's philosophical foundations and long-term financial plan.

**Sustainability** The Sustainability Committee is charged with

evaluating the school's use of resources and identifying opportunities for Touchstone to replace, reduce, reuse or recycle to decrease the school's environmental footprint.

The Committee is further charged with recommending programmatic and administrative changes that will further the goal of making Touchstone a more environmentally sustainable organization. Additionally, the Committee is charged with educating the Touchstone community regarding their findings and the efforts being made to implement sustainability changes.

**Technology** The Technology Committee is charged with evaluating the technology assets of the school to ensure that we provide a safe, productive and cost efficient technology infrastructure at Touchstone. The Committee is further charged with generating a technology migration plan that provides necessary upgrades within the constraints of the technology budget laid out in the 5-year plan. The Committee is also charged with defining and implementing a technology support plan that minimizes technology downtime at the school and minimizes the risk of losing critical data on any of the school's systems.

### ***Standing board committees***

**Finance** The Finance Committee recommends to the Board of Trustees the budget, fees for tuition or other services, financial aid to students (usually delegated to an ad-hoc subcommittee), salaries and benefits for employees in concert with the Personnel Committee, estimates non-tuition income in concert with the Development Committee, and any other areas the BOT or its Chairperson may from time to time designate.

**Governance** The Governance committee solicits input from the full Touchstone community as it chooses a slate of nominees to

present at the Annual Meeting in March for election to the Board of Trustees. The Governance Committee is also responsible for orienting newly elected board members and helping them become productive members of the board.

### ***Other committees***

**Diversity at Touchstone (DAT)** The committee works to support respect for diversity in many ways. We are guided by one of the core principles of the school's philosophy: "TCS values the range of diversity found within the social world - from learning styles, to differing family structures, to the varieties of cultural expression. We celebrate and nurture diversity within our community. We are committed to an education - and ultimately a world - free of sexism, racism, and all other forms of prejudice". DAT sees their role as that of facilitators for the TCS community in fostering these ideals.

### **Finances and Fundraising**

As an independent school, Touchstone receives no ongoing financial support from federal, state or local governments. Touchstone's growth, the current school building, the playground, the parking lot and the playing field are a credit to the commitment to careful financial management and to the generosity of parents, grandparents and friends.

The Finance Committee, in cooperation with staff and the Board of Trustees, is responsible for the financial health of the school. Tuition is the major source of revenue, but it only covers about 85% of the costs of operations. The remaining 15% is generated through gifts, fundraising events and auxiliary programs.

### **Annual Fund**

The Annual Fund provides an opportunity for parents, extended family, friends and community members to support the school during the current school year. The fund runs on fiscal cycle from July 1 - June 30.

Annual funds collected in a fiscal year go toward the school's operating expenses for that year, so contributors support all aspects of the school's program. Meeting or exceeding our Annual Fund goals helps to keep tuition costs down each year.

Each year we strive to attain a 100% participation from our

families in Annual Fund giving. 100% participation can help us in many of our efforts to secure grant funding, funding from businesses, corporations, and foundation support. Giving to this fund each year is an important way to support our school community.

### **Capital Campaigns**

Capital campaigns are special campaigns that raise funds for long-term and substantial improvements in the school. They insure the future health of the school, as opposed to Annual Fund contributions, which support the current program.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Calendar**

The calendar is set each spring for the following school year and is provided to families in advance of September. It is possible that certain curriculum days will be designated as make-up days. On the last day of school students are dismissed at 12:00 (noon) before lunch.

### **Curriculum Days**

Touchstone's educational program is integrated and thematic, and curriculum of this type requires much planning by teachers. To assure that program quality is high, approximately one day a month is set aside as a Curriculum Day, with no classes meeting. Teaching staff uses these days to plan curriculum, meet with staff, visit other schools, take part in professional workshops and write progress reports. The Extended Day Program offers child care on most Curriculum Days. If you need child care on these days, contact the Extended Day Program Director. Refer to page 41 of this booklet for additional information.

### **Communication**

**News Notes** is a newsletter posted on the web each Thursday. It includes information about what is happening at the school and in the community. Every parent is sent an e-mail reminder containing the link to Touchstone's **News Notes** webpage on

Thursday afternoon. If you do not have an email address to send the link to, a paper copy can be requested from the office.

Parents may submit articles to be included in ***News Notes***. Submissions must be in the office by noon on Tuesday. The preferred method for submission is electronically. Send your submissions either in the body of an e-mail or as an attachment to [newsnotes@touchstoneschool.com](mailto:newsnotes@touchstoneschool.com). All articles are subject to review and editing by the administrative staff, there is a 250 word maximum for submissions.

Copies of News Notes and other school forms are kept in a rack outside the office window.

### **School Cancellations and Delayed Openings**

The head of school decides whether school will be closed or delayed due to inclement weather. These decisions are made independent of the area school systems and take into account the wide geographic area from which students and staff come. School closings and delayed start announcements are communicated directly to parents and staff through the school's telephone broadcast system by 6:30a.m. A recorded message will also be placed on the school's main telephone number and a notice will be displayed on the school's website. Public announcements will also be available on WBZ (AM 1030) Radio and Channel 4 TV, Worcester radio stations WTAG (580 AM) and WSRS (FM 96.1). The Extended Day Program does not operate on days when the school is closed due to inclement weather.

It is the responsibility of parents to find out if school has been closed. When school is in session, but the weather is problematic, parents should use their own judgment about road conditions and keep their children home or pick them up early if they feel this is the safest thing to do.

If there is a delayed opening, Before School Care is not available. Students should not be dropped off any earlier than 15 minutes prior to the announced start time.

If it is necessary to release students prior to 3:00 p.m. or to close the Extended Day Program before 6:00 p.m, the announcement



will be made by the same methods for school cancellations and delayed openings.

### **Schedule**

The Touchstone school day runs from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Children may begin entering their classrooms at 8:15 a.m. For children arriving prior to 8:15 a.m., care is available between 7:45 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. for a nominal fee.

The school day starts promptly at 8:30 a.m. and ends promptly at 3:00 p.m. Parents and children should **BE ON TIME**. Every student's tardy arrivals will be recorded in the office, and students who arrive late will be required to check in at the office. Frequent tardiness negatively impacts on a child's integration into the classroom routine.

