

# **Thomas Ditson Elementary School**

**STUDENT AND Parent/Guardian**

## **HANDBOOK**



Section 1

**2021 – 2022**



## THOMAS DITSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

39 COOK STREET  
BILLERICA, MASSACHUSETTS 01821-4394  
978-528-8510  
Fax: 978-436-9537

Victoria S. Hatem  
vhatem@billericak12.com  
*Principal*

Julia Hannon  
jhannon@billericak12.c  
om

September 2021

Dear Ditson Families,

On behalf of our faculty and staff, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2021-2022 school year at the Thomas Ditson Elementary School! We invite you to become a part of the school and your child's education. As a team, we can work together to ensure that we build a strong foundation and provide the best possible elementary experience for your child(ren).

In an effort to encourage life-long learning, we as a learning community are committed to:

- recognizing and appreciating each student's individual strengths
- recognizing and accommodating different learning styles
- respecting and promoting diversity
- fostering moral and ethical values
- developing personal responsibility
- encouraging social, physical, emotional, academic and creative growth

The purpose of the handbook will assist you in understanding the procedures of our school. Should you have questions or concerns we encourage you to contact us at 978-528-8510. By working together with our families, we can affect the skills, habits and values of our students to ensure that they are set on the path for a future of many successes.

I look forward to working with you this year and forming the bonds and partnerships needed to provide every student with what they need in order to ensure their success here at school and beyond.

Sincerely,

Victoria S. Hatem

## **Table of Contents -**

### **School and District Information**

Mrs. Hatem's Welcome Letter	2
Central Service and Ditson School Directory	4
Vision and Mission Statements	5
Ditson Staff List	6 - 8
Ditson Daily Schedule	9
Bus Transportation	9
Arrival and Dismissal Procedures	10
Attendance Policy	11

### **Behavioral Guidelines**

Ditson BEEs Behavioral Expectations	12 - 13
General School Policies	14
Bullying Intervention/Prevention	14 -19

### **General Information**

Appropriate Dress	19
Birthday Celebration	20
Cancellations, Delayed Starts	20
Classroom Placements	20
Contacting School Personnel	20
CORI Checks	21
Custody Stipulations	21
Disciplinary Consequences	21
Electronic Devices	21
Emergency Drills	21
Field Trips	21
Fun Club	22
Homework	22
Illness	23
Instrumental Lessons	23
Kindergarten Screening and Kindergarten Registration	23 - 24
Open House & Parent/Guardian Conferences	24
Report Cards & Progress Reports	25
School Records	25
Safe School Guidelines	25
School Visitors	26
Vacations	26

### **School Nutrition and Cafeteria**

Cafeteria Prices, Meal Magic and Online Payments	26
Healthy Snack Ideas, School Parties and Celebrations	

### **Parent/Guardian Engagement**

Ditson School Association – DSA	27
School Site Council	

<b>Who to Call When You Have a Question – Guideline</b>	28
---	----

## **Central Services Directory**

Billerica Public Schools Website	<a href="http://www.billericak12.com">www.billericak12.com</a>
Billerica School Department Main Number	978-528 -7900

Superintendent of Schools	
Mr. Tim Piwowar	978-528 -7908

Assistant Superintendent, Instruction	
Dr. Jill Geiser	978-528 -7920

Director of Finance and Operations	
Ms. Robin Hulsoor	978-528 -7918

Special Education	
Mrs. Amy Emory	978-528-8590

### **Ditson School Directory**

Website	ditson.billericak12.com
---------	-------------------------

Main Number	978-528-8510
Principal	
Ms. Victoria S. Hatem	
<a href="mailto:vhatem@billericak12.com">vhatem@billericak12.com</a>	978-528 – 8510

Assistant Principal	
Mrs. Julia Hannon	
<a href="mailto:jhannon@billericak12.com">jhannon@billericak12.com</a>	978-528 – 8510

Secretary	
Mrs. Dorothy Maguire	978-528 – 8510
<a href="mailto:dmaguire@billericak12.com">dmaguire@billericak12.com</a>	

Nurse	
Mrs. Kendrah Lawton, Ms. Samantha Amico	978-528 – 8520

School Psychologist	
Ms. Kristina Sychtysz	978-528 – 8527

Social Workers	
Mrs. Judith Ross, Mrs. Dawn Webber	978-528 – 8510

Cafeteria	
Mrs. Debbie O'Neil	978-528 – 8525

DSA Co-Presidents	
-------------------	--

## Vision and Mission Statement

### **Billerica's Theory of Action**

Our approach to the education and CARE of children:

**C**OMMUNITY – fostering collaboration and partnerships

**A**TMOSPHERE – welcoming, safe, and respectful for all

**R**IGOR AND **R**ELEVANCE – preparing our students for college and career in the ever-changing global society

**E**XCELLENCE AND **E**QUITY – promoting and celebrating the inherent dignity of all

Because we **CARE**....our Vision, Mission and Core Values at the Ditson School are:

### **Vision**

The Ditson School strives to create an inclusive environment in which Parent/Guardians, guardians, faculty and staff work together to ensure that all students are provided the opportunity to feel accepted and grow as individuals both academically and socially and build a foundation of skills that will support them as they continue to develop into contributing members of society.

### **Mission**

In partnership with the Billerica Public Schools, the Ditson Elementary School is committed to creating a challenging learning environment that encourages high expectations for success through developmentally appropriate instruction that allows for individual differences and learning styles. Our school promotes a safe, caring and supportive environment where each student's self-esteem is fostered by positive relationships with students and staff. We strive to have our Parents/Guardians, teachers and community members actively involved in our students' learning. We recognize, appreciate and celebrate each student's strengths, respect and promote diversity, demonstrate mutual respect and caring while fostering moral and ethical values. We work toward developing responsibility for learning and encourage social, physical, emotional and creative growth.

