

THE STRONGHOLD SCHOOL™

STUDENT HANDBOOK

BY PAUL D. WHITE



COURAGE • INTEGRITY • ACHIEVEMENT

THE STRONGHOLD SCHOOL™

STUDENT HANDBOOK

BY PAUL D. WHITE

What can replace our dysfunctional school system?

This detailed blueprint for education reform, with simple, concrete, proven examples, covers every issue:

- From improving student achievement to resolving special education dilemmas;
- From dealing more effectively with discipline, drugs, and dress codes to handling difficult parents;
- From managing curriculum and instruction issues to better preparing students for future careers.

On all these issues — and more — the **Stronghold School Student Handbook** tells how to *totally reformat public education* and bring our schools into the 21st century, starting today!

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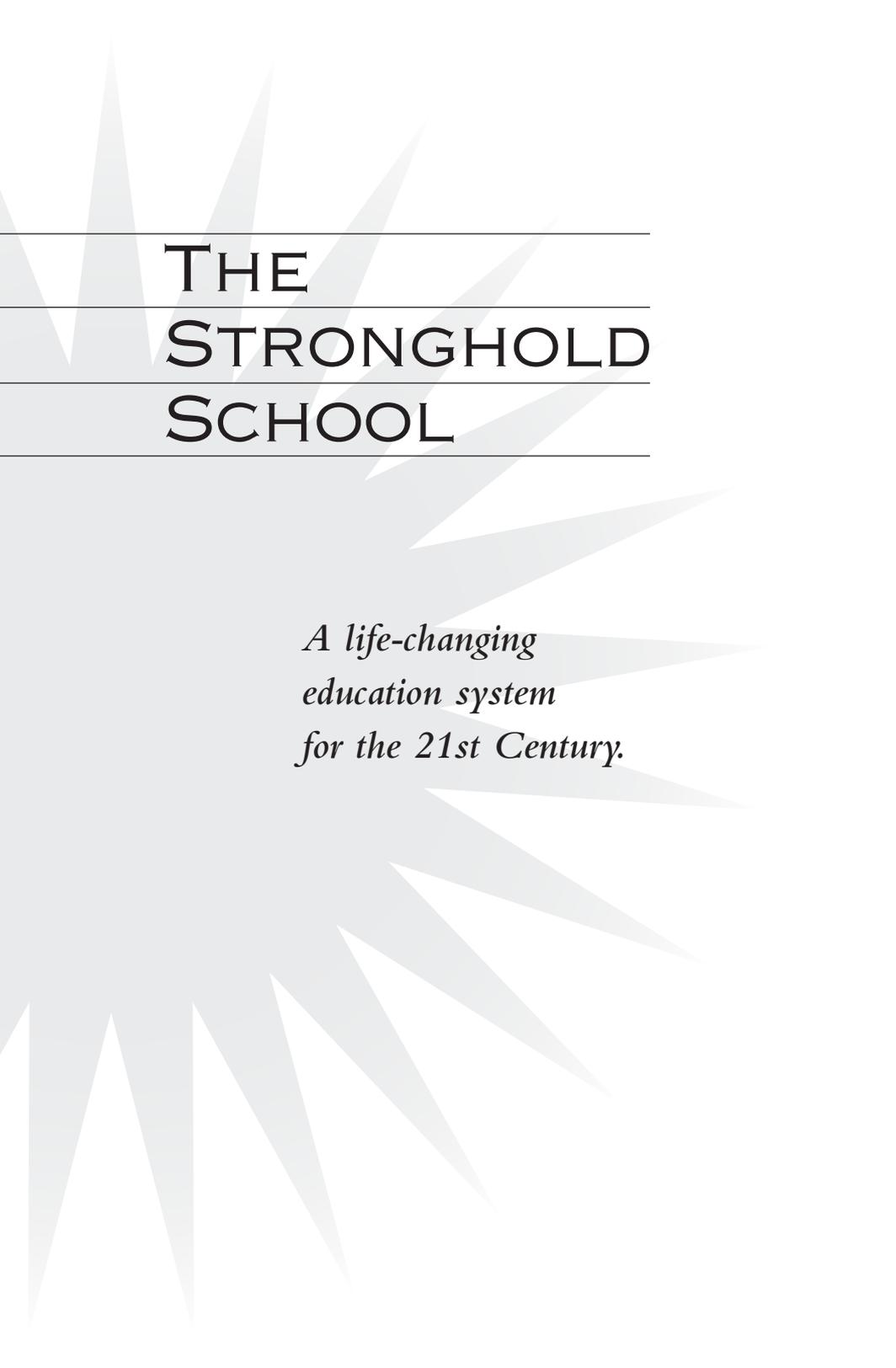
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Fourth Edition