After school care can be arranged through the Extended Day Program. Children who have not been picked up by 3:15 p.m. will be placed in the Extended Day Program. Please also refer to the EDP section of this handbook for an explanation on registration, policies and fees.

When children arrive they may leave their lunch boxes and outer wear in their designated "cubbies." There are no lunches or refreshments provided by the school except for an afternoon snack for the youngest classes. There is no refrigerator available for children's lunches. Students should bring a nutritious snack and lunch, as well as beverages.

Snack takes place around midmorning (time varies slightly from class to class) each day followed by an outdoor recess in good weather or indoors if the weather is inclement. Lunch takes place around noon (time varies slightly from class to class) followed again by an outdoor recess. The youngest classes will have a 30 minute rest time following lunch recess. The youngest classes will also receive a teacher-provided snack in the afternoon each day.

### **Lunches and Snacks**

Children bring both their snack and lunch to school each day. Children are encouraged to use insulated lunchboxes since we have no refrigeration to offer for children's lunches. There is also no method of heating lunches, so insulated containers are useful for packing foods that need to stay hot. The school encourages environmentally friendly practices - reusable food and drink containers are encouraged.

### **Guidelines for Shared Food**

Sharing food is part of many Touchstone experiences and is an important part of building a sense of community. When we share a snack or a meal together, conversations flow in new ways and relationships are strengthened.

Nurturing each other is another aspect of sharing food, one that asks us to be mindful of sharing foods that are best for our bodies and to be aware that the foods we share at school serve as a model of healthy lifelong eating habits for our students. The focus of shared foods at Touchstone should be on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, dairy and protein. Wherever possible, the foods we share should demonstrate to students that healthy food can be a tasty part of a celebration, snack or meal.

Some shared food is provided by Touchstone, such as at EDP, the teacher-provided snack in the youngest classes, and in individual classrooms as part of the teaching curriculum. It is our goal to serve foods that are low in fat and sodium, and without hydrogenated oils, high fructose corn syrup or artificial sweeteners, preservatives, or colors. Beverages available include water (preferable!) and occasionally, milk and unsweetened juice. When special foods are shared in classrooms for teaching purposes or celebrations, nutritional balance will be considered whenever possible. Our commitment to the School's gardens provides a natural opportunity for learning about healthy eating, and harvested vegetables will be incorporated into our eating practices as they are available. Parents should notify the school nurse, their child's teacher and the EDP director if they have any

specific dietary concerns regarding their child.

When families are asked to bring in food to share for potlucks and other events, we ask that they are mindful of the spirit of these guidelines in selecting and preparing their contribution. To be respectful of allergies and other dietary needs, a list of ingredients should always be provided. Of course, when the school has announced that a community member has a life-threatening allergy, those foods must not be served.

### **School Events**

Throughout the school year there are several all school events parents should be aware of and be sure to put on their calendar. Each of these and the others that will come up during the year will be announced and explained in our weekly ***News Notes***.

***Convocation*** (September) A welcome from our head of school and Board of Trustees Chair held on the first morning of school.

***All School BBQ*** (September) A family event to bring the community together.

***Halloween Parade and Assembly*** (October) Students, teachers and many parents come in costume and parade around the school, followed by an assembly.

***Curriculum Night*** (fall) teachers do a presentation on one aspect of our curriculum.

***Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Assembly*** (January) An annual event honoring the spirit and work of Dr. King, held in January.

***Family Night*** (winter) An opportunity to visit all of the classrooms and see the work being done in each. This is an evening event. May be held in conjunction with a Curriculum Night.

***Annual Meeting*** (March) The head of school and Board officers report on the state of the school and the Board of Trustees are elected by the members of the corporation (all parents/guardians are members of the corporation).

***Auction*** (spring, held every other year, on odd numbered years) An adults only evening with great food, great company and great items to bid on.

***Community Cleanup Day*** (spring) Touchstone families and neighbors clean up the trash that has accumulated over the winter along the roads in our neighborhood.

***Grandparents/Friends Day*** (spring, held every other year, on

even numbered years) An Open House event for sharing the Touchstone experience with Grandparents and Friends.  
***Graduation (June)*** An evening event for acknowledging all OSP students who are graduating from TCS

### **Toy Guidelines**

Often children want to bring dolls, toys, or electronic games/devices to school. While we want to encourage the sharing of objects of educational value in the classroom, children are asked to keep all toys and electronics at home unless the teacher has requested items for a particular day of sharing. Exceptions will be made for young children in need of special comfort objects.

### **Student Phone Use**

Students with cell phones and/or any other communications devices must keep them turned off and put away; any emergency calls or text messages must be made with the knowledge and consent of the classroom teacher or the EDP adult staff member.

### **Computer/Internet Acceptable Use by Students**

Students using computers at Touchstone Community School will follow the same Guiding Principles that govern all other aspects of behavior within the Touchstone Community:

- **Our community is based on mutual respect.** (We show our respect for each other by being kind and fair whether we are speaking to or about someone as well as when we are using any form of technology to communicate to or about someone. We respect each other's property and the school's property.)
- **We all share responsibility for creating a community in which everyone feels safe and included.** (We have a responsibility to stop and report hurtful or disrespectful uses of computers and other electronic devices.)
- **We believe students learn from each other and have a responsibility to help others learn and develop.** (We are kind and fair to each other at all times so that we always feel safe and comfortable in our community. We help each

other take care of learning tools such as computers.)

- **We expect social, emotional, and academic progress and development from all members of our community.** (As we get older, we learn that we are expected to take greater responsibility for the way we treat others, and that includes how we treat others when using technology to communicate. We have a responsibility to use computers at school only to enhance learning.)

Students are allowed to use the school's computers, or their own computers while they are on the school's premises, only when directed to do so by a Touchstone staff member. Similarly, students will use programs (software) and network connections only as directed by Touchstone staff. Students are not allowed to access files and documents that they have not created themselves or been given direct permission to view by the creator of the file or document.

If a student finds a computer left on and it is obvious no one is about to return to work on that computer it does not mean the student can use the machine or read what is on the screen. This would be the same as reading a personal letter addressed to someone else or using someone else's property without their permission. The student should report this to a Touchstone faculty/staff member.

