

# South McKeel Academy

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## Student Handbook 2025-2026

[www.southmckeel.com](http://www.southmckeel.com)

Principal: Michelle Poppell  
Assistant Principal K-3: Lisa Hancock  
Assistant Principal 4-6: John Massung  
Director of Schools: Michele Spurgeon

### Mission Statement

Through innovative teaching methods, technology and experiences in the classroom and beyond, South McKeel Academy will endeavor to produce students who have fostered a love of learning, a spirit of community, and an ability to be successful in tomorrow's world.

### Absences/Tardiness/Checkouts

At The Schools of McKeel Academy, regular attendance is essential for academic success, and it is expected that children attend school every day. To support this, please schedule medical and dental appointments for your child after school hours whenever possible. Students arriving late should be accompanied into the school office by a parent or guardian and signed in. If a child attends less than 50% of a school day, they will be marked absent. In alignment with Florida State Statute (Title XLVIII, Chapter 1003.26), which mandates regular school attendance throughout the entire school year, we are committed to ensuring that all students maintain consistent attendance. Excessive absences, tardies, or early checkouts will be reviewed by administration to identify the causes and determine appropriate actions. Persistent attendance issues may lead to dismissal from South McKeel Academy.

#### Uploading Documentation for Absences

Parents can submit documentation for absences by logging into McKeel Systems and selecting attendance. There is an option to "upload note".

#### Attendance Warning (10 or more unexcused absences)

After a student has accumulated 10 days of absences, tardies, or early checkouts the parent will receive an automated attendance message notifying them that their student has reached an excessive number of absences. Parents are responsible for monitoring their child's attendance records in McKeel systems. Instructions for viewing attendance can be found at: <https://www.mckeelschools.com/departments/information-technology/tutorials/mckeel-systems/attendance>

#### Attendance Contract (15 or more unexcused absences)

If a student reaches 15 unexcused absences, they will be placed on an attendance contract. A parent or guardian will be required to attend a meeting to review attendance expectations. The contract will remain in effect for the remainder of the school year. Students on an attendance contract may be unable to participate in extracurricular activities including field trips, field days and house days. **Ongoing attendance issues may lead to dismissal from South McKeel Academy.**

## **Truancy law**

Florida law defines “truant” as a student who has 15 or more unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge or consent of the student’s parent or guardian.

**There are no checkouts allowed after 2:15 PM.**

## **Behavior Expectations**

### **Purpose of South McKeel Academy Behavior Expectations:**

- Provide students with a knowledge base of how work ethics affect their learning and production in a working environment.
- Teach students basic skills based on school being their job.
- This is a teaching tool, designed to reward students for proper behavior in the classroom and on the campus.

### **South McKeel Academy Behavior Expectations:**

All South McKeel Academy students are required to follow the behavior expectations listed below. Three violations of these expectations, in the same category, will result in one infraction.

1. Follow directions
2. Takes responsibility for own actions; demonstrates self-control
3. Completes and submits quality classwork
4. Listens respectfully and acknowledges the thinking of others
5. Displays best effort
6. Uses technology in accordance with school policies
7. Follow uniform policy

Rewards and incentives will be put in place at the discretion of the classroom teacher.

For students in grades K-6, behavior notifications will be sent via email through the McKeel Systems site ([systems.mckeelschools.com](http://systems.mckeelschools.com)). Both parents and students can log in to view the student’s behavior log. Detailed instructions for viewing warnings and infractions are available at: <https://www.mckeelschools.com/departments/information-technology/tutorials/mckeel-systems/behavior>

This system enables teachers to instruct their students in proper behavior for school and the workplace. Misbehavior in the classroom will result in an infraction for minor and major offenses. The student may also be referred to the office for more serious breaches of conduct.