### **Core Values**

All students means ALL students ~ Inclusiveness ~ Collaboration and TEAM work ~ Respect ~ Accountability ~ Community ~ Honesty ~ Shared Responsibility

# Ditson Staff

Name	Position	Department	Email Address
Amico, Samantha	School Nurse	Nursing	samico@billericak12.com
Accardi, Anthony	Custodian		accardi@billericak12.com
Arena, Tammy	Paraprofessional		tarena@billericak12.com
Baldwin-Morse, Stephanie	Speech and Language Pathologist	Special Education	sbaldwinmorse@billericak12.com
Bourgeois, Kate	Reading Specialist	Reading	kbourgeois@billericak12.com
Bouthillette, Patricia	Teacher	Grade 2	pbouthillette@billericak12.com
Buck, Laurie	Coach	Reading	lbuck@billericak12.com
Butler, Brianna	BCBA	Special Education	bbutler@billericak12.com
Clemente, Elizabeth	Speech and Language Pathologist	Special Education	eclemente@billericak12.com
Cook, Carol	Teacher	Kindergarten	ccook@billericak12.com
Cordeiro, Nicole	Teacher	Grade 1	ncordeiro@billericak12.com
Couvee, Andrea	Teacher	Grade 1	acouvee@billericak12.com
Cyrus, Christopher	Custodian		ccyrus@billericak12.com
Daye, Melissa	Teacher	Grade 2	mdaye@billericak12.com
Deshpande, Shruti	Paraprofessional		sdeshpande@billericak12.com
Devlin, Tricia	Teacher	Grade 4	tdevlin@billericak12.com
DeYoung, Amy	Team Chair	Special Education	adeyoung@billericak12.com
Di Stefano, Lisa	Special Education Teacher	Special Education	ldistefano@billericak12.com
Donohue, Alison	Occupational Therapist	Special Education	adonohue@billericak12.com
Downing, Olga	Teacher	Grade 3	odowning@billericak12.com
Fallon, Anita	Paraprofessional		afallon@billericak12.com
Farrell, Karen	Specialist Teacher	Library/Technology	kfarrell@billericak12.com
Graham, Diane	Teacher	Grade 3	dgraham@billericak12.com
Guinane, Andrea	Paraprofessional		aguinane@billericak12.com

Gunn, Brienne	Teacher	Kindergarten	bgunn@billericak12.com
Hamelin, Tara	Teacher	Grade 4	thamelin@billericak12.com
Hannon, Julia	Assistant Principal	School Administration	jhannon@billericak12.com
Hatem, Victoria	Principal	School Administration	vhatem@billericak12.com
Jennings, Leslie	Speech and Language Pathologist	Special Education	ljennings@billericak12.com
Kelly, Kerri	Paraprofessional		kakelly@billericak12.com
Knoettner, Bethany	School Psychologist	Special Education	bknoettner@billericak12.com
Kouloungis, Daphne	Teacher	Grade 3	dkouloungis@billericak12.com
LaCasse, Jennifer	Teacher	Grade 3	jlacasse@billericak12.com
Lavoie, Mark	Senior Custodian		mlavoie@billericak12.com
Lawton, Kendrah	Nurse	Nursing	klawton@billericak12.com
Lynch, Colleen	Connections Teacher	Special Education	clynch@billericak12.com
MacKenzie, Sara	Paraprofessional		smackenzie@billericak12.com
Maguire, Dorothy	Secretary		dmaguire@billericak12.com
Marshall, Mairén	Teacher	Grade 4	mmarshall@billericak12.com
McGuilicuddy, Maura	Specialist Teacher	Music	mmcguilicuddy@billericak12.com
McNamara, Jennifer	Teacher	Grade 4	jmcnamara@billericak12.com
Mediros, Jamie	Paraprofessional		jmedeiros@billericak12.com
Merluzzo, Paula	Paraprofessional		pmerluzzo@billericak12.com
Milanes, Jane	Teacher	Kindergarten	jmilianes@billericak12.com
Miller, Meaghan	Coach	Reading	mmiller@billericak12.com
Murphy, Valerie	Teacher	Grade 2	vmurphy@billericak12.com
Nawrocki, Patricia	Paraprofessional		pnawrocki@billericak12.com
Nolet-Downey, Meghan	Coach	Social Emotional Learning	mnolet-downey@billericak12.com
O'Neil, Debra	Cafe	Food Services	doneil@billericak12.com

Ouellette, Kara	Teacher	Kindergarten	kouellette@billericak12.com
Pascuito, Debra	Paraprofessional		dpascuito@billericak12.com
Petitpas, MaryEllen	Paraprofessional		mpetitpas@billericak12.com
Philbrook, Kerry	Special Education Teacher	Special Education	kphilbrook@billericak12.com
Pierce, Corey	Specialist Teacher	Health and Wellness	cpierce@billericak12.com
Rafferty, Robert	Specialist Teacher	Physical Education	rrafferty@billericak12.com
Robichaud, Nicole	Specialist Teacher	Art	nrobichaud@billericak12.com
Ross, Judith	Social Worker	Special Education	jross@billericak12.com
Ruggeri, Katie	Teacher	Grade 1	kruggeri@billericak12.com
Sabella, Toni	Reading Specialist	Reading	tsabella@billericak12.com
Seitz, Sue	Teacher	Grade 2	sseitz@billericak12.com
Shea, Catherine	Teacher	Grade 4	cmcnamara@billericak12.com
Sposito, Trina	Teacher	Grade 2	tsposito@billericak12.com
Steadman, Rachel	Special Education Teacher	Special Education	rsteadman@billericak12.com
Sterner, Katie	Connections Teacher	Special Education	ksterner@billericak12.com
Swinford, Celine	Teacher	Grade 1	cswinford@billericak12.com
Sychtysz, Kristina	School Psychologist	Special Education	ksychtysz@billericak12.com
Vecchi, Maria	Special Education Teacher	Special Education	mvecchi@billericak12.com
Walsh, Denise	Paraprofessional		dwalsh@billericak12.com
Webber, Dawn	Social Worker	Special Education	dwebber@billericak12.com
Woods, Brenna	Teacher	Grade 1	bwoods@billericak12.com



# Ditson Daily Schedule

## **School Hours – 8:35 – 2:45**

- **Students are allowed to enter the building at 8:25.** Students having breakfast at school are allowed in the building at 8:10.
- All Kindergarten students have a ½ hour lunch daily. Grades 1 and 2 will begin the year with a 25-minute lunch daily. Grades 3 and 4 will have a 20-minute lunch.
- All students have a 25-minute recess daily
- All students have a 45-minute special daily

## **Early Release Days**

Throughout the school year, early release days are scheduled for the purpose of parent/guardian/teacher conferences, professional development and teacher planning. These dates are listed on the school calendar. **Dismissal time for Early Release is 12:45.** Lunch is served on Early Release Days.

