

Dearborn STEP

Assessment Program



Student and Caregiver Handbook

Scott McGinn, Director

2026 - 2027 School Year

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MISSION AND VISION

Mission

At Dearborn STEP, our mission is to rekindle each student's spark for learning and engagement by creating a supportive, structured environment where they can rediscover the joy of being a student. We are committed to partnering with caregivers to provide guidance, understanding, and resources that strengthen the home-school connection. Through thoughtful observation and assessment, we work closely with sending districts to offer meaningful insights into each learner—empowering teams to make informed, compassionate, and effective decisions that pave the way for student success.

Vision and Core Values

At Dearborn STEP, our vision is to create a learning environment where curiosity guides discovery, collaboration drives growth, and community anchors every experience. We believe students are best understood when they have opportunities to engage authentically, build meaningful relationships, explore their strengths and needs, and experience success.

Our three core values shape how we approach learning, relationships, and the assessment process:

Curiosity

We approach learning, ourselves, and others with openness. We encourage students and staff to ask questions, try new things, and develop a deeper understanding of themselves as individuals.

Community

We strive to create a place where students experience connection, belonging, and shared ownership.

Every member of STEP contributes to an environment where people feel valued, supported, and able to participate as themselves.

Collaboration

We believe growth and understanding happen through working together. Students, caregivers, STEP staff, districts, and outside providers each bring important perspectives. Through collaboration, we develop a fuller understanding of each student and what they need to move forward successfully.



OUR COMMUNITY PRINCIPLES

Respect

Recognizing the dignity, perspectives, needs, and boundaries of ourselves and others.

Identity

Developing an understanding of who we are, including our strengths, needs, experiences, and identities, while valuing those of others.

Safety

Working together to create an environment where people feel physically and emotionally secure enough to learn, participate, and grow.

Empathy

Seeking to understand the experiences and feelings of others and responding with compassion



SCHOOL HOURS / CONTACT INFORMATION

School Address

575 Washington Street | Newton, MA 02458

School Hours

Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays

8:15 a.m. – 2:30 pm

Wednesday

8:15 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

Telephone Numbers

Fax		781-641-1769
Main Line		781-641-1761
Scott McGinn, M.Ed.	Director	Ext. #2
Kris Blake, LICSW	Clinical Director	Ext. #3
Catlin Pires, M.Ed.	Special Education Teacher/MCAS Administrator	Ext. #4
Dr. Johnson	Psychiatrist	Ext. #5
Kate Richardson, LCSW	Lead Clinician	Ext. #6
Clinical Intern Office	Clinicians	Ext. #7
Colleen Manning, MS	Lead Clinician	Ext. #8



PROGRAM INFORMATION

Caregiver Participation

Caregivers are essential participants of the Dearborn STEP Assessment. We can ensure that the school experience will be successful for students only by working together. Caregivers regularly communicate with school staff (clinical, educational, and administrative) to plan, evaluate, and share information. These interactions may take place in various formal and informal ways, including team meetings, weekly reports, weekly phone calls, and caregiver meetings. The primary contact person for caregivers will be the student's assigned clinician.



Reporting Absences

If your child will be absent from school, please call 781-641-1761 x1 or send an email to smcgin@dearbornstep.org and kblake@dearbornstep.org. If leaving a message, please include the reason for the absence. Regular daily attendance and active participation in all aspects of the program are important for students to make significant progress. It is our standard policy to call home when a student is absent. Program attendance is reported to the sending school district.

Weather Related Cancellations

The STEP program will follow Newton Public Schools' decision concerning delayed openings or cancellations due to severe weather.

If the sending school district is closed due to severe weather conditions and STEP is open, the student caregivers are welcome to provide transportation for their child to and from STEP. If students cannot attend, the day will be considered excused.

Acceptable-Use Policy

STEP provides on-site technological resources to all students for the purpose of meeting our educational mission, vision, and goals. We use Google products like Google Classroom as a tool to enhance our instructional practices and create opportunities for learning. Here are the uses and conditions of Google that we follow. [Google Terms of Service](#)



HEALTH AND NURSING

Illness

Any student with a fever, a communicable disease, or who is too sick to attend school should stay at home. Students should not return to school until they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the aid of medications.