### **Any violation of the following will result in an infraction or in more serious cases a referral to the office:**

Any violation of any of the following will result in **one infraction**:

1. Disrespectful behavior toward peers or property of school/others
2. Unauthorized area (out of assigned area)
3. Unauthorized items - food, gum, candy, toys
4. Horseplay (pushing, hands on another person, etc.)
5. Disruptive behavior (Level 1)
6. Personal communication device infraction (including displaying good digital citizenship)

Any violation of the following will result in **two infractions**:

1. Inappropriate language or actions in the presence of others (including cussing, name calling)
2. Defacing/destroying school property
3. Disruptive behavior (Level 2)
4. Disrespectful behavior (including lying) toward authorities
5. Cheating (including plagiarism)
6. Recurring personal communication device infractions

## **Serious Breaches of Conduct**

The following are considered serious code violations. Any violation of these or others listed in the **Student Code of Conduct** will result in an automatic office referral which may lead to multiple infractions, student suspension and/or dismissal from South McKeel Academy.

- Abusive language or conduct directed at an adult Assault/Threatening others
- Battery/Fighting Bullying (verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, cyberbullying)
- Forgery/False Information/False Reporting or Alarms Defiance (openly)
- Continuous Disruptive behavior Drugs Leaving campus without permission
- School bus safety/Misconduct on school bus
- Spitting at or on another person or their property
- Stealing Weapons of any kind Disruption of the educational process
- Audio/Video recording others without teacher permission
- Use of/misuse of personal communication devices
- iPad/Computer misuse including conducting internet searches for or viewing adult content

The Code of Conduct can be found on the South McKeel website. Other breaches of conduct are outlined in the PCSB Code of conduct found on the PCSB website.

Students and/or parents may anonymously report bullying activity on SMA's website.

## **Levels of Consequences**

The accumulation of infractions is per semester for grade K-3. Students in grade 4 will reduce overall levels by one at the semester break. The accumulation of infractions for grades 5-6 is for the entire year.

### **Behavior Level Reduction Requests (BLRR)**

Students in grades 4-6 can reduce accumulation of infractions by obtaining a Behavior Level Reduction Request (BLRR) from a school administrator complying with the requirements. Students may turn in a BLRR once they reach Level 1. Each successfully completed and submitted form will result in a reduction of a level. Multiple BLRRs may be submitted for continued success with making good choices. Students must be in attendance 15 school days without an infraction, behavior violation, or referral in order to receive a level reduction.

#### **Level 1 (5 Infractions)**

Parent Contact by Teacher

Student Completes Behavior Reflection Form

#### **Level 2 (10 Infractions):**

Parent/Teacher/Student Conference

Behavior Plan Created

#### **Level 3 (15 Infractions):**

Parent/Student/Teacher/Administrator Conference

Student Revisits Behavior Plan and Completes Behavior Reflection Form

#### **Level 4 (20 Infractions):**

Parent/Student/Administrator Conference

Loss of School Activities (field trips, clubs, etc.)

In-School Detention

#### **Level 5 (25 Infractions):**

Parent/Student/Administrator Conference

Danger of Dismissal Letter

After School Detention

#### **Level 6 (30 Infractions):**

Student serves one day out of school suspension (OSS)

**\*Students at or beyond Level 6 will receive additional consequences and may be dismissed from South McKeel Academy.**

## Birthday Recognition

South McKeel Academy will recognize student birthdays on a monthly basis at school. Personal celebration invitations and food for individual or class celebrations will **NOT be permitted** at school. Additionally, deliveries for students such as food, flowers, or balloons will not be accepted.

## Change of Information

It is the parent's responsibility to update records on the McKeel Online Office if there has been a change in phone numbers, address, or email address. For address changes, two proofs of address are required. Court ordered changes must have documentation on file at school.

## Digital Citizenship

From ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education)

Students operate in a manner that demonstrates their understanding of the opportunities, responsibilities, risks, and foundational skills required to live, learn, and work in an increasingly digital world.

Performance Indicators:

- a. Students understand and practice safe, legal, ethical, and responsible use of technology, information, and resources.
- b. Students are aware of the persistence of their activity in the digital world and actively foster a positive digital identity and reputation.
- c. Students critically consume technology and media and understand the social, legal, and ethical impact computing and technology has on our lives.
- d. Students evaluate new and emerging technologies and transfer their knowledge of technology operations to use them.

Students at South McKeel Academy are expected to practice good digital citizenship with technology tools. Technology is an important part of our educational program at South McKeel Academy. All personal devices should be powered off and in backpacks during school hours. Apple/smart watches should not be used as a communication tool during the school day. We do not allow or promote student use of social media apps such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok etc.