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THE

STRONGHOLD

SCHOOL

*A life-changing
education system
for the 21st Century.*

By the author of
WHITE'S RULES – SAVING OUR YOUTH, ONE KID AT A TIME

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul White is a teacher in Southern California.

Published by the Paul D. White Institute

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Fourth Edition

TO THE 7,000 STUDENTS
who drop out of high school each day in the U.S.

*Like Archimedes
realized when he uttered
the phrase, “Eureka!”,
displacement is the key to
solving the problem.*



Introduction

*“...it is not so much academic education,
as a moral and spiritual culture,
which lifts one higher.”*

— MARY BAKER EDDY

Stronghold School is built on the same conviction on which The United States of America was founded. It's the spiritual principle stated in the opening words of the Declaration of Independence: “...ALL men...are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...”

We, too, believe that all students have a God-given ability to overcome any challenge, limitation, or past experience. And echoing a basic teaching of Christian Science, we further believe that there are *no exceptions* to this Divine claim – no limitations whatsoever on a person's ability to transform their life.

From this simple, inclusive spiritual perspective, comes our revolutionary re-creation of K-12 education, including:

- A life-changing learning experience that emphasizes not just academic growth, but relevant applications, global awareness, career preparedness, social compassion, family harmony, moral courage, and clean/sober living.
- An innovative, comprehensive restructuring of how schools can function
- Basing every activity and decision on a strong foundation of moral/spiritual values.

Approaching education from this spiritual perspective is a logical, legal, and perfect fit with public schools, where we've used it successfully for over 25 years. It coerces no one, respects every individual's beliefs, and yields unimaginable results – academically and behaviorally – that simply can't be achieved in any other way. Our hope is that as you read our student handbook, you'll start to see the limitless possibilities that await you, and *your* children, and *your* schools.

THE STRONGHOLD SCHOOL

STUDENT HANDBOOK

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Welcome to Students

*There are two educations.
One should teach us how to make a living,
And the other how to live.*

— JOHN ADAMS

Welcome to The Stronghold School.

We think you'll really like this school. It feels like home.

We have only two main goals for you, our students:

- To help you to become independent.
- To inspire you to want to help others.

To accomplish these goals, we focus on four things:

A STRONG WORK ETHIC

- Anything worth accomplishing takes hard work.
- It doesn't matter how long it takes you to learn something.
- It doesn't matter whether you're faster or slower than someone else.
- What's important is that you finish what you set out to do and give your best effort.

INTEGRITY AND MORAL VALUES

HOW we live our lives is far more important than WHAT we end up doing. At The Stronghold School (SS), moral values come first. Which values? Values that men and women everywhere and for all time have agreed are important: Honesty. Integrity. Respect. Unselfishness. Moral Courage. Forgiveness.

There are a lot more, but you get the idea. Without these qualities, no matter how rich, successful, or famous you become, your life will be meaningless and unfulfilling.

AN EXCELLENT ACADEMIC EDUCATION

We listed academics last, but not because it's unimportant. We put it last because improving your academic skills is an effect, not a cause. Academic growth is the unavoidable side effect of being taught in an environment that is hard-working, based on moral values, and embraces a world view.

Something you're really going to like about going to school at SS is that every time we ask you to learn something in class, our teachers also explain *why* it's important. They'll tell you how you will use that knowledge or skill in your future. This way you'll stay more interested and do better work.

We'll do a lot of explaining in this handbook, too. It tells you about the ordinary school-type things that schools want students to know. But it also gives you the "whys" and "hows" that schools usually *don't* want

students to know. Things like why the school day should be a lot shorter and the years in high school a lot fewer, why homework should be eliminated, and how schools waste money that should go toward helping students. You'll find it interesting.

