

AASD Elementary School Handbook

2024 – 2025



Principals:

Stephanie Hillman—Lynch-Bustin

Jordan Collum—SRU

Welcome to Athens Area School District! We are excited to be a part of your child's educational journey. As educators, we aim to have a profound and positive impact on your child's life. We look forward to sharing the next few years with you.

Your child will have an opportunity to belong to a caring school community. We will dedicate time every morning and afternoon to support development of social and emotional skills such as empathy and self-regulation. We believe that these skills are just as important as academics.

Below are some belief statements from our district's strategic plan.

Vision Statement:

Athens Area School District is a small community preparing learners to make a big impact as citizens and leaders in a global economy.

Mission Statement:

The mission of the Athens Area School District, in collaboration with family and community, is to ensure educational excellence by preparing students with the skills necessary to become life-long learners and responsible members of society.

Slogan:

Building foundations for future success!

Beliefs:

We Believe:

- **Continuous Learning:** Each learner, including adults, is curious, competent, and able to take an active role in their own learning.
- **Responsive Teaching:** Effective educators empower all learners to achieve personal excellence by being open, flexible, and responsive to their needs.
- **Positive Learning Environment:** A positive, innovative learning environment empowers all of us to grow through rich, authentic relationships both locally and globally.
- **Community Engagement:** Together as a community of families, educators and leaders we share responsibility to inspire our modern learners to be active, critically engaged global citizens.

One Student-Centered Goal:

All Athens Area School District students will graduate fully prepared to succeed as active citizens in the competitive workforce or college without remediation.

Strategic Focus Areas:

Goal 1: Student Achievement:

All students will graduate prepared for post-secondary education, and workforce entry and will make an impact as citizens in an ever-changing global economy.

Goal 2: Community Engagement:

All faculty and staff in the Athens Area School District are accountable for engaging its diverse community as partners to support and sustain a world-class education system.

Goal 3: Operations and Resource Management:

Optimize the use of capital, operational, and human resources to meet the goals of the school district for modernization of learning spaces, instructional innovation, and recruitment and retention of personnel.

ATTENDANCE

Regular school attendance is the number one factor in academic success and is compulsory in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The School Code of Pennsylvania establishes the only grounds for legal absence. These include personal illness, death in the immediate family, quarantine, impassable roads, religious holidays, and educational trips approved by the Principal. All other excuses are considered unlawful or unexcused. Accumulation of three days of unlawful absence will result in an official truancy notice being sent to the parents. Parents of students unlawfully absent beyond these days are subject to referral to magisterial district justice.

Under Pennsylvania law, a parent or guardian may be subject to the following if found guilty of a summary truancy offense by the district justice:

- Fined up to \$300 for the conviction and each subsequent violation of the compulsory school law.
- Required to complete a “parenting education program”; or
- Ordered to complete up to six (6) months of community service.
- If a parent/guardian fails to comply (i.e., defaults) with a sentence imposed by the magisterial district justice (examples: a fine, parenting education program, or community service), she or he may be incarcerated in the county jail for up to five (5) days and subject to a fine.

I. Excuses

- A.** If student is under the age of 18 or is eighteen or older and still living at home, the excuse must be signed by parent or guardian. If a student is eighteen or older and living independently, he/she may sign the excuse. He/she, of course, accepts the right with the knowledge that he/she is responsible for truthfulness, and he/she accepts the consequences of frequent absences.
- B.** The Attendance Office may make whatever checks they deem fit on the validity of excuses.
- C.** Temporary excuses (3) are issued by the Office if excuse was forgotten. If an excuse is not returned, the absence will be recorded as unexcused.

II. POWERSCHOOL ATTENDANCE CODES AND TIMES

Attendance for full-day absence will be deemed as excused or unexcused based on local policy and will be recorded as follows.

E: Designates a full-day absence deemed excused by the principal or accompanied by a doctor’s or legal excuse. A maximum of (10) days of cumulative lawful absence verified by parental notification shall be permitted during the school year. All other absences beyond ten (10) cumulative days shall require an excuse from a licensed physician. Parents and/or guardians have three (3) school days to hand in legal excuses or deemed an extension from the administration.

- **If a student comes to school and goes straight to the nurse and is sent home this will be an excused pm.**
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- **A student who leaves school for an appointment and returns will not be charged an absence.**

X: Designates a full-day absence deemed unexcused by the principal or with no excuse provided. Please mark all absences unexcused until a legal excuse is submitted.

EA (Excused AM): Any student who is excused for AM only and enters after 11:30 am.