SMA leverages various techniques to provide a safe online environment for our students. Students should know that if they do happen to come across inappropriate content/images while in class (or at home) **they are expected to immediately tell their teacher or adult in charge**. Students should only be on websites approved by the teacher. McKeel Schools issued email accounts should only be used for school related business, not for personal communication to other students or parents/guardians.

## Field Trip Chaperones

All chaperones MUST be approved volunteers. Only one chaperone per student may attend field trips. Chaperones agree to assume duties as stated on the chaperone form. Chaperones must be available to chaperone the entire trip; no early checkouts are permitted. The chaperone is responsible for the children assigned to him/her and is not to leave them unattended. Chaperones **MAY NOT BRING SIBLINGS/ CHILDREN OF ANY AGE ON FIELD TRIPS**. Chaperones are not permitted to take any children, other than their own, from a field trip. Only immediate family members are permitted to check out students from field trips. Chaperones must be 21 years of age or older. All students attending a field trip must ride the bus to the arranged destination.

## FORTIFYFL

### Report Suspicious Activity (for students and staff)

FortifyFL is a suspicious activity-reporting tool that allows one to instantly relay information to appropriate law enforcement agencies and school officials. A tip can be submitted by downloading the app (FORTIFYFL) or by visiting the website [www.getfortifyfl.com](http://www.getfortifyfl.com) Anyone who knowingly submits a false tip through FortifyFL may be subject to further investigations by law enforcement, and may be subject to criminal penalties under section 837.05, F.S.

## Grading Scale

Students in grades K-6 will follow a traditional reporting system.

- A: 90-100 Excellent
- B: 80-89 Proficient
- C: 70-79 Developing
- D: 60-69 Limited Evidence
- F: 0-59 Of Concern

## Homework

In the primary grades (K-3), homework primarily involves reading. Teachers may send home **optional** practice.

Recommended reading days/times:

- K:** M-Th, 10-15 minutes (read to or assist with reading)
- 1st:** M-Th, 10-15 minutes (read to or read independently)
- 2nd:** M-Th, 15-20 minutes (read independently)
- 3rd:** M-Th, 20-30 minutes (read independently)

In grades **4-6**, assigned homework will be appropriate for the grade level and should not exceed 45 minutes per night. Practice and reinforcement of classroom instruction will be the goal of any homework. Students are expected to independently complete, return, or submit all homework as it is assigned. Homework must be attempted to avoid a Behavior Expectation Warning (At Home Practice Not Complete).

## Hours

The school day will be from 8:15 AM – 3:00 PM. Students who are not seated in class, by 8:15, are considered to be tardy. Before school (7:00 – 7:30 AM) and after school (3:15 – 6:00 PM) care will be available for a fee for students in Grades K-5. Students not participating in the CAT Care program **may not** be dropped off before 7:30 AM as supervision is not available. **All** car riders need to be picked up **no later than** 3:20 PM. Once students have been dismissed from the classroom, they may not return to get items such as homework, lunchboxes, etc.

## Make-Up Work

Students are responsible for making up any missed work. Students in Grades 4-6 should check their Canvas account and communicate with all teachers regarding assignments.

## Medication Policy

The staff at South McKeel Academy is prohibited from giving **ANY** medication to students without a South McKeel Medical Authorization Form signed by a physician. **The medicine must be delivered to the school clinic by a parent/guardian.** Students are not allowed to carry medication throughout the day at school unless they have a written form on file in the clinic that has been signed by parents/physicians.

## Moment of Silence

House Bill 529 requires a moment of silence in first period classrooms daily in Florida's Public Schools. Teachers are prohibited from making suggestions for the moment of silence; parents and guardians are encouraged to discuss moment of silence and make suggestions for their child.

## Personal Electronic Devices/Accessories

In compliance with HB 1105 and Florida Statute 1006.07(2)(f), South McKeel Academy enforces a personal communication device policy to support a focused, safe, and distraction-free learning environment.

Florida law prohibits students from using wireless communication devices during instructional time unless expressly authorized by a teacher for educational purposes.

To ensure compliance:

- All personal communication devices must be turned off and kept in student backpacks during the school day.
- This includes cell phones, smartwatches, and any internet-enabled accessories or devices.
- Use of a device during class time without staff permission will result in a personal communication device infraction and appropriate disciplinary action.