## **Half Days**

There are three (3) scheduled half days during the school year. These days are the Wednesday prior to the Thanksgiving break, the day before the Christmas break and the last day of school. Dismissal time on ½ days is 11:40 AM. Lunch is not served on ½ days.

## **Bus Transportation**

### **Eligibility**

Students who are eligible for bus transportation will be provided a bus pass from the child's school.

### **Bus End-of-Day Drop-Off**

Policy EEA: All K-4 students must have a Parent/Guardian or other approved individual present at the bus stop in order for the students to be released from the bus.

If no Parent/Guardian, guardian, or other approved individual is present, the student(s) will be returned to the school they attend for pick up. Year-long exceptions will only be valid with written consent from a Parent/Guardian /guardian submitted to the principal of your child's school.

# Arrival Procedures

With your child's safety in mind, we have established the following guidelines for morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up of students.

**Teachers are on duty at 8:25 in the morning. Students should not be dropped off before that time.**

- Morning entrance to the Ditson School over the bridge is limited to staff members, school busses, and Parent/Guardians who are dropping off students only.
- Parents/Guardians wishing to drop off students in front of the school may do so in the designated area only. Please note that this is for DROP OFF ONLY. At no time may the car be parked or left unattended. Teachers will be on duty inside and outside the school to make sure your child arrives at his or her classroom safely.
- Parents/Guardians who drive children to school and wish to walk them to the building MUST park in the lot before the bridge near the basketball court and walk over the bridge to the school.
- All students who are being dropped off must be dropped off via the use of the car-line.
- Grade level drop off areas are designated. Parents will be informed of these areas prior to the start of the school year.
- Please do your best to keep the flow of traffic moving safely by not getting out of the car yourself.

## Dismissal Procedures

### Early Dismissal

If a child is being dismissed prior to the end of the school day, a Parent/Guardian must report to the main office before picking up the student and sign them out in the main office. If a student is going to be dismissed to an adult other than the Parent/Guardian, the school must be informed in writing of the name of the person picking up the child. Identification will be checked. Children will not be dismissed early to walk or bicycle home alone.

### End of Day Dismissal Procedures

Dismissal procedure for students who are dismissed for car pick-up:

- Cars will proceed through the parking lot to the designated pick-up area for their child's grade.
- Teachers will be assisting students into the cars
- Please place your car tag on the dash or on the driver's side window. We will call students by car number
- To maintain safety Do NOT pass the car(s) in front of you and please follow the directions of the teachers on duty

- Parents/Guardians who wish to walk to the building to pick up their child must park before the bridge near the basketball courts and walk over the bridge.
- At pick-up, students will be designated either as a Bus Student, Pick-Up or Walker. **Any change to this designation must be communicated to the office *in writing* in order to facilitate the change. This notification must occur prior to 2:15, unless there are dire circumstances to support the change.**
- Reminder: There is NO VEHICLE ACCESS from McHugh Avenue to the Ditson School. This IS NOT a drop-off or pick-up area.

### **Dismissal Procedures for Bus Students**

Bus numbers will be called over the loudspeaker and students will walk to the front of the building, follow the direction of the teachers on duty, and board their bus. Bus numbers are called a second time to ensure all students have ample time to make it to their bus.

### **Dismissal of Walkers**

Walkers will be dismissed from the side door closest to the kindergarten playground.

## **Attendance Policy**

According to Chapter 76, Section 1, of Massachusetts General Law, students are expected to attend class every day that school is in session. Billerica Public Schools believes that regular and punctual school attendance provides an essential foundation for educational progress and assists students in developing habits necessary for success in college and career. Students who are absent miss critical classroom instruction, opportunities for social interaction with teachers and peers, and clarification of assignments. Extended absences impair academic progress and undermine student grades. The goal of the Attendance Policy is to ensure that each student keeps their absences to a minimum so that they can take full advantage of the educational program and actively participate in the school community.

### **Absences**

**An *excused* absence/tardy includes:**

- Documented illness or injury signed by a medical professional on letterhead
- Bereavement/family funeral
- Major religious observances
- Extraordinary family circumstances (excused at the discretion of the principal)
- Documented court proceedings
- At the high school level up to three days for college visits

**An *unexcused* absence/tardy** is not covered by the aforementioned definition. Examples of an unexcused absence may include, but may not be limited to:

- Repetitive or chronic absence or tardiness due to illness or injury not documented by a doctor or other medical professional
- Family vacations
- Non-emergency family situations

*When a child is absent or tardy, the Parent/Guardian must call or email the designated attendance line by 8:35am on the same day. You can leave a message 24 hours a day. If a call or email is not received, the school will call the Parent/Guardian informing them of their child's absence.*

*Ditson School Attendance Line Info  
978-528-8513  
ditsonabsent@billericak12.com*

- After a student is absent three (3) consecutive days, the school nurse will also call home.
- When a student accrues 5 unexcused absences, a letter will be sent home, describing an action plan for addressing the students' attendance.

## **Behavioral Guidelines**

The Ditson School strives to develop well prepared citizens for both school and the world by consistently teaching and reinforcing respectful and responsible behavior throughout the school community through the use of a positive behavior system we call DITSON Bees.

We continually notice students showing expected behaviors and reward them with Bee tickets to acknowledge their respectful and responsible behavior.