EP (Excused PM): Any student who is excused for PM and leaves before 11:30 am.

UA (Unexcused AM): Any student who is unexcused for AM only and enters after 11:30 am.

UP (unexcused PM): Any student who leaves before 11:30 am and is unexcused.

ED (Early Dismissal): Any student who leaves after 11:30 is considered an early dismissal

Any student who enters before 11:30 am will be marked as Tardy

TE (Tardy Excused)- Any excused late arrival after the official start of the school day and before 11:30.

TU (Tardy Unexcused): Any unexcused late arrival after the official Start of the school day and before 11:30

PARENT COMMUNICATION

Once a student has three (3) or more unexcused absences in the current school year- meaning the student is “truant” It is the school’s responsibility to send a written notice explaining to the parent/guardian that their child is truant. The district must send this notice within 10 days of the student’s third unexcused absence. The notice must be in the language of communication that is spoken in the home, as indicated on the home Language survey when the child was enrolled. The Notice must include a description of the consequences if the student becomes “habitually truant.” The notice may also include an offer to meet to discuss the reasons for the student’s truancy so that a plan can be developed to overcome barriers so that the student can attend school regularly.

TEP/SAIC/SAIP-

Conference between parent and school to improve attendance.

6 unexcused Days- At six (6) unexcused days a meeting notification will be sent home requiring a SAIP meeting.

ACCOUNTABILITY

If the student reaches six (6) unexcused absences and the required SAIP has been held then it is the district’s responsibility to file a truancy violation in their local district court, the court will provide the parents/guardians the information on the hearing. At the hearing, it is the school’s responsibility to demonstrate burden of proof against the student and the adult/guardian that they are in violation of compulsory school attendance, this means that the child is aged eight (8) through seventeen (17), or is younger, but enrolled in school, and does not qualify for one of the exceptions to mandatory school attendance. They are deemed habitually truant.

Paperwork is orderly and easy to follow.

- 3 Day Letter
- 6 days TEP/SAIC/SAIP
- After SAIP is held the next unexcused absence may result in Magisterial filing.

FILING WITH MAGISTRATE

- Under Fifteen (15) years of age:
- The school must refer the child to either (1) A school-based or community-based attendance improvement program or (2) the county children and youth agency (CYS) for services or possible disposition as a dependent child under the Juvenile Act. Additionally, the school may file a citation against the parent of a habitually truant child under fifteen (15) in a magisterial district court.
- File against parent(s)/guardian

III.

Requests to Leave the School Building

- A. All requests to be excused must be clear and explicit as to the reason. There are only two ways for a student to be dismissed from school before the end of the day.
 1. The student must have an excuse form signed by parent or guardian,
 2. Parent/guardian must come to school personally and sign the student out. For the protection of all students, *a phone call will not be accepted.*
- B. No student is to leave the school without permission from the Principal, the Main Office, or the Nurse.
- C. In case of student emergencies (illness, accident, etc.), contact will be made only with those listed on student’s Emergency Card.

IV. Students Who Walk to School

Students must use the sidewalk when arriving/leaving school. Students are not permitted to cross the driveway while the buses are unloading/loading.

V. Late Bus

If a student arrives late to school because the bus was late, he/she is to report to the Office to sign in. This will not be recorded as anything against the student.

VI. Educational Trips

Students or parents should pick up the request form in the Main Office. This form is to be returned to the Main Office who will forward it to the Principal, who approves or denies these requests. Use an Educational trip form if you are going to dance recitals, competitions, sport events, trips, etc.) This should be accomplished at least five (5) school days prior to leaving. All work that is missed during the time the student is gone is your responsibility and must be picked up from your teachers prior to leaving, to be handed in the day of the student's return. **Only will excuse up to 5 days, and this will not count towards the 10 cumulative that requires medical notes.**

*** For students in state tested grade levels, Educational Trips will not be approved during state testing windows.**

VII. Take Your Child to Work Day

Documentation for the parent/guardian's place of employment must be provided in order for this to be considered a legal excuse. This form will need to have pre-approval from the principal to make this day a legal absence.

IX. School Hours

- A.** School begins at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. Students that are car riders will be dismissed at 2:55, all others 3:00 pm. A student is tardy after 8:05 a.m. Students who are in the building prior to 8:00 a.m. and after 3:00 p.m. must be under the direct supervision of a teacher, coach, or advisor. Students should not arrive to school prior to 7:45 a.m.
- B.** Any student or adult in the building after 3:00 p.m. or on weekends, without the supervision of a teacher or staff member, will be subject to arrest for trespassing.
- C.** Students may not loiter on any properties adjacent to the school property.
- D.** Once a student arrives at school, he/she cannot leave school property without written permission. All school rules apply.
- E.** Students riding the bus are not permitted to leave school property before boarding buses home.