South McKeel Academy is not responsible for any personally owned devices or accessories—including mobile phones, headphones, Apple Pencils, smartwatches, or chargers—that are lost, stolen, or damaged on campus.

Additional campus guidelines include:

- Devices may not be used before or after school in the car line or bus line areas
- While we understand some parents provide smartwatches for safety purposes, these devices may not be used for calling, messaging, texting, accessing the internet, or taking photos/videos during the school day.
- Parents should not text or call their children during the school day. If you need to contact your child, please call the school office.

## Pledge of Allegiance

Pursuant to 1003.44 FS students can opt out of reciting the pledge of allegiance with a written note from their parents. Parents who are interested in exercising this option should email, mail or deliver their note to Michelle Poppell, Principal at [michellepoppell@mckeelschools.com](mailto:michellepoppell@mckeelschools.com)

## Student Contract

As a student at South McKeel Academy I agree to do my best.

I will:

- Come to school on time each day
- Dress in a South McKeel Academy Risse Brothers uniform top and bottom
- Follow all school, class and bus rules
- Treat staff members and other students with respect
- Return notes and papers with my parent's signature
- Complete my work in class and at home
- Take care of school property

I understand that being a student at South McKeel Academy is a choice and a privilege. I will do my part to help make our school the best it can be.

## Student Uniform Policy

Students attending South McKeel Academy are required to wear the school uniform while on campus. **All uniform clothes must be purchased through Risse Brothers School Uniforms.** This includes both shirts and bottoms. The Risse Brothers Uniform store is located at: 2525 Drainfield Rd., Suite 11, Lakeland, FL. See our website for store hours. You may also contact them at [www.rissebrothers.com](http://www.rissebrothers.com) or by telephone at 863-940-9913.

**South McKeel Academy expects all students to look professional at all times. Uniforms must be worn appropriately as follows:**

- All pants are to be worn above the hip bone
- Shirts are to be tucked in at all times
- Skorts and shorts are not to be rolled up
- Belts must be visible and fastened properly
- Body writing or fake tattoos must not be visible

### Required Uniform

**Pants** – long navy blue or khaki

**Shorts** – navy blue or khaki (hemline should reach mid-thigh or lower)

**Shirts** – red or navy with *South McKeel Academy Block* logo (Gr. K-6)

Long or short-sleeved undershirts must be plain **WHITE or NAVY** only with *no logo*.

**Skorts** – South McKeel Academy plaid, navy or khaki skorts for Gr. K-6 (hemline should reach mid-thigh or lower)

### Tights or Leggings

May be worn but must be full length covering the entire leg under the uniform in **WHITE or NAVY** only. No cropped leggings are permitted.

### Shoes

Must have closed toe and closed back for safety purposes. (NO boots, boat shoes, sandals, flip-flops, crocs, roller shoes, etc.). **Athletic shoes are REQUIRED for PE.**

### Belts

Must be worn and visible at all times with any bottoms that have belt loops.

### Jewelry

Earrings (**ears only- no gauges allowed**)

### Coats/Jackets Options

**NAVY** South McKeel Academy “Wildcat” hoodies/sweatshirts are available for purchase by order only through our vendor (information on the school website). These and other solid **NAVY** sweatshirts, jackets or sweaters with **no logos** may be worn at all times. Hoods on jackets should not be worn while on campus. Jackets/sweatshirts must be shorter than uniform shorts/skorts.

### Makeup

Minimal makeup, in natural tones, will be allowed for girls in Grade 6.

### Hair

Only naturally occurring hair colors will be permitted (no purple, green, orange, pink, etc.) Student's hair may not cover their eyes. Students with hairstyles that are considered distracting to the educational process will be referred to the office. If you are unsure of acceptable styles, please contact an administrator before making the change to your child's hair.

### Backpacks

No offensive or disrespectful writing or drawing on the outside. For safety purposes, rolling backpacks are not be permitted. A doctor's note is required to use one for medical reasons.