If a student at school has a fever or other indication of illness, a caregiver will be called, and the student will be sent home.



Food Program

Breakfast, snack, and lunch are offered daily at no cost to students or caregivers. Students are permitted to bring their own breakfast or lunch if they prefer and the facility has a student refrigerator if needed.

Students and staff will be alerted to, and abide by an allergy policy when necessary.



Medications

STEP medical forms are required from caregivers and prescribing physicians to dispense any medication to students.

A licensed nurse is available for students who must take prescription medication during school. Medication must be in original labeled containers and will be kept in a locked medical closet. Students are not allowed to carry any medication (OTC or prescribed) on their person unless a special arrangement has been made with the director and nurse. Over the counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil), Tums and allergy medication may be dispensed with written permission.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING

Academic Overview

The educational curriculum is individualized for each student. At intake, STEP and the sending district create a plan.

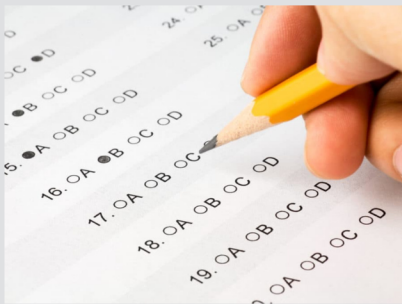
It is important to note that the STEP program is designed to include clinical and social opportunities for the students. As a result, there is less time in the week to complete academic work than in most long-term school settings. Students participate in core subject classes ranging from 40-55 minutes each. Each student is pulled from one of these classes per week to take part in a clinical session with a primary clinician. Due to other program priorities, students are unlikely to maintain a traditional academic pace. Still, grades and credits can be obtained and provided to the district.

Credit / Report Cards

Students earn credit toward their sending school district while enrolled at STEP. Because each district has its own system for awarding credit and issuing report cards, STEP uses a Pass/Fail grading system for students who participate in our structured classes. Districts may request a STEP report card, which is typically formatted to represent one quarter (45 days) of a 180-day school year. These reports are generated at the conclusion of a student's placement at STEP.

MCAS and Academic Testing

While enrolled at STEP, students are eligible to participate in MCAS testing. If a district would like STEP to administer the MCAS, this should be communicated during the intake process. Districts must transfer the student to STEP in the DESE portal, and STEP will administer the MCAS on site. Caregivers who wish to opt their student out of testing should communicate directly with the district.



STEP also offers formal academic testing using the KTEA-3. This assessment is typically provided to students who have not had formal testing within the past year. If a student has had recent academic or neuropsychological testing, additional formal testing is generally not conducted. When administered, KTEA-3 results become a component of the final STEP assessment.

CLINICAL PROGRAMMING

Clinical Overview

The clinical component of STEP includes weekly individual therapy, group counseling (2-3 times a week), electives, and weekly community-based activities. Each student is assigned a counselor and is expected to meet during scheduled sessions and actively participate in the counseling process. Therapeutic check-ins are available as needed throughout the school day.



STEP Psychiatrist

STEP utilizes a part-time psychiatrist who meets with students during the evaluation. The goals and objectives vary depending on each individual case. In general, the psychiatrist is a resource for caregivers and students who may need psychoeducation, collaboration with providers, or support around medication.

Therapy Dog

Both Dearborn Academy and Dearborn STEP share the use of a therapeutic dog named Grizzly. Grizzly makes appearances at STEP and can be helpful to students who may find some time with the dog helpful!



MILIEU PROGRAMMING

Our milieu programming includes a wide variety of learning opportunities including:

- Electives
- STEAM
- Life Skills
- Art
- Gym



Alternative Learning Opportunities

Alternative learning opportunities—often including community-based activities—are integral to the program and occur every month. These types of activities range from recreational and educational to community service. Some past examples of these opportunities include:

- Lunches at Cabots
- Trips to parks
- Apple picking
- Social games on site (board games, Wii, etc.)
- Baking
- Volunteering (ie. Cradles to Crayons)
- Creating care-packages for troops
- Museum visits
- Historical sites
- Rock climbing

Staff may determine that it is not in the student or community's best interest to participate in an off-campus outing. In such cases, alternate programming will be provided for the student on-site.



