



Merritt Secondary School

CODE OF CONDUCT

Statement of Purpose

Merritt Secondary School takes pride in providing a high-quality education program within a safe and caring environment. In order to ensure that we provide a productive and safe environment for all students and staff we have a code of conduct to:

- Provide a foundation for the development and maintenance of a safe, caring and orderly environment for school members;
- Strike an appropriate balance among individual and collective rights, freedoms, and responsibilities;
- Outline and clarify expectations for students while at school, going to and from school, and at any school function or activity at any location.

MSS promotes the values expressed in the BC Human Rights Code respecting the rights of all individuals in accordance with the law – prohibiting discrimination based on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, physical and mental disability, gender identity and gender expression, sex or sexual orientation – In respect of discriminatory publication and discrimination in accommodation, service, and facility in the school environment.

Rationale

This code is based on principles of respect, rights, and responsibilities.

- Displaying Respect for the rights, property and safety of themselves and others.
- Honouring the Rights of others - through the process of learning and demonstrating appropriate behaviours.
- Assuming Responsibility for one's own behaviour in order to sustain a safe and productive learning environment.

Conduct Expectations

(Expectations described below are not an all-inclusive list, but are given in the spirit of the rationale given above)

All school members will demonstrate respect for themselves, others, and their school by:

- Treating school property and the property of others with a high standard of care and respect;
- Expressing themselves with language and gestures that are socially acceptable in a professional environment;
- Exhibiting behaviour that is free of all forms of intimidation, harassment, racism, and discrimination;
- Dressing in accordance with the school dress standards (as outlined below);
- Refraining from all types of violent acts;
- Informing a school official of any unsafe situation in a timely manner (individual or behaviour);
- Attending all scheduled classes and arriving on time;
- Refraining from disruptive or unnecessary behaviours that negatively affect the learning environment;
- Refraining from the possession of any form of a weapon, including replicas, while on school property;
- Refraining from the possession and use of all forms of intoxicants and tobacco (drugs, alcohol, etc.); including vapes, cigars and E-cigarettes;

- Complying with reasonable requests from staff, and responding to staff in a truthful manner;
- Following individual classroom rules; and,
- Modeling respectful and responsible behaviour, not only at school, but within the community as well.

These expectations apply to behaviour during school hours (**including the time to and from school**) at school, during school-organized or sponsored activities, and behaviour beyond these times (**including on-line behaviour**) that negatively impacts the safe, caring, or orderly environment of the school, and/or student learning.

Examples of Unacceptable Conduct

Unacceptable conduct includes (the areas cited are examples only and not an all-inclusive list):

Behaviours that:

- Interfere with the rights of others to learn (e.g. speaking disrespectfully to a teacher).
- Create an unsafe situation for any school member (e.g. not complying with safety procedures when working with equipment; skateboarding on school property; using a laser pointer on people; making threats; posting pictures on the Internet without specific permission).
- Distract others from focusing on instruction or concentrating on prescribed tasks (e.g. having a cell phone ring in the middle of a class or text messaging a fellow student within a class or in another class).

Acts of:

- Bullying, harassment or intimidation (e.g. directing intimidating behaviours toward another school member or systematically excluding an individual from a group activity).
- Physical violence (e.g. fighting or encouraging other school members to fight).
- Retribution against a person who has reported incidents (e.g. threatening to hurt someone because of their attempt to prevent a violent act).
- Any acts of a sexual nature outside of public displays of affection acceptable in a professional environment (the workplace).

Illegal acts, such as:

- Possession, use or distribution of illegal or restricted substances or their paraphernalia (e.g. being in possession of marijuana while at school or within the “Drug Free Zone” or associating with an individual or individuals who are in the act of using a controlled substance).
- Possession or use of weapons (e.g. having a knife at school or threatening a school member with a tool).
- Theft of or damage to property (e.g. tagging the walls in a school bathroom or stealing a school member's personal possession).
- Tobacco, E-Cigarette or Vaporizer use on school grounds.
- Sharing of inappropriate images, whether pornographic, defamatory or violent in nature.