Students will not attempt to go around any security measure installed on a computer. Attempting to guess passwords or change security settings are examples of unacceptable behaviors.

Frivolous or improper use of computer resources is prohibited. This includes playing games during the school day and going to any Web site without an adult's permission. It also includes using any technology at school to communicate in hurtful or disrespectful ways to or about others.

Students cannot use the Touchstone computers for selling or advertising. Computers are to be used only for teacher-approved activities.

When students choose to incorporate information that they find

on the Internet, CD-ROM's, or other computer files, into their work, such as research papers and reports, they must give proper credit to the authors and owners of any information they use. Using the work of others without giving proper credit is plagiarism.

We expect students to apply these same standards of behavior at home when using technology to communicate with community members. Whether by email, web sites, social networking sites, texting, etc., disrespectful messages to or about community members will not be tolerated and could result in suspension or expulsion from school.

Touchstone Community School computers are the property of the school and teachers and administrators may view files and documents on any school computer. Students should be aware that files and documents might also be viewed by adults when they are doing repairs or maintenance to a computer.

We expect students to apply these same standards of behavior at home when using technology to communicate with or about others. Whether by email, web sites, social networking sites, texting, or any other form of electronic communication, disrespectful messages to or about others will not be tolerated and could result in suspension or expulsion from school. The 2010 Massachusetts Anti-bullying law has the following definition of bullying:

the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that: (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property; (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. For the purposes of this section, bullying shall include cyber-bullying.

The law also has the following definition of cyber-bullying:

bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyber-bullying shall also include (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Touchstone Community School will comply with all state and federal guidelines regarding student use of technology, which will include but not be limited to reporting student activity to proper authorities in circumstances that may be deemed cyber-bullying or other potentially illegal behavior.

### **School Directory**

A school directory of families and staff is published each school year. The directory is for personal use only and should not be used or shared for any commercial purposes. From time to time the school will communicate with parents via email. These lists are also to be used only for school related purposes.

### **Homework**

Homework at Touchstone begins the development of skills and capacities and is family friendly. Homework enables students to:

- Work on long-term projects designed to develop a capacity

for independent work and sustained effort.

- Practice skills or operations needed to develop automaticity and fluency.
- Finish work begun in class.
- Develop a topic or project further than is possible in class.
- Use the classroom for individual or group exploration and learning.

Current homework guidelines are:

- ALL STUDENTS SHOULD EITHER READ OR BE READ TO, AT HOME, APPROXIMATELY 20 MINUTES EACH DAY.
- 8-9 year olds will have no more than a 10-20 minute additional assignment each night.
- 9-10 year olds will have no more than a 20-30 minute additional assignment each night.
- 10-11 year olds will have no more than two additional assignments totaling 40 minutes each night.
- OSP students will have 80 - 90 minutes of homework including 20 minutes of reading.

Teachers have discretion in the implementation of this policy. Homework is rarely given over the weekend. Parents are encouraged to support and assist, if necessary, their children with homework, but increasing independence is the goal. Questions about the parent's role in homework should be discussed with the classroom teacher.

### **School use for Events**

All use of the school for events whether by a committee, a classroom or private party should be scheduled with the EDP Director.

### **Alcohol Policy at School Events**

Alcohol is not permitted at any event held on school property, or at any school sponsored event where children will be present.

### **Holidays**

Holidays are not celebrated on a school-wide basis. Each class chooses their celebrations throughout the year based on the season, what is being celebrated by the student's family and the current classroom theme. The one exception is



Halloween. On Halloween children come to school in costume and a parade takes place followed by a fun-filled assembly. Parents are encouraged to participate by coming in costume and attending the assembly.

### **Absenteeism and/or Extended Vacations**

Touchstone's success depends on students' active involvement in the learning process, for themselves and for those around them. A pattern of mounting or excessive absences/tardinesses for any one student ultimately undermines the learning process. To avoid that, we have established the following guidelines during the academic year:

We expect that parents will make every effort to plan family vacations during school vacation periods and communicate with the head teacher long in advance, should an extended absence be necessary. No make up curriculum work will be provided unless the absence is an extended one and the head teacher feels it is necessary.

#### **For absences**

At the 10<sup>th</sup> absence, a note may be sent home to alert parents of the school's concern. At the 15<sup>th</sup> absence, the head teacher may ask for a meeting with the parent and the head of school to discuss the absences and encourage good attendance.

#### **For tardiness**

Being late to school can significantly affect the entire school day for a child and his/her classmates. The beginning of the class day at 8:30 a.m. is a critical time for important lessons, daily schedules and changes, calendar work, and social interactions that frequently establish relationships for the day.

When latenesses begin to hamper a child's progress in any of these areas, the head teacher and the head of school will consult about the need for a parent conference. At that conference, we will work to support the family in order to help them make changes that allow for consistent timeliness.

#### ***Parent notice of absences***

Parents should call the school by 8:15 a.m. to let the office know

of any full day absence from illness or other special circumstances.

Apart from these common guidelines for reacting to patterns of absences and tardinesses, we will respond to individual circumstances as they present themselves. We will continue to work with parents to minimize the negative impact of absences and tardinesses on students' participation in the learning process.

### **Permission for School Trips**

During the school year, each class may take many different kinds of trips related to its curriculum studies. Some of these trips will be short walking trips using the resources in the area surrounding the school. Other trips will involve transportation by bus or car.

A general field trip permission form will be sent out before the school year begins. Parents should sign and return it by the first day of school. This permission slip covers all trips during the school year.

Before each class trip involving the use of a car or bus, the teacher will send a notice home concerning the purpose, time, place, cost and kind of transportation to be involved. The teacher will also state whether a visit to a gift shop will be part of the trip and make suggestions for an appropriate amount of spending money. A room representative may also contact you and ask if you can help with transportation.