On the following page is the DITSON matrix indicating expected behaviors in certain areas of the school building, on the playground, and on the bus. We encourage you to review the matrix with your child(ren) and have discussions with them about the matrix, expected behavior and the DITSON Bee program within the school.

## DITSON Bees' Expected Behavior Matrix

School-wide Rules/ Expectations	Typical Settings/ Contexts					Bus
	All Settings	Hallways/Stairwells	Bathroom	Cafetorium	Recess	
Dependable	Be on task Do your best Be prepared	Walking quietly Ex. "You talk, you walk."	Report problems to an adult Wait quietly for your turn Report if bathroom needs supplies	Cleaning up after yourself	Pick up the equipment Line up when asked Pick up after yourself	Stay in seat Stay in section No food, drink, or gum
Inclusive	Include others	Stay with your class	Flush your business for others Give others privacy and space	Take turns sitting with others Invite different classmates	Invite another student to play Include everyone Take turns	Sit with a buddy who is alone Take turns sitting with others Have pleasant conversations
Trustworthy	Take ownership for your actions	Stay in your spot	Do the right thing Use what you need	Eat your own food	If a problem arises, tell the truth	If a problem, arises tell the truth Do the right thing
Safe	Walk in all situations except for an emergency Check for shoelaces Use hand railing if needed	Hold door for others Hands to yourself Shoes tied Stay to the right when walking	Use safe hands and feet Report unsafe behavior to an adult Keep area clean	Eat your own food Use a respectful voice volume	Use equipment properly – balls, etc. Report unsafe behavior to an adult	Know the emergency drill Hands to ourselves Feet on floor Stay seated Hands inside of the bus
Open-eared	Teachers are the "Bee Keepers" of their room	Listen to teachers' directions Zero noise while walking	Report problem to an adult	Look and listen when another is speaking Use a respectful voice	Listen to adults on duty	Listen to the bus driver/monitors Follow directions Listen for when your Bus is called at dismissal
Nice	Use kind words/actions Be a good citizen	Hands to yourself Hold doors for others Use polite words Excuse me, thank-you	Use kind words and actions	Use a respectful voice to adults Keep food at your place not on the walls, floors	Use kind words/actions	Use polite words Such as; hello, goodbye and thank-you Use appropriate language

# **Student Code of Conduct**

## **General School Policies**

The students at the Ditson School are forbidden to engage in the following activities during school time or during school sponsored functions:

- Possession of dangerous weapons (i.e., sharp objects, knives, etc.). Toy weapons are not appropriate in the school setting.
- Possession of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.
- Defacing, damaging, destroying, or stealing school or personal property.
- Improper behavior that disrupts or interferes with the operation of the school, classroom, or school assemblies.
- Possession of inappropriate literature, CDs, pictures, notes, etc. and the use of offensive language.
- Intentionally causing or attempting to cause emotional and/or physical injury to another person (i.e., bullying, teasing, harassment).

Children who fail to comply with the established codes of discipline will be reported to the Principal and/or the Assistant Principal for disciplinary action, which may be any of the following:

Reprimand/Consequence  
Parent/Guardian Notification  
Detention  
Suspension

## **Billerica Bullying Intervention/Prevention Plan**

The plan listed below is a brief overview of the full Billerica Bullying Intervention Plan, which was developed by the Billerica Public Schools. The elementary student handbook addition was developed so that our youngest students can begin to understand the concept of bullying, the impact of bullying, and the interventions necessary to maintain a safe learning environment.

**In May 2010, Massachusetts passed an anti-bullying law.** The law defines bullying as **repeated** written, verbal, or electronic communication, or a physical act or gesture that happens during school, at the bus stop, on the bus, or while walking to and from school. This also includes before and after school activities or out of school activities that carry into the school.

These include, but are not limited to, actions that:

- cause physical or emotional hurt or pain to a student, or causes damage to a student's property. For example: making another student cry.
- make a student feel unsafe. For example: a physical or nonverbal threat against another student, thereby creating a hostile environment.
- disrupt another student's ability to learn. For example: a student cannot complete their work because he or she feels upset with being teased at recess or after school.
- affect a student's ability to make friends and feel included. For example: not including others in play or at work.
- disrupt the entire school. For example: a rumor starts and the whole school is impacted.

### **Definitions:**

**Cyberbullying** is bullying that includes but is not limited to phone and computer communications such as texting, emails, photos, video, instant messaging, blogs, and web pages.

This includes:

- pretending to be another person
- knowing another student is pretending to be another person
- posting of inappropriate material that can be viewed by others that creates harm

A **hostile environment** is an unsafe environment

An **aggressor** is the bully.

The **target** is the student being bullied.

For this document, the **Principal** refers to either the Principal him/herself, or his/her designee.

The **complainant** is the person who initially reports a potential incident of bullying.

A **bystander** is a person who is present at an event or incident but does not take part.

### **How Bullying at School Is Handled**

When the Principal at your school gets a complaint of bullying, the Principal will speak with the complainant and /or the “target” to gain understanding of the events, timeline, and individuals involved. The facts will be studied, and the Principal will determine whether the incident report is considered bullying by the definition of bullying. **The Principal has two options for resolving school-related conflict: informal and formal.**

**First Option: Informal Resolution**

If the Principal decides that this incident can be resolved through conflict resolution, the “target” and “aggressor” will be brought together and the incident will be discussed. The Principal will help the two parties resolve the conflict. The Parent/Guardians/guardians of both sides of the conflict will be notified by the Principal (as required by state and federal laws). S/he will discuss the issues and the resolution or non-resolution of the incident. When the conflict is resolved and everyone is satisfied with the resolution, the conversation between the students will remain confidential and no further actions are taken.

If any of the people involved in the informal conflict resolution are not satisfied with the outcome of the intervention, they may officially call for the second option, formal resolution.