Principal Authority

The Principal and his/her designates has a right under the School Act to discharge discipline from the time a student leaves home to go to school until such time as the student returns home at the conclusion of the school day. However, the Principal's and the District's authority also extend beyond the normal "home-to-home" rule when the behaviour of a student off school premises or after school hours adversely affects the operation of any school in the district for example, on-line communication, violent altercations, etc.

Rising Expectations

It is understood that students require assistance in developing and subscribing to these socially responsible values and behaviours. One role of school staff is to educate and guide student social development by increasing expectations and consequences as students mature both physically and socially. As a result, responses to behaviour will vary according to these variables. Generally, as a student matures, expectations will increase, and consequences will be adjusted accordingly.

Consequences

We believe that discipline is intended to promote the development of pro-social behaviours. To this end it is partially our responsibility to actively teach these attitudes and skills. In this process, it will be necessary to draw on consequences to enhance student learning. The use of consequences will be governed by the following principles:

Consequences will...

- be appropriate to the student's stage of development;
- reflect the intensity, frequency and/or duration of the inappropriate behaviour;
- be chosen primarily for their educational value;
- make sense to the student as much as possible; and,
- be appropriately timed.

Following are some examples of consequences that may be considered (it should be understood that this is not a complete list of consequences):

- Informal meeting with a student to address the situation
- Phone call to parent to discuss the situation
- Referral to School Based Team
- Mandatory tutorial time assigned
- Redo of formative or summative assessment
- Formal meeting involving student and guardian
- Make up or rehearsal time assigned (early morning, lunch, after school)
- Removal of an assumed school privilege
- Referral to Vice-Principal
- Restitution, either monetary or through school-based community service
- Restorative Justice
- Definite in-school or out-of-school suspension
- Indefinite suspension

*In addition, special considerations may apply to students with diverse abilities, if they are unable to comply with this code due to having a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature.

The following are some examples of consequences that would not be appropriate based on the established principles:

- Corporal punishment
- Use of academic work as a disciplinary procedure (e.g. assigning extra academic work to punish misbehaviour), use of an evaluation procedure as a disciplinary act (e.g. arbitrarily assigning a test to an individual or class that is behaving inappropriately)
- Using an individual as an example to deter misbehaviour in others (e. g. reprimanding an individual in front of his/her peers)

Notification

In instances where a student, or group of students, engages in a serious breach of the code of conduct, it may be necessary for school officials to advise other parties, however we cannot share information about other students at any time. Specifically, we will adhere to the following guidelines:

- Parents/Guardians of student offender(s) – in every instance
- Parents/Guardians of student victim(s) – in every instance
- School district officials – as required by school district policy
- Police and/or other agencies – as required by law
- All Parents/Guardians – when deemed to be important to reassure members of the school community that school officials are aware of a serious situation or incident and are taking appropriate action to address the matter.

In addition to the above, we have a responsibility to the district and the Ministry of Education to track and generically report data collected on student misbehaviour patterns. This information is used to determine trends, re-tool responses, and determine changes to existing policies and practices. If you have any questions about this code and related applications, please feel free to contact the school administration.

School District Expectations Regarding Student Behaviour

Every student shall be subject to the School Code of Conduct while on school premises, while going to and returning from school, and at all games and functions under the school's jurisdiction, whenever and wherever held.

Suspension

A "suspension" is, by definition, a removal of a student's right to attend regular class instruction sessions.

Suspension may be either:

- Definite (In-school or out of school) – up to ten school days, or
- Indefinite- in excess of ten school days

Administrators of schools, and teachers authorized by the Board of Education and the principal, may suspend a student when the Administrator or other authorized teacher concludes that:

- A student is willfully disobedient to a teacher or any other employee of the board carrying out responsibilities approved by the board;
- The behaviour of the student has a harmful effect on the character or persons of other students or staff members;
- A student fails to apply himself in his or her studies or fails to comply with the rules of the school and does not, after due warning, make a reasonable effort to reform.