COMMUNICATION AND MEETINGS

Weekly Reports

These written updates describe each week's academic, social, emotional, and milieu progress. These weekly reports are emailed as an attachment to caregivers and districts.



Weekly Phone Calls with Clinician

Clinicians coordinate with caregivers on setting up a time for weekly check-ins.

Caregiver Meeting

During the first week at STEP, our Clinical Director and Clinician will coordinate an in-person caregiver meeting. These meetings run approximately 90 minutes and provide an essential opportunity for the team to hear about the student and caregiver journey.

Midpoint Meeting

A virtual meeting between caregivers, the district, and STEP will occur approximately at the "midway" point of a student's time at STEP. These meetings aim to bring the team together and for STEP to verbalize the educational, clinical, and milieu observations.



The information conveyed in the meetings is much of the content found in the Weekly Reports. However, caregivers and the district can ask the attending STEP team members clarifying questions.

Comprehensive STEP Assessment

A comprehensive assessment will be completed for each student enrolled in the program for over thirty days. These reports, which provide a comprehensive summary of a student’s time at STEP and final recommendations, will be sent to districts and caregivers 48 hours before the final meeting.



Final Assessment Meeting

A final meeting will occur on approximately the 40th school day of a student’s time at STEP. This meeting includes caregivers, representatives from the sending school system, STEP staff (teacher, clinician, and administrator), and any collaterals approved by caregivers and the district.

At this meeting, STEP staff will review the formal assessment and recommendations.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Living RISE

RISE provides a shared framework for how members of the STEP community are expected to approach learning, interactions, challenges, and one another. Because every student comes to STEP with different strengths and needs, these principles may look different from student to student. Staff work with students to understand and practice these expectations throughout their time at STEP.

- RESPECT** Treat others with dignity. Respect differences, boundaries, property, learning, etc.
- IDENTITY** Be yourself. Learn about your strengths and needs. Respect the identities and experiences of others. Practice self-advocacy.
- SAFETY** Help maintain physical and emotional safety. Use technology appropriately. Maintain appropriate boundaries. Seek adult support when needed.
- EMPATHY** Consider how your words and actions affect others. Listen to different perspectives. Repair relationships when harm occurs.



POLICIES

Dress Code

To promote a healthy learning environment, students are required to adhere to the following guidelines:

All students should dress in a manner that supports their learning and the learning of others. While students are generally free to determine their own style, if a student is wearing clothing that impacts the learning environment, a clinician or administrator will make a plan for the day.

Clothing must not state, imply or depict hate speech or imagery that target groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation, or any other classification.



Alcohol Tobacco, Vaping, and Drug Use

Dearborn STEP Assessment remains committed to maintaining a smoke-free environment. It recognizes that the smoking of tobacco or the use of any tobacco product, including smokeless/chewing tobacco or electronic devices (i.e., vapor/E-cigarettes), can have serious health implications for everyone in the school community. Smoking or use of any tobacco product, including chewing tobacco and any (M.G.L., Chapter 71, Section 2A) electronic smoking device (i.e., vapor/E-cigarettes), whether it contains tobacco or not, is not allowed within the school building, on school grounds, school-sponsored events or school transportation vehicles.

Students found in possession of any tobacco product or tobacco-related paraphernalia in the building, on school property, or school buses will have the product confiscated by an administrator. They will be subject to a program response that may include termination.

Touch and Physical Conduct Policy

Dearborn STEP has clear expectations around touch and physical contact for the clinical well-being of students. Staff are trained on maintaining boundaries with students and are also trauma-informed. To ensure the safety and well-being of staff and students, STEP adheres to the following expectations:

Prohibited Forms of Contact

- Hugging/kissing/acts of physical intimacy
- Hand-holding
- Horseplay
- Massaging/rubbing in any way

Permitted Forms of Contact

- Handshakes
- High Fives
- Fist-bumps

Phone Use

Dearborn STEP is committed to creating a learning environment that fosters focus, engagement, and meaningful connection. As part of this commitment, STEP is a phone-free space for students.