### **Field Trip Drivers**

Prior to a field trip drivers must:

- have a current CORI on file with the Touchstone office
- Show the office a valid drivers license (a copy will be made and kept in the office files)
- Show the office a current vehicle inspection sticker
- Show proof of insurance coverage of at least \$100,000 (a copy will be made and kept in the office files)

Appropriate safety restraints must be used at all times. The Child Passenger Restraint Law requires infants and small children to ride in federally approved child passenger restraints until they are at

least 5 years old and weigh over 40 pounds. Children who are between ages 5 and 12 and who weigh more than 40 pounds must use booster seats or safety belts. Child safety seats and booster seats will be provided by the child's parent.

Teachers will provide each driver detailed written directions to the destination and make it clear to the drivers whether you will be traveling together or meeting up at the destination.

Teachers will provide each driver with a list of the children who will be riding in their vehicle and assure that each child has the proper safety restraints.

Teachers will provide each driver with a list of cell phone numbers for the other drivers on the trip.

Any issues surrounding student behavior on field trips, either in the car or during the visit should be discussed with the classroom teacher.

Unless specifically instructed by the teacher, children should not be eating while traveling in a car. Unless instructed by the teacher, drivers should not make any stops along the way. Drivers should start the trip with a full tank of gas and check that their car is in good condition prior to the trip.

If a field trip is scheduled to arrive back at school after 3:15, drivers need to inform the other families in their carpool so alternative pick-up arrangements can be made.

### **Dropping Off and Picking Up Children**

For purposes of safety and efficiency we ask drivers to form queues for pick-up and drop-offs and to remain in their vehicles. Please do not use your cell phone during drop-off or pick-up as this can be a distraction and create a safety issue.

If someone other than a parent or the regular carpool driver is going to pick your child up, you must send a note in to school detailing the change with a date and signature on it. This applies even if the driver is another Touchstone parent or close relative.

#### Morning Drop-Off

- You may approach the school from either Upton or Grafton.
- Enter the parking lot ONLY from the entrance nearest the school.
- If you are not leaving your car to come into the school you may stop in the driveway and discharge your passengers. Please wait for the children to enter the building before leaving.
- If you need to come into the school, park in the main parking lot, NOT in the driveway, on the street or in a visitor's parking place.

#### *Afternoon Pick-up*

- Approach the school from the east (Upton), using Old Grafton Road from Route 140 and leave traveling west, to Moroney Road to Route 140. This one-way arrangement should move traffic quickly, keep our neighbors happy, and above all, be safe. This is especially important during the winter months when Leland Street may become quite narrow due to snow.
- Pick up children at the front entrance to the school entering the driveway nearest the school. If waiting in queue more than 10 seconds, please consider turning your engine off.
- Place a sign on the passenger's side window indicating the community the carpool serves or the child/children being picked up.
- If you need to come into the school prior to dismissal time, you must arrive and enter the parking lot prior to 2:45 p.m. or after 3:15 p.m. Please park in the main lot.
- If you arrive at the school between 2:45 p.m. and 3:15 p.m. you must get into the dismissal line until directed to park by the teacher on duty. Do not jump the line and do not park along Leland Street.

- Students who are not picked-up by 3:15 p.m. will be placed in the Extended Day Program (EDP). Parents must park and come inside the building to sign-out the student (s) on the EDP registration list. (Look for complete details in the Extended Day Handbook.

Parents, to ensure our children's safety, PLEASE practice the following during dismissal:

- \* End cell phone conversations before entering the circle. The teachers and your children need your full attention.
- \* If you are waiting in the circle, stay at your car while you wait for your children.
- \* If you have parked in the parking lot, wait at the bench near the end of the sidewalk so that faculty and students may be able to see easily which cars are in line.
- \* Once your children have been delivered to your car, make sure their seat belts are securely buckled. For insurance reasons, teachers and staff will help children into cars but they may not buckle the children's seat belts.
- \* If you must bring your pet with you to dismissal, please keep your pet in the car during the dismissal process.

To ensure their own safety, students must practice the following:

- \* Make playdate arrangements outside of dismissal time.
- \* Stay with your own class and watch for your driver.
- \* Wait until all the cars coming into the pick-up queue have come to a full stop.
- \* Shake out with your head teacher or another teacher if your teacher is not available.
- \* Walk (don't run) on the sidewalk to your car, and enter from the sidewalk side.
- \* If you must go to the parking lot, an adult must accompany you.

### **Clothing**

Sneakers plus slacks or shorts are required on gym days. For safety on the playground, children should wear sneakers every day.

All students are required to have boots, warm jackets, snowpants or waterproof pants, two pairs of gloves or mittens, and hats available in their cubbies from December 1<sup>st</sup> through March 31.

Students in Sheryl, Jane, Ginny, and Tamara's classes will wear snow gear unless the teacher decides otherwise. Students in Susan, Julie, and Polly's classes and OSP can choose the gear they wear during recess, but the following rules apply:

- All play on snow covered fields requires boots and snowpants.
- Walking on snow requires boots.
- Without boots or snowpants, students will be required to remain on the blacktop.

A separate pair of sneakers must be kept at school for gym classes. Outdoor shoes are not allowed in the gym.

### **Lost and Found**

It is very helpful to have your child's name or initials on his/her clothing and belongings as the "Lost and Found" basket fills up quite quickly. The "Lost and Found" basket is located in the Common Room. Parents and students are advised to check it regularly; unclaimed items are donated to charity monthly. We recommend that each student have a backpack, school bag or other container for transporting papers and other items to and from school.

### **Gifts for Teachers**

At teachers' request, the school discourages parents from giving personal gifts to teachers. Parents are encouraged to make gifts of materials or books to the class or the library if they wish. Teachers are thanked every year for their efforts on Teacher Appreciation Day.

### **Birthday Parties**

In response to requests from parents over the years, we offer the following in reference to school life and birthday parties.

The school has only one hard-fast policy: namely, birthday party invitations should not be distributed at school.

If a family decides to have a "class party," or a "class boys' or class girls' party," we ask that all of the children or girls or boys in the class be included. Not doing so is clearly exclusionary, the kind of exclusion that hurts, and affects the class as a learning group, whether the child is 4 or 14 years old. We hope families will be considerate of others, avoid "exclusion," and be discrete. In these cases, the less public the party is, the better.

Please do check with your child's classroom teacher before planning or sending in treats for the class on your child's birthday, so that you are aware of any special allergies or food concerns in that classroom.