**Informal Complaint-Steps Made Simple (See “Billerica Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan” for complete information regarding this procedure)**

1. Report bullying to any adult in school.
2. The principal will investigate the complaint.
3. If appropriate, the students will be brought together.
4. The principal will try to get the students to work out the problem.
5. Principal will contact the Parent/Guardian of students involved to report the complaint, the resolution or non-resolution of the conflict.
6. Those students involved have the option of filing a formal complaint if not satisfied with the solution, or they may choose to have the complaint handled formally at any time.

**Second Option: Formal Resolution**

**Step One:**

The complainant will submit an Initial Bullying Reporting Form

**Step Two:**

The Principal will conduct an investigation, using the Bullying Investigation Form to document progress. The Principal will interview students, look at electronic, written, and verbal information, investigate past and current patterns of behavior, gather when, where, how and why the incident occurred, establish the relationship of the students involved, and make a determination if the policy on bullying has been broken. The investigation will be completed within fifteen (15) school days (barring extenuating circumstances) from when the incident is reported.



**School officials may take immediate action to protect any students identified as involved in the incident, even before the investigation is completed, if the investigator feels this is needed. This includes the assistance of appropriate professionals and/or agencies. Anyone who reports incidents of bullying, whether they experience it themselves or reports an incident of bullying that occurred to someone else, is entitled to such assistance.**

**Step Three:**

Once the Principal receives all the information, s/he will review results of the investigation and decide what disciplinary actions are necessary. Decisions concerning disciplinary action will occur within five school days.

Discipline may include reprimand, detention, suspension, expulsion, academic interventions or other punishments. In extreme circumstances, the Police can be notified. Alternatively, “targets” and “aggressors” may be recommended for therapy and/or guidance, if such formal methods of intervention are deemed appropriate to the situation.

**Step Four:**

The Principal will keep a written record of the incident, the investigation, and the intervention/discipline.

Parents/Guardians of all students involved in the reported incident will be notified of the result of the investigation. In cases where it is determined that bullying did occur, Parents/Guardians of both the target and aggressor will be sent a formal Parent/Guardian Notification of Bullying Incident. The discipline of the “aggressor” will be kept confidential and will follow the law. This notification will occur within 5 school days.

**Formal Complaint- Steps Made Simple (See “Billerica Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan” for complete information regarding this procedure):**

1. Complainant files Initial Bullying Reporting Form to Principal.
2. Principal (or designee) will investigate the report through an interview of students involved, bystanders, and review of all additional information (within 15 days). Principal documents investigation with Bullying Investigation Form.
3. Principal determines if the incident(s) or pattern of behavior breaks the policy on bullying.
4. Principal reviews all information regarding the incident or pattern of behaviors.
5. Principal determines disciplinary actions; a bullying education component may be included in or added to these disciplinary actions (within 5 days).
6. Principal notifies Parent/Guardian of all students involved (within 5 days).
7. Law Enforcement might be notified if deemed appropriate.
8. Confidentiality and Disciplinary Codes are followed as the law requires.

**Appeals**

Refer to the “Billerica Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan” for more detailed information on the implementation plan for the Massachusetts State Law on bullying prevention, as well as the appeals process.

To have the complaint investigated again, complainant must write a letter to the superintendent outlining the reasons why he or she is requesting another investigation. The request **MUST** be received within 7 days of receiving the results of the first investigation.

### **Confidentiality**

The confidentiality (privacy) of the complainant, target, aggressor, and any witnesses will be respected as much as possible.

### **Making a False Accusation:**

Any student who reports a false accusation of bullying or retaliation will be subject to discipline including, but not limited to, reprimand, detention, and/or suspension.

## **Questions**

### **What can I do if I am the target of a bully?**

**Don't be afraid to report the bullying.** The bullying will often get worse if you do not report what is happening to your Parent/Guardians, your principal, and your teacher. Teasing and bullying can make you feel isolated and alone and can damage your self-esteem. Protect your self-esteem by asking for help. **Telling on a bully is not tattling.** Adults want help to be sure you are safe both at school and outside of school. Some tips on what you can do to empower yourself and to stop the bullying include:

1. If you feel comfortable, tell the bully to stop what they are doing that is bothering you. This may be easier if you have a friend with you.
2. If possible, remove yourself from the area that the bullying is occurring. For example, if it is happening at recess find the teacher and let them know what is happening to you. If this adult does not take action tell another adult.
3. Do not start teasing the bully or hit them.
4. Tell other adults that you trust including the school principal, the school counselor/school psychologist, the school nurse, and your teacher. You will need to have someone to talk to about how you are feeling as well as to have the reassurance that the bullying will not reoccur.
5. When reporting the bullying try to be as specific as possible. It is important for the principal to know who is the bully, when is the bullying occurring, where it is occurring. The principal will also want to know if the bullying has happened before and for how long it has been occurring and if there have been witnesses to the bullying such as other students or school staff.

6. Tell your Parent/Guardians about the bullying immediately. They will take their own follow-up steps to ensure your safety at home and at school.
7. Tell yourself that it is not your fault. Believe that you do not deserve to be mistreated by a classmate or student at school or on the bus or at outside of school activities.

### **How can I help my child if he or she has been bullied?**

1. Listen calmly to your child about what is occurring. Try to be comforting without letting your child know how upset you are about what is happening. Remaining in control will help you to focus on your child's feelings and be able to ask the specific Who, What, When, Where questions that will be required to gain a full understanding of what is occurring. Take notes about *what your child is sharing* so that you can thoroughly answer the questions that will be asked of you when you make a report to the school principal.
2. Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings with a school counselor. Contact the school counselor to grant permission for them to meet with your child.
3. Remember to reinforce that your child should not try to engage the bully or decide to take matters into his or her own hands by hitting the bully.
4. Practice role playing what your child would do if he or she found themselves with the bully.
5. Advise them to stay in groups of their friends and not to be alone in areas where the bully could speak to them without the benefit of witnesses.
6. Reiterate that they are not at fault for the bullying and that they did the right thing by sharing what was going on with you.
7. Reassure your child that you will work with the school to protect them and ensure that the bullying does not occur.
8. Spend time with your child on their preferred activities that will bring them some joy.
9. Arrange some social events with your child's peers which would be positive for them.