Upon arrival, students will place their cell phone, Apple Watch, and/or AirPods into a lockable Yondr pouch. Students will lock the pouch and keep it with them throughout the day. At dismissal, a staff member will unlock the pouch so students can access their devices before leaving.

We understand that some students have become reliant on cellular devices for various reasons. STEP staff will work closely with these students to support a smooth transition. We believe that removing phones during the school day will encourage deeper engagement in learning, allow for more authentic peer interaction, and support a more accurate assessment of each student’s strengths and needs.

Caregivers may continue to contact STEP staff to relay important information or communicate with their student if necessary.

For more information about the Yondr pouch system, please visit: <https://www.veryondr.com/phone-locking-pouch>.





Bullying Prevention & Intervention Plan

In keeping with Massachusetts Anti-bullying law, M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O(b), All acts of bullying and cyberbullying are prohibited. Retaliation against a person who reports bullying provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited.

We expect that all members of the STEP community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences. We are committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment free from bullying and cyberbullying. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning and prevent and eliminate bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

Staff, students, caregivers, guardians, or others may report incidents of possible bullying. Staff members will report immediately to the program director when they witness or become aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. The program director will immediately assess the alleged target's sense of safety and take steps to provide protection from further incidents. The director will conduct a thorough investigation and contact the caregivers of the students involved regarding the outcome.

Dearborn STEP Assessment Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

In keeping with Massachusetts Anti-bullying law, M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O(b), acts of bullying and cyberbullying are prohibited:

- (i) On school grounds and property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased, or used by a school district or school; or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, and
- (ii) At a location, activity, function, or program that is not school-related through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school district or school, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the target or witnesses, infringe on their rights at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited.

The school expects that all members of the school community will treat each other in a civil manner and with respect for differences.

The school is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment free from bullying and cyberbullying. This commitment is an integral part of our comprehensive efforts to promote learning and prevent and eliminate all forms of bullying and other harmful and disruptive behavior that can impede the learning process.

Reporting an Incident of Bullying

Staff, students, caregivers, or others may report incidents of possible bullying. Staff members will report immediately to an administrator when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. Reports from others may be made anonymously, in writing, by phone, or by email, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Students, caregivers, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. Students may report and discuss an incident of bullying with any staff member, their counselor, or an administrator. In all such cases, the school's confidentiality policy applies. Information that might affect the safety of others cannot be held in confidence.

Responding to a Report of Bullying or Retaliation

Before fully investigating an allegation of bullying or retaliation, the administration will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; and identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target. Administrators may take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The administration will implement appropriate strategies for protecting a student from bullying or retaliation who has reported bullying or retaliation, a student who has witnessed bullying or retaliation, a student who provides information during an investigation, or a student who has reliable information about a reported act of bullying or retaliation.

Notice to Caregivers

Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the administration will promptly notify the caregivers of the target and the aggressor, as well as the procedures for responding to it. There may be circumstances in which an administrator contacts caregivers prior to any investigation.

Notice to Law Enforcement

At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the administration has a reasonable basis to believe that a law has been violated, the administrator will notify the local law enforcement agency.

Investigation

The administration will promptly investigate all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved.

During the investigation, the administration will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, caregivers, and others as necessary. Whoever is conducting the investigation will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

The administration or other staff members may conduct interviews. To the extent practicable, and given our obligation to investigate and address the matter, the administration will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process.

Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with school policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, administrators will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

Determination

Administration will make a determination based on all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, we will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or benefiting from school activities. Administrators will:

1) Determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Administration will promptly notify the caregivers of the target and the aggressor about the investigation results and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, administrators cannot report specific information to the target's caregiver about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of to report violations.

Responses to Bullying

If it is determined that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the school use a range of responses and disciplinary actions that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. Discipline will be consistent with the Plan and with the school's code of conduct.

If the administration determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student may be subject to disciplinary action.

Dearborn STEP's administration will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of others.

Definitions

Bullying

Bullying is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof directed at a target that:

- i. Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- ii. Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- iii. Creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- iv. Infringes on the rights of the target at school; Or
- v. Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings.

Retaliation

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