SS wants you to know everything about our school because we don't want you to feel like a guest. We want our students to feel like co-owners—partners—in this school, and partnerships that last are built on honesty. So we're starting our partnership with you by telling you the truth about how a great 21st century school operates. For right now, SS is the *only* school that operates that way. But other educators are getting more interested in how we do things, and, sooner or later, we think they will follow our lead.

We're going to fill you so full of exciting ideas about what you could do with your life, that you'll be able to finish your basic studies much faster than usual, and move on to specific training in the career of your choice.

And if we — your teachers, parents, and administrators — do our job right, the life you lead when you graduate from SS will leave the world a better place because you were here.

We want you to be smart *and* good. Stick with us, and you'll be both. ❖❖❖



ENROLLMENT

As the twig is bent, the tree inclines.

—VIRGIL

You don't have to be a certain age to enroll and start school with us. You just have to be able to behave and be willing to work hard.

How do we know if you have these two qualities?

We schedule an enrollment meeting with you and your family and we just have a good honest talk. We tell you and your family what we have to offer you as a school and what we require. We ask you and your family what you're looking for. We'll have you observe a class. Pretty soon, it becomes obvious to all of us if we've got a match.

We enroll new students this way because how people get started in school has a lot to do with how successful they become later on.

Until you're willing to control your behavior and work hard, coming to school is a waste of time. You don't learn anything, you don't enjoy it, and you

interfere with the teachers' efforts to help students who are ready to learn.

But once students decide to get serious and do their best...whoosh! They learn almost faster than a teacher can teach them.

Another benefit to this method?

When you enroll students this way, they're much less likely to drop out or get kicked out of school. Why? Because they've chosen to be here. It makes a real difference. ❖❖❖





CLASS PLACEMENT AND PROMOTION

*It's what we accomplish –
not what we plan to accomplish – that matters.*

— ANONYMOUS

We don't assign your work at Stronghold School based on how old you are. We assign it according to the skills you've learned. We do it this way because we don't want to confuse two unrelated items: how old you are, and what you know.

We don't identify your school level by any certain grade, but by your academic abilities. School is fun and teachers do their best when you're learning at a level that is just right for your ability: hard enough to challenge you, but easy enough for you to be successful.

How long do you have to keep working on any particular skill? Only until you prove that you've learned and understand the material.

Work hard and you'll finish sooner and go on to more complicated levels in that subject. Pay less attention or go at a slower pace and you will take a

while longer. Calendar time has nothing to do with how long you work on a skill. What matters is that whenever you finish a project, you'll have a sense of real accomplishment, because you will have mastered the material.

We offer all kinds of extra teaching help, so you can learn as quickly as you want. There's just one catch. We won't force you to take the extra help. You have to ask for it. You have to *want* to do better. If there's any secret to being successful in school (or life), that's it.

You'll remain a student at SS only until you're able to work at a level equal to the college or tech-school classes you'll need for your future career.

Once you've got that strong academic foundation... you're out of here!

And whether you finish SS at 14 or 16 years old, you'll be ready to succeed at the next level. ❖❖❖





WHAT WE TEACH

*Nothing in life is to be feared.
It is only to be understood.*

—MARIE CURIE

Sometimes, students think the purpose of schools is to teach them the answers to everything. That's a great idea, but there's one problem. SS doesn't have all the answers, and neither does anyone else.

We do the next best thing. We'll teach you all the answers we *do* have. Also, we'll teach you how to learn: how to look for answers to the world's biggest questions and solutions to the world's biggest challenges.

This is what makes coming to school at SS exciting and why you won't want to miss a single day. You never know what exciting idea or solution is going to come up in your class discussions.

What are the things we'll teach you about? EVERYTHING that humans have ever known or believed.

All the world's knowledge lies within the basic subject areas: English, math, social science, and science.

- You'll learn about events, theories, and people you like and dislike and believe and disbelieve.
- You'll learn *from* and *about* the past, but we focus on the present and future.
- You'll learn how to look at everything in the world from multiple perspectives, because everything we do affects someone else. We don't just teach one side of any issue, because both sides of most topics are supported by honorable, intelligent people.
- You'll learn how to form intelligent opinions and how to question your own beliefs.
- You'll learn how to express your disagreement with the opinions of others without insulting anyone or feeling insulted.
- You'll spend a lot of time learning about emotional topics, including religion, sex, drugs, politics, and race. Not only *should* you learn about these issues in class, but you also *must* learn about them if you want an education that will be useful to you in your future.