X. Custody Papers

In situations where court-determined custody is in effect, the school district must be supplied a copy of the custody order. This will enable the district to maintain its impartial and unbiased position in these matters and prevent possible disruption or embarrassment for the child. Copies will be made free of charge by the school upon presentation of the custody order in the office of the building principal. All copies will be kept confidential.

ATTIRE

While we recognize a teacher or student's right for freedom, expression and comfort; our dress code policies reflect safety and respect amongst all who inhabit our school. Our goal is that each student and teacher attend school in respectful and safe attire with clean grooming practices. If a style demonstrates that it is disruptive to the educational process, constitutes a threat to the safety and health of self and/or others, or is in violation of any statute, it will not be permitted on our school property.

The following clothing will NOT be permitted:

- 1. Clothing which advertises tobacco, tobacco products, use of tobacco, alcoholic beverages or consumption of alcohol, drugs or drug paraphernalia, objectionable quotations or slogans, profanity or vulgarity, or racist comments.
- 2. Wearing hoods, hats, sunglasses, scarves, bandanas or head coverings except for medical or religious purposes.
- 3. Strapless tops, spaghetti straps, plunging necklines or arm lines in both front and back that displays the chest area.
- 4. Tops with sleeves narrower than a student's hand.
- 5. Dresses, skirts and shorts should be no shorter than approximately the finger-tip length of a student's arms at his/her side (including slits).
- 6. Any clothing that exposes undergarments or midriff areas.

7. Coats, scarves, gloves, or outerwear worn during class time.
8. Any type of footwear that is not safely secured around the heel of the foot (i.e., flip-flops), and closed toe, or high heels that affect stability.
9. Pajama attire, including robes, blankets, slippers, and pillows.

Students who violate the dress code shall be required to modify their appearance by covering or removing the offending item and, if necessary or practical, replacing it with an acceptable item. School administration will make all final decisions pertaining to any disputed item of clothing. Any person who refuses to adhere to the dress code policy shall be subject to further disciplinary action.

If a student or family needs assistance obtaining proper clothing, please contact the school office.

BEHAVIOR

Each school utilizes a school-wide positive behavior support system (PBIS). Emphasis is placed on teaching proper behavior, good citizenship, and rewarding good behavior. When students do break the rules or disrupt class, they may be assigned a consequence by the teacher or referred to the principal. Every effort will be made to communicate with parents/guardians when consequences are assigned.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SAP)

The Athens Area School District offers a systematic process using effective and accountable professional techniques to mobilize school resources to remove the barriers to learning and, when the problem is beyond the scope of the school, to assist the parent/guardian and student with information so they may access services within the community.

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) shall provide assistance in:[4]

1. Identifying issues that pose a barrier to a student's learning and/or academic achievement.
2. Determining whether or not the identified problem lies within the responsibility of the school.
3. Informing the parent/guardian of a problem affecting the student's learning and/or academic achievement except when student communications are made confidentially, in accordance with Board policy, laws and regulations.
4. Making recommendations to assist the student and the parent/guardian.
5. Providing information on community resources and options to deal with the problem.
6. Establishing links with resources to help resolve the problem.
7. Collaborating with the parent/guardian and agency when students are involved in treatment through a community agency.
8. Providing a plan for in-school support services for the student during and after treatment.

*Please contact the school office with any concerns you feel could create barriers to learning for your student.

COMMUNICATION

A strong home-to-school connection is integral to academic success. Parents/guardians should expect regular communication from their child's teacher. Responses to phone messages or e-mails should occur within 24 hours on school days. We encourage you to communicate regularly with your child's teacher as well.

DELAYED OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS

Weather-related or other emergencies causing delayed openings, early dismissals, and/or total cancellations will be communicated via parent link telephone calls and through the District SchoolInfoApp. Additionally, information will be broadcasted over the following radio/TV stations.

Radio

WATS 960 AM
WAVR 102.1 FM
WTTC 1580 AM
WHGL 1310 AM/100.3 F
WCIH 90.3 FM
WILQ 105.1 FM
WCII 88.5 FM

Television

WETM - Elmira
WNBF - Binghamton
WENY - Elmira
WNEP - Wilkes-Barre-PA
WYOU - Scranton/Wilkes-Barre

*Please **DO NOT** call the school or administration as this ties up telephone lines to bus drivers, teachers, etc.