## **General Information**

### **Appropriate Dress**

The style of dress or appearance is generally determined by the student and Parent/Guardians. However, students should consider health, safety, and weather conditions when selecting school clothing. Clothing that presents a danger to the health or safety of a student or is distracting to the educational process is not permitted. Any article of clothing seemingly offensive either by appearance, language, or intent will be considered inappropriate.

Students should arrive well-groomed and appropriately dressed for school activities. We recommend clothes and shoes that are comfortable and practical for activities such as physical education, outdoor recess and art projects. If a student's attire is inappropriate for school activities, the parent/guardian will be notified and asked to bring a change of clothing.

### **Birthday Celebrations**

Invitations to birthday parties should be mailed to children unless the entire class is being invited. Invitations will not be distributed in school or on school grounds, unless all students in the class receive an invitation.

Each child's birthday will be announced daily on morning announcements during the week surrounding the child's birthday. Summer birthdays will be announced in June. ***We encourage Parent/Guardians to donate a book the library in honor of their child's birthday.***

## **Cancellations, Delayed Starts and Unscheduled Early Release**

Families will be notified via phone call, social media posts, and local TV and radio stations of school cancellations, delayed openings, and unscheduled early releases.

Please be sure that emergency dismissal information for your child is clearly written on the office emergency card sent home in September. Any change in the dismissal arrangements should be made in writing to the classroom teacher.

Should the Superintendent of Schools determine an early dismissal is necessary, students will be sent home before the end of the day. **IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE Parent/Guardian TO INSTRUCT THEIR CHILDREN IN THE PROCEDURE THEY WANT THEM TO FOLLOW, I.E. WHICH NEIGHBOR TO GO TO, ETC.**

### **Classroom Placements**

The team of grade-level teachers and other staff members, including the principal, assistant principal, SEL Team, and special education personnel, collaborate to determine classroom placement. There are many factors that go into student placement such as striving for a reasonable balance of boys and girls, a balance of student abilities, and reasonable class sizes. In addition, consideration is given to the placement of students with various learning styles and needs of children matching the teaching strategies used by staff. The process begins in early March, and the students will participate in a Move-Up day in June where the students will have the opportunity to meet their next year's teacher.

### **Contacting School Personnel**

Communication among all the stakeholders, students, Parents/Guardians, and teachers is essential to providing a positive elementary experience. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to call, email, or arrange to meet with their child's teacher to discuss their child or any concerns you may have.

In an effort to reduce paper consumption, newsletters and announcements will be sent out electronically. Hard copies of all correspondences can be sent home to families that don't have email access.

## **CORI**

All adults who work or volunteer at the Ditson School must complete a background check. The CORI (Criminal Offenders Record Information) request form needs to be filed in the main office. A photo ID will also be required. Please allow approximately three weeks for processing before you can volunteer.

## **Custody Stipulations**

It is important that you inform the office of any custody stipulations/restrictions that are in place. It is the Parent/Guardian's responsibility to provide legal documentation each year. All matters will be handled in a confidential manner. Our priority is the safety and well-being of each child. The school will remain neutral on all issues.

## **Disciplinary Consequences**

Consideration of other forms of social justice and cooperation with adults will help all children be successful at the Ditson School. We expect children to solve problems through discussion rather than physical contact. An adult is always nearby to help with conflict resolution, through student and staff discussion, reasonable and appropriate guidelines for self-control and good citizenship will be reinforced.

As a PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports) School and being guided by our Behavior Matrix expectations, Ditson students rarely require disciplinary actions. Teachers, administrators and staff make every effort to resolve issues informally. If the rules are disregarded, appropriate action will result through teacher and/or principal involvement. This may, at times, include a lunch or recess detention during the school day.

## **Electronic Devices**

Cell phones, and all other electronic communication devices are not permitted during the school day or on the buses. In the event that it can be demonstrated that the use of a device is a necessity during the day or on the bus the Principal/Assistant Principal may waive this policy to accommodate the needs of a particular student.

Students are prohibited from using a cell phone or other device to record conversations, send & receive text messages, take pictures, or other such communication.

The school is not responsible for the loss of electronic devices and or cell phones.

## **Emergency Drills**

Fire drills are held four times a year to test the mechanical fire alarm system and to teach students the safest way to exit the building in case of a true alarm. Upon hearing the alarm, students are to exit the building quickly and quietly under the direction of the teacher. In addition, our staff and students practice "lock down" procedures on a regular basis, using the ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate) protocol.

## Field Trips

Field trips are a voluntary extension of the classroom and serve to enrich the curriculum. Any student who chooses NOT to participate in a field trip must still attend school. At the discretion of the principal/assistant principal, a student whose behavior in the days prior to a field trip is deemed unsafe for the field trip may be required to remain at school. A supplementary lesson will be provided. The school's core values and community rules that are applicable within the school also apply to the field trips. Students participating in field trips must submit a signed Parent/Guardian consent form prior to each scheduled trip.

Students must be present on the day of the field trip to participate. For example, if a student is absent on the day that their class goes on the field trip, they will not be allowed to go on the field trip with another class.

No student will be denied access to a field trip due to lack of the family being able to pay for the field trip.

## Fun Club

**The Fun Club** is a joint effort between the Billerica Boys and Girls Club and the Billerica School Department and is solely run by the Billerica Boys and Girls Club. The club is held in the cafeteria of the Ditson and there is a cost to the program. Please arrange for consistent alternate transportation (i.e. Bus, pick up, etc.) if your child is not attending Fun Club all five days. If you have any questions regarding Fun Club, please direct them to the Billerica Boys and Girls club, 978-667-2193.

## Homework

Homework is an excellent way for students to apply, review, and practice skills taught in class. It helps students learn to accept responsibility and learn to work independently. Therefore, all students are expected to complete all homework assignments. Homework is generally assigned Monday through Thursday. The amount of homework assigned is based upon what the average child will be able to accomplish in the time prescribed in the following table:

Kindergarten	15–20 minutes
Grade 1	20-30 minutes
Grade 2–3	30–45 minutes
Grade 4–5	45–60 minutes

Students in all grades are expected to read independently or be read to for 20–30 minutes at home on a daily basis.