## **EDUCATION PROGRAM**

### **Integrated Arts**

A full-time teacher of the arts offers classes integrating movement, drama, music and art. Every class participates in an extended weekly session.

### **Physical Education**

A physical education specialist provides a full program of gymnastics, sports skills training, movement and fitness. Every class participates in three periods of physical education each week. A separate pair of sneakers must be kept at school for gym classes. Outdoor shoes are not allowed in the gym.

### **Spanish**

All classes in the school receive Spanish instruction. Our program emphasizes conversational Spanish, basic vocabulary and Spanish culture. Teachers of younger classes will arrange special activities with the Spanish teacher on a weekly basis.

### **Library**

The Touchstone Community School Library welcomes all

community members. Our collection includes a wide selection of fiction and non-fiction materials. During the school year, the library is open from 8:15 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Students and parents are extended borrowing privileges. Each student has a personal library account. Students may check out books themselves, following the guidelines posted in the library. There is a full selection of education and parenting titles that will interest parents. Parents may check out books on their child's library account. The lending period is three weeks. Parents will be asked to reimburse the library for books that are returned damaged or are not returned by the end of the school year.

Families are invited to join the Andrew Spencer Memorial Birthday Book Club. Members choose a book from a special collection to donate to the library in honor of a birthday, teacher, pet, parent, grandparent or any other special person or occasion. More details are available in the library.

Volunteers are always welcome and appreciated. Please stop by and let us know your interests and how you would like to help.

### **Peer Mediation**

As a community school we place a high value on helping children gain the skills they need to work together and to solve their own problems as they arise. This is a skill increasingly valued in the workplace. Student volunteers from the 10, 11, 12 year old classes and the OSP to are trained to mediate conflicts that occur at recess. Peer mediators spend six intense hours earning the skills they will need to do this mediation process. Students learn to listen to both sides of a conflict without taking sides, to listen for the underlying, often unspoken, needs of the children they are helping, and to help the children solve their own conflict rather than imposing solutions on them. Participants in a conflict at recess can choose to get help from the peer mediators on duty that day. Students in the conflict must agree to mediation before beginning. If they don't, they can always go to get help from a teacher, instead.



### **Community Meetings**

Community Meetings are held every Friday, unless there is a special morning event. These community meetings are for announcements, presentations or discussions, and are led by the head of school or OSP students. Parents are welcome to attend Community Meetings.

### **Assessment, Conferences, Reports and Portfolios**

Assessment of students is done by observation, individual conferencing between teacher and student and ongoing portfolio development. Progress is reported through conferences and written reports, the format of which varies from level to level. Parent/teacher or portfolio conferences are scheduled four times per year and are also available upon request on an informal basis throughout the school year. Written progress reports will be sent out twice per year.

Touchstone has no testing or evaluation services. Should additional information about a child be required, we must ask parents to provide this at their own expense.

### **Parent - Teacher Conferences**

Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled four times each year, in September, November, February and May/June. Each conference serves a different function and is described in detail later. During conferences, teachers and parents review each student's progress and set goals for future learning. As children move into the older classes, they begin to attend conferences with parents so that they become directly included in the assessment process. Parents may also request to meet with teachers at any time during the year. Written reports are mailed twice a year (November and June).

### **What? No report card?!**

At Touchstone, teachers use observation, conferencing with children individually, and portfolio development instead of

grades and report cards to assess children's learning. In recent years, many American schools have realized the wisdom of portfolio-based assessment and descriptive narratives to document and display students' progress, and have consequently adapted their methods of assessment. Building the portfolio is an on-going process, both within a given school year and from year to year. It enables children to construct for themselves an authentic and lasting sense of personal value and competence. Sharing the portfolio allows students to reflect on their work, notice what has changed, and look ahead and plan for what still needs to be done.

The tips presented here are suggestions to help you, as a parent, make the most of your conference time. These ideas may help to strengthen meaningful communication between you and your child's teacher so that you can support your child's learning as a team.

### ***All Kinds of Conferences***

Each scheduled parent-teacher conference has a specific focus and purpose.

### ***September Goal-Setting Conference***

This 20-minute conference gives you a chance to meet your child's classroom teacher and share any information that you feel is important for her to know for the upcoming year. At this conference, the teacher will primarily be listening to you. You should be prepared to answer the following questions:

- What are your goals for your child this year (academic, social, and emotional)?
- What are particular concerns you have for your child this year?
- Is there anything going on at home that might be helpful for your child's teacher to know?
- Did your child receive academic support or counseling over the summer? What are your follow-up plans for this school year?

### ***November Conferences***

At this 30-minute conference, the teacher will share with you her observations regarding your child's experience in the classroom thus far, including work samples or information gathered from informal assessments. You may be asked to share more specific information or insights you have about your child's learning needs. You should also ask questions and mention any current concerns you have about your child.

### ***February/Early March Portfolio Conferences***

For parents of students in the younger classes, the February conference is 30 minutes long. Younger students share their portfolios with parents outside of the actual conference time. (Individual teachers provide details prior to the conference.) In the older classes, the portfolio conference is a 45 minute, three-way conversation among student, parents and teacher, during which your child will share his or her portfolio with you.

Creating a portfolio and sharing it with others is a most important learning experience. The portfolio conference provides an opportunity for a child to receive the complete attention of parents and teacher for an extended and uninterrupted period of time. Student, parents and teacher celebrate together the learning and progress that have taken place.

Reflecting about one's own work is challenging at any age and stage of life. It takes courage to be the center of attention and formally present your work to your parents and teacher. Children very much want and try hard to do their best, even if it does not appear that they are working up to their "potential." Here are some suggestions for ways you might respond, whether your child shares the portfolio with you outside of the conference time or during the scheduled conference:

- Smile!
- Encourage your child to take the lead.
- Listen carefully and with full attention to what your child has to say.
- Don't use statements that imply judgment. ( "Good work!" or "That's beautiful." )

- Do use nonjudgmental “I” messages. (“I like the colors you chose.” “I bet you had fun when you made that.”)
- Do ask questions, or use other active listening responses. (“This reminds me of...”, “This makes me feel...”, “Tell me about this...”, “Where did you get the idea for that?”)