**All Scheduled Early Dismissals will be 2 hours*

ILLNESS

Our schools are staffed with full-time nurses or health room assistants (HRA) who can assist with administering medication, deal with emergencies, or help students who are ill. If necessary, the nurse may contact the student's parents/guardian for permission to go home. If a nurse or HRA is not in the building, the student must report to the office where a school employee will contact the parent to pick up the child as quickly as possible and assume responsibility for his/her care.

HEAD LICE

If a student is sent home with a note from the nurse that live lice were found, then treatment is required before student returns to school. When sent by nurse it will be an excused absence, any additional days will be unexcused.

MEDICATION

All medication that must be taken in school must be left in the nurse's office. Written instructions from the child's physician, (Dr's order), as well as permission from parents/guardians to take the medication during school hours must be given to the school nurse. A record will be kept indicating date, time of day, dosage of medication taken, and signature of student. This record will become part of the student's permanent health record. The school cannot, due to policy restrictions, administer to any student Tylenol supplied by the school. The above criterion has to be met for any and all types of medication to be given during school hours. Additionally, the district use of medication policy is available in the school office for your perusal. Students are not permitted to bring their own medication to school or have medication in their possession.

FOOD

All food brought into the school that will be shared with other students, such as for classroom parties, etc. must be store bought, and in a sealed container from the store.

PRIVACY OF STUDENT RECORDS

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (Sec. 513 of the Education Amendments of 1974, P.L. 93-330) governs the access to student records by parents, students, and other persons. Therefore, it is necessary to have the written consent of parents of students under 18 years of age, or the student if 18 or over, for school records to be released to any person or agency outside the school. Consent forms are available in the Guidance Office.

STUDENT ACCIDENT INSURANCE

Student accident insurance is available through the school district. A brochure is available on the district at www.athensasd.k12.pa.us. Click District, then Documents to locate the brochure. If you have any questions, please contact your school office.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a privilege provided to students by the Athens Area School District. To maintain a safe environment, students are expected to follow school rules and driver directions while on the bus. Students may be removed from the bus as a consequence for not following the rules. According to Senate Bill 1077, the district has the right to video and audio record students when on school transportation, and these recordings may be used by the principal when reviewing incidents. Questions and concerns regarding transportation should be referred to the district transportation coordinator at 570-888-7766 (ext. 4104), or to the school principal.

AASD SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

The Athens Area School District recognizes that every student has particular learning needs. These needs can be met through a variety of options including the regular class, supportive services within the regular class, special classes, and special schools. To develop an effective educational program for each student, identification activities are available to discover individual strengths and weaknesses. This is done with the assistance of specially trained personnel to determine an appropriate educational program for each child. The process can be initiated by a written request from either school personnel or parent. The Athens Area School District is committed to providing each student with the opportunity to maximize their learning potential. Thus, we provide a continuum of educational settings and services to accommodate each student.

REFERRAL OF CHILDREN FOR SCREENING & EVALUATION

As prescribed in Section 1402 of the PA School Code, the Athens Area School District routinely conducts the following screenings:

HEARING ACUITY:	Kdg. through 3 rd grades, 7 th & 11 th grades
VISUAL ACUITY:	Kdg. through 12 th grades, Kdg. Registration (by request)
SPEECH/LANGUAGE:	Kdg. Registration, by referral and/or request
DENTAL:	Grades 1, 3, and 7
PHYSICALS:	Kdg. grades 6 and 11

Specified needs from all of these screening sources are noted within the child's official file. Parents with concerns regarding their student may contact building principals at any time to request, in writing, a screening or evaluation of their child. Communication with parents and exceptional students shall be in English or the native language of the parents.

SCREENING OF CHILDREN

Screening of children, using immediately available data sources such as health records, cumulative records, enrollment records and report cards, is conducted for hearing, vision, motor, and speech and language skills. Screening may lead to intervention by the Child Study Team (CST). This team is comprised of the building principal, regular classroom teacher, support teacher, and others as appropriate. The Child Study Team will communicate with the parents about the child's needs as well as instructional support services that will meet those needs. If a student does not progress with CST intervention, parents will be asked to give their written consent for the district to conduct individual, professional assessments.

EVALUATION OF CHILDREN

No evaluation may be conducted without written parental permission. Before a formal evaluation can begin, parents are to be provided with the following information:

- Notification of who referred the child for evaluation
- Notification of why the child was referred
- Opportunity to review the child's school records
- General schedule of evaluation activities
- Notification of rights of the parents regarding consent for evaluation

Evaluations are conducted by a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) to determine the child's learning ability, behavior patterns, physical abilities, and communication skills. The team is made up of the parents, teacher, principal, and school psychologist. The team may also include a special education teacher, supervisor, speech therapist, counselor,

and other staff as deemed appropriate. Methods used in the evaluation include observation, review of records, and group and individual testing. Information is gathered from school personnel, medical personnel, and parents as well.