In addition to daily homework, students may also be assigned long-term projects. With these assignments, Parents/Guardians are encouraged to monitor their child's progress on a regular basis in order to avoid a last-minute rush for completion.

Parents/Guardians are urged to create a positive attitude toward homework and if possible, provide a quiet place for the work to be done in addition to checking its

completion. Children should be encouraged to put completed homework in a folder or a backpack each night. This will eliminate confusion the following morning. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to communicate with the teacher about any problems, concerns, or questions they may have about homework.

### **Illness at Home**

If your child has a fever, diarrhea, vomiting, or other symptom of illness, please don't send your child to school until the symptoms are gone for 24 hours. Children with contagious diseases, strep throat, conjunctivitis, impetigo, etc. may not return to school until 24 hours after the start of an antibiotic.

### **Illness at School**

It is not uncommon for children to become ill while at school. We require all Parents/Guardians to fill out a health history and an immunization report so that we will know your child's reactions to illness. Also, we require Parent/Guardians to sign an emergency form so that we provide emergency medical care if necessary. Please know that the school will make every attempt to reach the Parent/Guardian or designated person before independently deciding upon emergency care.

When a child is at school and exhibits an abnormal fever, diarrhea, vomiting, rashes or general and uncharacteristic malaise, the Parent/Guardian will be called and requested to pick up their child immediately. We recognize that illnesses are often untimely and inconvenient; however it is vital that children who are ill be picked up as soon as possible.

### **Instrumental Lessons**

Students entering the fourth grade may begin the study of a string, wind, or percussion musical instrument. During the course of the year, group lessons are held once a week for thirty minutes during the school day. *Students are responsible for any missed classroom work.* During this time, students are instructed in all aspects of learning to play a musical instrument including instrument care, tone production, note reading, and comprehensive musicianship. Upon attaining a basic performance standard, students in the first year are invited to play in either the Andante String Orchestra or Silver Band. Those students in the second year who continue to meet performance standards play with either the Allegro String Orchestra or Emerald Band. Throughout the school year, students perform numerous concerts with these ensembles, as well as solo and small group performances for both the school and community.

### **Kindergarten Screening**

Kindergarten screening is provided by the Billerica Public Schools within the last few weeks of the school year prior to entering kindergarten the next school year. The children are screened in the areas of vision/hearing, fine motor/gross motor, speech and language, cognition, visual motor and visual memory. Children with problematic development will be referred, with Parent/Guardian permission, for further testing and possible specialized intervention. For further information, call the school office.

## **Kindergarten Registration**

Kindergarten registration will be held after winter vacation. Parents/Guardians should make every effort to register their child at their home school at this time. Orientation for incoming kindergarteners and their Parent/Guardians will be held in the spring and fall before the session begins.

A child is eligible to enter Kindergarten when:

- The child is five years of age on or before August 31, of the year.
- A birth certificate is required
- Proof of Residency
- An immunization certificate covering the following is presented: diphtheria, measles, mumps, polio and pertussis.
- An examination by the family physician is required within six months preceding entrance, and every three to four years thereafter.

## **Open House Night and Parent/Guardian Conferences**

Parent/Guardian conferences can be arranged with your child's teachers at any time convenient to both parties. Arrangements can be made by sending a note to the teacher or calling the office.



A Back to School Open House will be held in September.

Formal Parent/Guardian conferences are held during the year (see schedule below), with afternoon and evening appointments scheduled by teachers.

### **Fall Conference:**

Thursday, November 4, 2021 (Afternoon) 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. & (Evening) 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

### **Spring Conference:**

Thursday, March 31, 2022 (Afternoon) 1:00-3:00 p.m. & (Evening) 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.





## **Report Cards and Progress Reports**

Progress reports are issued three times a year, at mid-term. A progress report is a non-graded report informing Parent/Guardians of their child's academic and social development. Comments are encouraged to enhance communication between Parent/Guardians and teachers.

Report cards are distributed three times a year. The report card has a detailed explanation of the marking system used to communicate each child's progress toward the curriculum standards established for that grade level in the Massachusetts Curriculum Standards. Progress report and report card schedules are noted in the monthly school calendars.

## **School Records**

The vast majority of the materials found in student folders are duplicate copies of materials given to the child and Parent/Guardians: report cards, standardized test information, etc. Regulations pertaining to the release of information about students shall be in conformity with Sections 34A, 34B, and 34E of Chapter 71 of the General Laws, Chapter 71B of the General Laws and Section 13 and Chapter 76 of the students' rights of confidentiality, inspection, amendment and destruction of student's records. Parent/Guardians of Billerica students or the students themselves, when they reach eighteen years of age, may review their records as maintained by our schools upon written request.

If you are moving from Billerica, please come to the school office to sign a records release form. Your new school district will request your child's records soon after you register with them. We cannot furnish records without your written consent.

## **Safe School Guidelines**

The Ditson School makes every effort to ensure an effective and safe school environment. Students and teachers promote themes of good character and follow the code of the DITSON matrix on a daily basis.

All doors are secured while school is in session, and the staff is trained in evacuation and safety procedures. School, Playground and Cafeteria Rules are established and enforced; students are supervised at all times. There is staff monitoring the hallways before school and during dismissal. In addition, our school has developed a crisis plan to address emergencies that arise unexpectedly. Grade-level leaders assist with communication during a crisis, and designated staff members work together to respond to and manage any crisis situations. Follow-up services, such as notification letters summarizing the situation and describing available support services, are provided when necessary.

The Ditson is a smoke-free school. There is no smoking permitted in the building or on the school premises.

### **School Visitors**

School policy is to accept only those visitors who have legitimate business at the school. All adults are required to enter and exit via the main entrance, which is monitored by cameras and requires authorized entry. As a matter of courtesy and safety, all guests, visitors, and Parents/Guardians must first report to and register at the office upon entering the building. After signing in, visitors are required to wear an identification badge.