The genius of the portfolio process as an assessment tool is that it allows children slowly to develop the ability to self-evaluate, rather than come to depend on the opinions of others for a sense of self-worth. With each successive year’s experience of making and presenting their portfolios, children gain more skill and sophistication in reflecting on and evaluating constructively what they do and how they spend their time at school.

### ***June Conference***

This 30-minute conference takes place just prior to the end of the school year and summarizes progress for the year. Younger children do not attend this conference. Children in the older classes may or may not attend at individual teachers’ discretion. Since you may know your child’s class placement for the coming school year by the time of this conference, it provides an opportunity to review your child’s progress and plan for a successful transition. Please think about the following in advance of the conference time:

- What social, emotional, or academic support, if any, will your child be receiving over the summer?
- Are there any special meetings that will need to take place before the start of the new school year to ensure a smooth transition?
- What are any goals or concerns that you have for your child in the upcoming year that may be helpful for the new teacher to know in advance?
- How did this year progress for you and your child?

### ***Preparing for Conferences***

Parent-teacher conferences will go by quickly! Give yourself some time *before* the conference to think about concerns, ideas, and priority issues you need to share with your child’s teacher. Several days before the conference think about your child’s school experience this year. What has your child told you about her school days? How does he seem to feel about

going to school? How are you feeling about your child's school experience? Take time to create a mental or actual list of information you would like to receive from or share with the teacher.

*Have some conversations with your child about his or her school experiences before the conference.* You might ask your child the following questions to get a sense of his or her perceptions and feelings about school:

- Is there anything important that you'd like me to ask your teacher?
- Is there anything that you'd like your teacher to know about you?
- What do you like best about school?
- Is there anything about school that is hard or frustrating?
- Who are your friends in school? What kinds of things do you do with your friends at school?
- What types of things would you like to do more (or less) often?

Please plan to arrive on time for your conference. Knock on the classroom door so the teacher knows you have arrived.

### ***Wrapping it up***

Please use only your allotted time for the conference. If the end of the conference is near and you need to address issues in greater depth, schedule another meeting with the teacher. At Touchstone, it is the shared responsibility of both teachers and parents to ensure that concerns about children's academic, social and emotional needs are communicated. Sometimes scheduled conferences do not provide enough time for mutual understanding of the student's needs, and in these cases parents must be sure to arrange opportunities for further discussion with the teacher.

Parent-teacher conferences are a wonderful opportunity to understand your child's ways of learning and relating to others in the classroom setting better. Consider each conference to be just one installment in an ongoing partnership between you and your child's teacher. Take advantage of these conferences to strengthen the parent-teacher partnership and the unique

environment that Touchstone provides for its students and their families.

### **Grouping Policies, Process and Arrangements**

The Touchstone Teaching Staff, and head of school spend a considerable time each spring creating class groups for the following year that are responsive to the needs of the students and the best learning groups that we can put together. The ultimate goal is the creation of effective learning groups – groups for cognitive, social and emotional learning. As we do so, **we strive to balance all of the following, and often competing, considerations:**

- **Group dynamics** The dynamics of a class group heavily determines how much learning takes place in a class group, and the Touchstone teachers, at grouping time, are continually considering the needs of individual students in the context of the groups we are creating. Because we believe that students learn from each other, because students work together cooperatively in small and large groups, and because social/emotional learning is part of the curriculum, the composition of the class group is carefully considered. The importance of the dynamics of the group also accounts for the difficulty we have making changes once groups are set.
- **Class size** Our goal is to create classes of 15 on average, but in the past ten years we have had classes of 12 and classes of 18. Whenever a class exceeds 16, the teaching staff will formally endorse the need for it and the Executive Committee and the Board of Trustees will be informed of the need.
- **Boy/girl ratios**
- **Age composition and spread**
- **Friendships**—We do not see friendships as the defining element in grouping, although we are mindful of them. Students develop socially and emotionally by developing new relationships and friendships. It is rare that children are in the same class with the same friends for their entire time at Touchstone. We encourage and support the growth and development that occurs when children form new relationships. Every new school year is an opportunity

for a new start for every child, and it is in the process of adjusting to a new class group that this growth and maturity can occur.

- **Academic and social development levels**
- **Personalities**
- **Leadership abilities**
- **Special needs and circumstances** We balance the group considering learning styles and strengths as well as students requiring extra attention.

We use the following process and calendar to create groups:

**Early March** –The head of school meets with each teacher individually to ascertain needs of current classes and individuals within them. Parents who wish to complete Grouping Forms do so and submit them to the head of school by March 15th.

The grouping process begins with the assumption that teachers have developed a comprehensive understanding of students' learning styles and needs, and parents' communication with their child's teacher has been ongoing throughout the year. The child's current teacher is the child's *advocate* and *representative* during the grouping process. However, if a parent feels that there is still something significant to consider for grouping purposes, he or she may complete a grouping form—which can be obtained from the office.

Grouping forms ask parents to describe their child's learning style, interests and needs and to indicate any special needs, concerns, or considerations they would like the staff to know for grouping purposes. This information is helpful to us to consider during the grouping process. Requests for a particular teacher or that specific students be placed or not placed in a child's class are not helpful to us as they negatively complicate our ability to create good learning groups.

Grouping forms will be made available to parents in early March and must be returned to the head of school before March 15<sup>th</sup>. (Reminders will be sent home in **News Notes**). The head of school will share this information with the child's teacher. If the school has any questions or disagreements regarding the information on

the form, the child's classroom teacher or the head of school will contact the parent(s) and arrange a conversation, if necessary.

**March, April & May** – The head of school, through conversations with teachers and individual parents, when necessary, constructs possible models and first draft lists. These **are scrutinized, reviewed, modified, and recast by the full teaching staff and head of school.**

**End of May** – Lists get final review from teaching staff and they are published to the Touchstone Community.

Teachers, in collaboration with the head of school, invest a tremendous amount of time, energy, and thoughtful consideration to the placement of each child. The ultimate goal, however, is to create good learning groups. Sometimes children (or their parents) may be surprised by their placements. A parent who wants a clarification of a child's placement may schedule a conference with the head of school and/or the child's current teacher.