School Search & Seizure Policy

Student, locker, backpack and vehicle searches may be made based on reasonable suspicions of a violation of school rules and/or law. The search shall be made pursuant to the reasonableness, under all the circumstances, of the search. The search of the student shall be justified at its inception, based on reasonable suspicion and reasonable scope in light of the age and gender of the student and the nature of the infraction. Contraband and other property unauthorized to be on school property or school sponsored activities will be seized for evidentiary purposes in a school hearing and/or legal hearing. Return of the property may be made to the parents/guardians of the student. Illegal contraband or other property will be turned over to the proper law enforcement.

Responsible Student Use of Personal Digital Devices, School Technology, and District Network Services

Student use of personal digital devices (any device used to communicate and/or access the internet), school technology, and district networks at school is for educational purposes.

The Merritt Secondary School personal digital device policy is designed to align with the Nicola Similkameen School District Code of Conduct for Students ~ Policy 502.1. The intent of the policy is to increase safety through minimized opportunities for cyberbullying and other inappropriate communication during instructional hours, as well as promote focused and productive learning environments. Restricting personal digital devices is likely to reduce the temptation for students to engage in off task and distracting activities associated with the devices (Smale et al., 2021). As part of the 2023 Adolescent Health Survey, Smith et al (2024) report that top reasons for student cell phone use in school included scrolling social media, connecting with family and friends, and gaming while only 11% of respondents did not use their phone for these activities.

Students will:

- Secure, power off and store personal digital devices during instructional (i.e. class time) at Secondary Schools unless instructed by the Principal or school staff;
- Use personal digital devices during instructional time for instructional purposes and digital literacy skills as instructed by the Principal or school staff;
- Ensure personal digital devices are not used in areas where privacy is expected, such as restrooms and change rooms;
- Be permitted to use personal digital devices to support accessibility, accommodations, medical and health needs;
- Always take precautions to ensure online safety, privacy, and security;
- Treat others with respect and kindness when using digital devices and district network services;
- Always use digital devices and district network services responsibly and with academic integrity.

Schools will ensure that all students have equitable and developmentally appropriate access to technology to meet curricular requirements. Students are not required to have their own personal digital device or cellphone at school.

The use of personal digital devices, school technology, and district networks is a privilege. Staff may revoke a student's access to devices because of inappropriate student conduct.

Violations of the school code of conduct could result in an appropriate tiered system of responses that may include restorative processes, disciplinary actions including suspension and police intervention.

References

- Smale, W., Hutcheson, R., & Russo, C. (2021). Cell Phones, Student Rights, and School Safety: Finding the right balance. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (195), 49-64. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1287931.pdf>
- Smith, A., Poon, C., Peled, M., Forsyth, K., Saewyc, E., & McCreary Centre Society. (2024). *The Big Picture: An overview of the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey provincial results*. McCreary Centre Society. Retrieved from https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_the_big_picture.pdf

Lockers & School Property

Lockers are the property of the school and are assigned to the students for school use. Students hold neither expectation of privacy in their lockers nor any other school property. Students leave articles of value in lockers at their own risk. School officials have the authority to search all school property (including lockers) at any time without notice, and to seize any property prohibited by law or school policy.

Dress Code

At MSS we require members of the school community to dress in a way that does not contravene standard professional practices and guidelines of health and safety in the building. This is a professional environment.

The following is a list of some specifics with regard to dress, but is by no means a complete list:

- Clothes should not display language which is sexual, explicit, prejudicial, defamatory or offensive to any members of the school community (swearing, etc.).
- Any references to drugs/alcohol/violence are prohibited on clothing.
- Visuals (pictures, logos, etc.) which are at all offensive to members of our school community are prohibited.