### **Vacation Policy**

We believe it is an educationally unsound practice to remove your child from school for family vacations and strongly discourage family vacations when school is in session. In addition to compromising the attendance law, family vacations interrupt the educational process in each subject area in ways that make-up work cannot reverse. *No packet of homework can replace instructional time spent in the classroom with a teacher; therefore, we will not provide advanced assignments.* Upon your child's return to school, they will be responsible for missed lessons and important assignments. We hope you will make every effort to schedule your family's vacations during our regularly scheduled school vacations.

## **School Nutrition and Cafeteria**

***School breakfast and lunch will be free of charge for all students for the 2021-2022 school year.***

### **School Parties and Celebrations**

Whenever food is offered as part of the celebrations, we encourage healthy and nutritional food choices. Healthy celebrations are an important part of providing a healthy school environment. Children are excited about new and different things, including fun party activities and healthy snacks.

When Parents/Guardians send in food, it is difficult to ensure the safety of children with food allergies. Schools can protect food allergic children by providing non-food celebrations or, if food is served, obtaining it from known sources such as the Billerica School Food Service Program. *Schools can provide a safe positive learning environment by providing healthy celebrations that shift the focus from the food to the child.* Due to allergies and other circumstances, it is mandatory that parents/guardians reach out to the classroom teacher for approval prior to sending anything into school for celebrations. The final decision is at the teacher's discretion. Staff members are encouraged to use non-food incentives and rewards in place of using food or candy. When food is served, make it count with healthy choices!

In accordance with the District's Wellness Policy, nutritious snacks are recommended.

- Low-fat or nonfat plain or flavored milk, 100% juice, water, flavored/sparkling water (without added sugars or sweeteners), sparkling punch (seltzer and 100% fruit juice)
- Fresh fruit - wedges or slices, Dried fruit, 100% fruit snacks
- Fresh vegetables – baby carrots, grape tomatoes, celery sticks, cucumber spears, red and green pepper strips, cauliflower and broccoli florets with reduced fat dressing or yogurt-based dip
- String cheese, cheese cubes or slices with whole grain crackers
- Low-fat pudding cups, low-fat yogurt squeeze packs or cups
- Pretzels, low-fat popcorn, trail mix, Animal crackers, graham crackers, oatmeal raisin cookies

## **Parent/Guardian Engagement**

### **Ditson Parent/Guardian Association**

The Ditson Parent/Guardian's Association is a non-profit organization formed to offer support to students and staff and to enhance the educational atmosphere at the Ditson School. This is done by organizing the various volunteer programs, like the Library Program. The DSA also raises funds through book fairs, fundraisers, walk-a-thons and many other means to help defray the cost of school activities and to provide the school with the extras not available through the School Department budget.

All Parents/Guardians of children attending the Ditson School are considered members and are encouraged to participate in the DSA. An elected Board consisting of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer lead the group according to established by-laws.

Board Members can be reached at home by phone or by sending a note to the school office. A list of current Board Members is sent home each fall with a volunteer flyer informing Parent/Guardians of where their help is needed during the year. The DSA also holds regularly scheduled open meetings to answer questions and plan for upcoming events. All Parents/Guardians are welcome and encouraged to attend these meetings.

### **Ditson School Council**

One of the provisions of the 1993 Education Reform Act requires each school in Massachusetts to elect a school building council with its members composed of the principal, Parent/Guardians, teachers, and members of the community. The council is representative of the Ditson community and provides a vehicle to advise the principal of policies and programs at this particular school. The school can provide information to Parents/Guardians on the specific details, utilizing the Ditson School Improvement Plan developed annually by the Ditson School Council.

## **Who to Contact When You Have a Question or Concern**

Smooth and efficient communication and close collaboration between home and school is important to the success of students. The guidelines below are intended to help Parent/Guardians know who to contact if they have a question and or concern. The Ditson School uses a collaborative approach to develop effective solutions and some situations may involve multiple staff. We try to respond as soon as possible to Parent/Guardians' inquiries, but please be mindful that teachers and staff are in class and meetings for most of the day.

### **When to contact the teacher:** (Email is the best method)

- Questions about assignments, homework, test/quizzes, and/or projects
- Questions about progress report(s) and/or grades
- Questions/concerns about classroom dynamics
- Questions/concerns about your child's relationship with the teacher

### **When to contact your child's special education teacher, school psychologist, speech pathologist, and other service providers:** (Email is the best method)

- Questions about classroom accommodations and modifications
- General questions about your child's academic progress and/or service delivery
- Questions/concerns about and/or for your student's paraprofessional
- Questions about setting up an IEP Team Meeting

### **When to contact the social worker:** (Ms. Judi Ross or Ms. Dawn Webber) (Either via phone 978-528-8512, 978-528-8637 or email)

- Questions/concerns about your child's relationships with peers
- Questions/concerns about your child's social emotional well being
- Questions/concerns about a situation that you are unsure how to handle

### **When to contact the school nurse: (Ms. Lawton or Ms. Amico)** (Either via phone **978-528-8520** or email)

- The health of your child has changed
- Your child's prescription has changed or will need to be refilled soon
- Health concerns about your child that teachers need to know

### **When to contact the assistant principal, Ms. Julia Hannon or Principal Ms. Victoria Hatem**

(Either the phone 978-528-810 or email)

- After you have processed through all the above steps or:
- For a concern that there is an issue of safety or well-being with your child
- After you have contacted other staff members and still have an issue that you feel has not been resolved
- If you are unsure about who to contact or how to resolve a situation.

### **Main Office Contact Information (Mrs. Dorothy Maguire)**

- Phone number: 978-528-8510

- Designated Attendance Phone: 978-528-8513
- Fax # 978-436-9537
- Aspen Family Portal -allows you to access attendance, progress reports and report cards
  - For support with Aspen please email: [portalhelp@billerica12.com](mailto:portalhelp@billerica12.com) please include child's name and Parent/Guardian's name.