Teachers will help to prepare students for transitions through classroom conversations and activities. They will also be available to work with individual students, as necessary, and to support parents in discussing the grouping process with their children. It is extremely important for parents to encourage smooth transitions by supporting the school's placement decisions in conversations with children.

In rare circumstances, if a parent believes—as a result of new information—that his or her child's needs will not be met by the assigned learning group, that parent may submit a written request for a change in class assignment to the head of school within one week of the date the lists are published. That parent will subsequently meet with the head of school and the child's current teacher to clarify the issues.

The full teaching staff and head of school review any requests for a change in class assignment and will make decisions through the staff's consensus process. In the event that the staff cannot reach consensus, final decisions are made by the head of



school. A change for one child has far-reaching implications for others. Thus, only in very unusual circumstances will the teaching staff consider altering class lists. The head of school will communicate decisions to parents in writing before the last day of school.

**August** - Up-to-date class lists, including all students new to the school, will be sent home in the August mailing.

These lists are complete and final. However, the school reserves the right to adjust the grouping policies and procedures due to very unusual and unforeseen circumstances.

### **Students Requiring Extra Attention and Support**

The school is very responsive to students requiring extra attention and support, and routinely provides this by virtue of our small classes, responsive teachers and the flexibility inherent in a thematic curriculum. We have no paid support staff and when a student requires more support than the classroom teacher can provide as a matter of course, parents must pay for services needed. For example, the school provides no regularly scheduled tutoring as part of our program, however the school can provide parents with a list of school approved tutors.

All teachers begin each year with information about their students

- From her/his end of year assessment reports,
- From a transition conference with last year's teacher, and
- From the child's Yellow Transition Folder, a folder that teachers pass to next year's teacher at the end of each school year.

Teachers also observe every child and conduct formal and informal assessments as part of regular classroom work, and these observations are frequent at the beginning of each year. Occasionally a teacher is puzzled by a child or observes him or her more closely than usual because the child's learning or behavior is of concern in some way. As part of this more intense observation, a teacher may ask the Head or another teacher, or last year's teacher, to observe the child and then compare notes.

After observation, if a teacher suspects that a child has some learning or behavior issues, she will share this information with the student's parents and with the Head. At this point, the Head and the teacher choose one or more of three possible courses of action:

#### Child Review

Teachers routinely do child reviews at staff meetings for the purposes of general information and advice. These reviews consist of a presentation by the classroom teacher and a gathering of input from the Head and full teaching staff. If the teacher suspects that a child has a learning issue or behavioral issue, the review will be different in one respect, in that an Extra Support Plan (ESP), will be developed. A Child Review may result, for example, in a recommendation for tutoring, an outside assessment, or more formal assessment here at school.

Following the November conferences and reports, the head of school will initiate an annual review of students for re-enrollment, involving individual discussions with head teachers and a possible review of a limited number of students with all head teachers. These discussions may result in a call for discussions with the parents of a few individual students—to problem solve and establish new support structures. Some of those discussions may turn to considering whether or not to invite a specific student to return, and if so, under what conditions. The school will make every effort to collaborate with individual parents as we strive to serve the needs of all our students.

#### Tutoring or Other Services

The head of school will determine if a person is qualified to be listed as a tutor based on the person's professional and educational background as well as their understanding of Touchstone's mission and philosophy.

When a parent requests names of tutors, the School's entire list of tutors will be provided. On-site tutoring is restricted to Touchstone Community School students. With prior approval from the head of school, a teacher may tutor his/her own

student. The school will set the fee and bill parents directly for all Touchstone student tutoring done at Touchstone by Touchstone employees.

All tutors are expected to collaborate with the student's classroom teacher to coordinate efforts and work in partnership to determine and serve the student's needs. Tutoring may be performed before or after school hours only, unless the head of school, in collaboration with the student's classroom teacher, view it necessary to schedule the tutoring during school hours.

An Assessment If the teacher's initial assessment is that an outside assessment is needed, the Head will help connect parents with the appropriate professionals for this assessment. Once the assessment has been completed, an Extra Support Plan will be developed.

An Extra Support Plan is developed as soon as all relevant information is collected. There are regular reviews of all children receiving extra help or attention at each conference time. At the scheduled conference in late May or June, the progress of students receiving tutoring help will be reviewed, and a decision will be made about whether or not tutoring should continue. Most children on ESP's will have a Transition Conference at the end of a school year or the beginning for the next one. The current teacher, next year's teacher, the Head and the parents attend this conference. The purpose of this conference is to develop a new ESP.

Tutoring is the most effective for students when done in partnership with the school and classroom teachers. Therefore, we ask parents to work with us and our established procedures rather than hiring outside tutors or services on their own. While we respect parents' rights in making decisions and hiring outside services for their students, we may be unable to provide the kind of classroom support requested or mandated by providers outside of our network.

## **HEALTH POLICY**

### **Medical Records**

information must be sent to the school office by the first day of school, as required by Massachusetts law.

### **School Emergency Forms**

A School Emergency Form must be filled out by the parent at the start of each school year and will be on file in a readily accessible location in the health office. References to parent(s) below also include legal guardians and those persons designated as responsible for the child by the parents or guardian. School Emergency Forms contain the following information:

- Student's name, address and home phone number.
- Parent's place of employment and phone numbers
- Name, address and phone number of relative or neighbor who could be contacted if either parent can't be located.
- Notations about illness, disability, allergy, or other special medication about which the school nurse and teachers ought to be aware.

Parents are responsible for notifying the office and teacher of changes in the above.

### **Allergy and Asthma Action Plans**

If your child has asthma requiring the use of an inhaler or potentially serious allergies, we will utilize a special one page Action Plan, which details exactly how to help your child. Included is a section to be completed and signed by your child's physician (for any medications), as well as emergency information you provide. Action Plan forms are available from the nurse or school office.

### **Screenings**

Postural, vision and hearing screenings are not currently conducted at Touchstone. Please be sure to ask your health care provider to include these screenings in your child's physical exam. Anytime your child has a physical please request a copy for their school health record.