Results of the evaluation are reviewed by the team to determine if the child is eligible for and in need of special education services. If a special education placement is recommended, the parents are expected to be a part of the team that determines the exceptionality and develops the Individual Education Program (IEP) for the child.

CHILD STUDY TEAM

As part of the general education program, multi-disciplinary teams of teachers meet regularly to review student academic progress and design intervention plans for students who are not making adequate progress. The goal of the Child Study Team is to ensure that all students receive the necessary services to help them succeed. These services are available to all students according to need and do not require a formal evaluation.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Each school district is obligated to provide appropriate special education programs, related services, and early intervention programs that are:

- Provided at no cost to parents
- Provided under the authority of a school entity-directly, by referral or by contract
- Individualized to meet the educational or early intervention needs of the child
- Reasonably circulated to yield meaningful educational or early education benefits and progress
- Designed to conform to an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Special education is designed to meet the needs of each exceptional student including “specially designed instruction conducted in the classroom, home, community settings, hospitals, institutions, or other settings. Instruction also is provided in skill areas such as physical education, speech, and vocational education.”

Early Intervention programs are “appropriate programs of educational development, specially designed to meet the needs of eligible young children and address the strengths and needs of the family.” Programs are provided to children with needs in any of the following developmental areas: physical, sensory, cognitive, language and speech, social/emotional, and self-help. Anyone wishing to pursue these services should contact the Intermediate Unit #17 directly at (570) 673-6001.

Related services available to students include transportation and developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that enable an exceptional student to benefit from his/her special education program. Examples include speech and language services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, social work services, school health services, and assistive technology services.

CHILDREN SERVED IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Special education services are available to children who have one or more of the following physical or mental disabilities:

- Autism
- Emotional Disturbance
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Deafness/hearing impairment
- Specific learning disability
- Intellectual Developmental Disorder
- Multiple disabilities
- Other health impairments
- Speech or language impairment
- Blindness/visual impairment
- Gifted
- Orthopedic Impairment

Early Intervention services are available to children who are at least three years of age, but less than the age of beginning school, and who have one or more of the same disabilities listed above as well as developmental delay. Early Intervention does not include gifted.

AASD SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The following programs are available at all grade levels:

- Emotional Support
- Gifted Support
- Hearing Support*
- Learning Support
- Life Skills Support
- Social Work
- Occupational Therapy (Educationally based)
- Physical Therapy (Educationally based) *
- Psychological Services
- Speech & Language Support
- Vision Support *

(indicates services contracted through Intermediate Unit #17)*

Placements within approved private schools, programs operated by other school districts, and partial or residential hospitalization programs may also be pursued as needed.

STUDENT RECORDS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Intermediate Units and School Districts are required by law to keep records on all students receiving special education and early intervention services. Included in these records are:

- Birth date, address, telephone numbers, and other general information
- Achievement test results
- Psychological test results
- Teacher progress reports
- Comprehensive evaluation reports
- Routine medical records

Every two or three years, for each mandated reevaluation, information is added to the file. Only school personnel are permitted to view a child's file. Anyone else must have written permission for a release of information to either view or receive copies of anything within a protected file. Parents can review the child's file and challenge the validity of any report or challenge the maintenance of information on file. Federal regulations give both natural parents access to their child's education records unless there is a court order, state statute, or legally binding document prohibiting access.

SURROGATE PARENTS

Federal legislation (PL 93-380 and PL 94-142) has established a number of measures to ensure the rights of handicapped children, including the right to a free and appropriate public education. To ensure that this right is realized by handicapped children whose parent or guardian is unknown or unavailable, the state requires that districts pursue a surrogate parent to represent the student. Districts must recruit, train, and select volunteer surrogate parents to aide in the identification of exceptional students and participate in the development of individualized educational programs. **If anyone is interested in obtaining more information on training to become a surrogate parent, please call the Bureau of Special Education Office at (814) 258-5649.**

NOTICE

For further information about these procedures or information about parent rights, mediation, due process procedures, or specific special education services, please contact:

Student Services
100 Canal Street
Athens, PA 18810
(570) 888-7766, Ext. 3289

You may also contact the Intermediate Unit's Procedural Safeguards Coordinator at (570) 323-8441.