## **Non-Uniform or Cold Weather Days**

### **Fridays**

Students are permitted to wear solid **BLUE** colored, plain (no holes, patches or designs) regular fit jeans, jean shorts, jean skirt/skort, or jean capris each Friday at a cost of \$1.00 or \$35.00 for the year prepaid for school fundraising purposes. All jean bottoms must be hemmed with NO frayed edges. Length of shorts and/or skirts should be mid-thigh or lower. Participation in "Jeans Fundraiser" is optional. Students who do not participate are to wear regular uniform bottoms. **Students not complying with the policy in place may lose their Friday jean privilege.** South McKeel sponsored spirit shirts, **with the block McKeel M logo**, may be worn with jeans or another uniform pant, short, etc. on Fridays only.

### **Cold Weather Days**

Students and parents will be notified the day before a cold weather jeans day if students will be allowed to wear jeans due to the cold temperature. Notifications may also be posted on our website, Facebook page or via an email. If no announcement is made, students are to report to school in their regular school uniform. Students are permitted to wear heavy jackets/coats on cold days. However, they are to be removed when they come inside the school building. **Jeans worn on cold days must be long jeans, solid blue colored, plain (no holes, patches, rips or designs).**

### **Dress Down Days**

Students are not permitted to wear spaghetti strap garments or tank tops. Clothing that is offensive, suggestive, disruptive, or indecent including clothing associated with gangs, or encouraging the use of tobacco, drugs, alcohol or violence is not permitted. Shoes must be closed toe and closed heel. All dress down attire must meet the dress code requirements in the Polk County Public Schools Code of Conduct. <https://polkschoolsfl.com/codeofconduct/#section2.06>

## **Teacher Conferences**

Teachers will schedule their own parent conferences. Please your child's email the teacher requesting a return call or meeting. An appointment is needed as teachers have duty assignments and scheduled meetings before and after school.

## **Transportation**

**Please notify the office by 11:00 AM if there is a change in your child's transportation for the day.**

- **BUS**-In order to ride a McKeel School Bus, the information for the McKeel Office Online must be completed so a bus stop can be assigned. Your child may not ride any other bus or disembark at any bus stop other than the one he/she is assigned for.
- **CAR**- Your child will not be loaded into a vehicle without the appropriate school year car tag. Please park and bring your identification in if a new tag needs to be made. NO EXCEPTIONS will be allowed. Parents are not permitted to escort their child(ren) into the school building. Children are to unload and load at the carline. Parents are NOT to park in the Building C School parking area to drop off (between the hours of 7:30-8:15) or pick up their children (between the hours of 2:15-3:30).

## **Visitors**

All visitors to the school, including parents, must sign in at the office located in Building C with a state issued ID before going to any area on campus. Visitors are only to go to the designated area they are approved to visit. Parents must use the main office door to enter and exit the school building.

## **Volunteers**

South McKeel Academy welcomes volunteers! All volunteers working with children in the school or on field trips must be approved (NO SIBLINGS/CHILDREN of any age are permitted on field trips, when volunteering or participating in events held during school hours). Parents are encouraged to join and be

involved in our PTO. SMA is responsible for the safety of everyone who is on our campus. In your role as a volunteer, we encourage you to be vigilant and report anything you witness that could affect the safety of the school campus. School safety is everyone's responsibility.

## **Wellness Policy**

McKeel Schools have adopted a Wellness Policy regarding healthy lifestyles. As part of encouraging a healthy lifestyle for our staff and students, please refrain from sending in snacks and/or drinks with high sugar or fat content. Healthy snacks include items such as fresh fruit and vegetables, low-fat cheese, low-fat crackers, pretzels, non-iced animal crackers, water and 100% fruit juice.

## **Wildcat Cafe**

### **Account Balances**

Parents may check the balance of lunch accounts and/or place money in lunch accounts by setting up an account at [www.myschoolbucks.com](http://www.myschoolbucks.com) (Use the last 6 digits of your child's student ID#.) Students are expected to maintain a positive balance in their lunch accounts. Each student will be provided a scannable ID card at the beginning of the school year. Lost or damaged ID cards must be replaced for a fee.

### **Breakfast and Lunch**

Breakfast may be purchased from 7:30-8:10 a.m. Students may purchase a school lunch or bring a lunch from home. Food from outside vendors is not permitted under any circumstance. Students are not allowed to bring sodas or candy for lunch.