### **Use of Medication in School**

1. The dispensing times of **medication should be scheduled, whenever possible, to coincide with the hours when the child is NOT in school.** Parents, in consultation with their physician, should seek alternative times for administering medication.
2. If it is determined that medication must be dispensed during school hours the parents may contact the school nurse (or office staff in her absence) who is responsible for the school medication program. All parents who request that their child be medicated during school hours will be provided with a Request to Administer Medication Form which must be signed and returned.
3. Prescription medications at school always require a physician or nurse practitioner's written order. This can be their signature on the request to administer medications form, a copy of the written prescription, signed instructions from the prescriber or their signature on an allergy or asthma action plan. The only exception is for a 10 day (or less) course of antibiotics where the original pharmacy label can be copied for documentation.
4. Non-prescription medication use requires the parent's signed consent, as well as proper supervision and documentation. The nurse or her delegate may utilize, when appropriate and with parental consent, certain common over the counter medications which are listed in detail in the over the counter medication form.
5. Children **MAY NOT** take any medication (prescription or over the counter) without supervision and proper documentation. At no time may children be in possession of medication.
6. Medications must be delivered to the school in a pharmacy or manufacturer-labeled container and must be delivered to the school nurse or her designate by the parent (or responsible adult) and picked up by the parent (or responsible adult) at dismissal time. Children **MAY NOT** deliver or pick up their own medication. Medication will be kept in a locked container at the school. You may ask your pharmacy to provide separate bottles

6. for school and home use.
7. Medications will be disposed of within 30 days after the permission form expires, as well as after the end of the school year. New forms are needed at the start of each school year, as well as for summer programs

### **Illness or Injury During School Hours**

We strive to provide a safe and healthy environment for everyone here. As an extra measure of preparedness most of our staff maintain first aid and CPR certifications.

If a student becomes ill or injured in school, one of the parents will be contacted immediately. The parent must take responsibility for picking up the child upon request of an Administrator, Teacher or School Nurse, within an hour of being notified. Except where a delay may have life-threatening consequences, arranging transportation home or to the emergency room of a hospital is the responsibility of parents.

way to protect yourself and others from illness:

### **Communicable Illness**

**Please remind your child that hand washing is the number one way to protect yourself and others from illness:**

Notify the nurse whenever your child is tested for a communicable illness (i.e. strep throat), including the test result. This is important for evaluation and advisement by the nurse of others who may become ill.

If antibiotic treatment is prescribed, your child may return to school **24 hours after the first dose**, provided they feel up to it.

Children who contract the following must remain out of school until the condition is no longer communicable.

Chicken Pox - 7 days after the appearance of vesicles and when all are dry crusted.

Conjunctivitis - after 48 hours of treatment if there is no longer any sign of discharge from the eyes.

Fungal Conditions (e.g. ringworm) - after 24 hours of antibiotic

treatment.

Lice and Scabies - until evidence of infestation has disappeared.

Staphylococcal Infections (e.g. boils) - after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment.

Streptococcal Infections (e.g. strep, impetigo) - after 24 hours of antibiotics treatment.

In addition, we expect all children at school **have not had fevers within the past 24 hours.**

## **TUITION AND FINANCIAL AID**

Tuition for each school year is established by a vote of the Board of Trustees.

There are three tuition plans that a family may elect:

- Full payment by June 1
- Two payments in June and November
- Monthly payments plans are available through FACTS Tuition Management.

A non-refundable enrollment deposit pro-rated depending on time of admission is required. Re-enrollment agreements for current families are sent out in late winter and due back in two weeks. A non-refundable deposit equal to 10% of the total tuition, along with the signed enrollment agreement, is required to hold a place for the fall.

**Financial Aid** is available. To apply for Financial Aid, families must submit an application to the School Scholarship Services for Financial Aid and copies of their federal tax forms to Touchstone's Financial Aid Officer. Financial Aid application forms are available in the school office. Families must re-apply each year. Awards for current families are announced by mid-April. All financial aid information is kept confidential and has no bearing on an applicant's acceptance to Touchstone.

## **“SPEAKING” TOUCHSTONE**

**TCS** - Touchstone Community School

**EDP** - Extended Day Program (our after school program)

**BOT** - Board of Trustees

**OSP** - Older Student Program (Touchstone’s Middle School)

**PLG** - Program Leadership Group

**P/T** - Parent/Teacher Conference

**News Notes** - Our weekly newsletter to parents

**Cubbie** - The place your child hangs their coat and puts their lunchbox

**The Circle** - The curved part of the Touchstone driveway where children exit their cars in the morning and are picked up at dismissal.

**The Ship** - The large wooden structure at the heart of our playground, in the back of the school

**The Pod** - The modular building that houses the 4 year old program.

**The Cottage** - The modular building that houses the OSP.

**Song Stairs** - The large wooden boxes in the Common Room open up and can be used as risers for choral performances.

Please let us know others you hear throughout the year you think should be added to this list.

## **QUESTIONS**

If this Handbook does not address your question(s) please speak directly to the person(s) concerned, who will be happy to help you.

If your question concerns daily operation of the school or interpretation of school policy, you should speak to Don Grace, head of school or Dave Secor, business manager.

If you have questions about payments to the school, reimbursements, or other financial matters, please contact Dave Secor.

If you have any questions about admissions, tours, or marketing, please contact Jennifer Weeden, director of admissions.



If you have a question about school events, News Notes, attendance, or to schedule an appointment with Don Grace, you should contact Joanne Ford, executive secretary.

For any physical health questions or concerns, you should contact Mary Durant, R. N., school nurse.

Questions about your child's class, academic or social issues are best answered by his or her classroom teacher(s). If the issue is not resolved after talking with the teacher, please contact Don Grace.

Questions about the Board or its committees can be directed to individual board members or to board chair Beckley Gaudette (see list of board members in the school directory).

**If there is a question or issue that arises that might be difficult to discuss or you're not sure who can address it, please call the office and Joanne Ford, executive secretary, will direct your call.**

You may have a question that you are reluctant to express or you may question whether we are interested in your particular concern. In these instances, please speak with Don Grace. He is responsible for fostering open communication within the community, and can respond to your concern or put you in touch with someone who can. And certainly, if you have any suggestions or ideas, share them with us; we strive to be a learning community, one in which positive change and growth is continuous.