As you come to class and learn about our incredible world, you will get all kinds of ideas about what to do with your future. When that happens, you won't want to waste time. You'll want to finish school at SS as fast as possible. You'll want to keep moving toward that great future that's waiting for you. ❖❖❖





CHAPTER 4

HOW WE TEACH

Life isn't boring — WE are boring.

—ANONYMOUS

One of the things you'll like best about SS is how you'll be taught.

Your classes will have 20 or less students, so you'll always get a chance to ask questions or give opinions about discussion topics. You'll also get to know your teachers very well.

You won't need a backpack because, with few exceptions, we don't use printed textbooks. One reason is that textbooks are too bulky and heavy to carry. Mainly, though, the problem is that textbooks are quickly outdated. We don't want to teach you about the world of 10 years ago, 10 months ago, or even 10 minutes ago. With an internet-linked computer station at each student's desk, we can teach you what's going on in the world, right as it's happening.

We don't teach academic subjects in isolation. You'll be taught how math, science, English, and social science all relate to each other, because that's how

they exist in the world. The understanding that all life's challenges interconnect will help you become a more creative thinker and a more effective problem solver.

Our teachers work hard, just like entertainers: They're on their feet in front of the class to engage you and to inspire your excitement and involvement with what you're learning. They teach as if the best answers to life's problems are still waiting to be discovered... because they *are!*

We don't do study-contracts, independent study, or individualized folders in quiet corners, and we do very few online classes. Real education is much more than passively reading information and answering questions in total silence. Real learning requires active involvement. You have to speak with and listen to your fellow learners, so that your heart becomes as educated as your head. For *this* type of education, *nothing* takes the place of a teacher who is on fire with the desire to change your life.

We constantly leave the school site to travel into the community. We visit life-sized examples of what we study in miniature in class. It's more real, more interesting, and the only way to connect your classroom and the real world. For example, if you study the issue of homelessness in class, it can remain distant and abstract. But if your class visits the local skid row and you walk among the homeless and help dish out food at a local shelter, your learning experience will be much deeper, imprinted forever

on your heart and mind.

Because our students can advance and finish school as rapidly as they choose, disrespect, “ditching,” dropping out, fighting, or “getting loaded” at school hardly ever happen. Our students *want* to attend classes every day and do their best. They want to complete school as fast as possible and move on to exciting lives. ❖❖❖





PARENTS

What right have I [as a parent] to permit my child to indulge in habits which will make him a nuisance to himself and to others later in life?

— MARY KIMBALL MORGAN

At SS, we value your parents because they—and not the school—have primary responsibility for developing the qualities that will make you successful in class.

The way your parents raise you has a huge impact on whether you are respectful or rude, honest or untruthful, hardworking or lazy, selfish or unselfish.

We work as hard as we can at SS to help you become well-educated men and women of integrity. We can only do this work *with* your parents. We can't do it *for* them.

Your success depends, in large part, on the relationship between our school and your parents. To make sure this relationship is a good one, every SS parent is required to attend a monthly parent meeting. When

you enroll, your parents must promise to attend these meetings.

These meetings are so important to your education that if your parents break their word and stop attending them, we drop you. For students to reach their potential, schools and parents have to work together. Neither can do it alone.

The importance of parents and school supporting each other in trying to help you, is the subject we talk about most at parent meetings.

- *That means your parents must make sure you come to school on time every day.*
- *That means your parents need to support your teachers and understand that teachers are not babysitters. What they teach you will affect your whole life. Your parents need to support your teachers 100 percent in your class work and behavior.*
- *That means your parents won't baby you when you get little aches and pains. We all feel better some days than others. That's just a fact. But you still have to come to school and do your best, just as you will when you have a job and support yourself and perhaps a family.*
- *That means your parents need to understand that kids copy what they see at home. If parents demonstrate good character and live clean, sober lifestyles,*

their kids usually will, too. If parents use drugs or alcohol and say and do things that are illegal, immoral, or extremely inappropriate, then their kids will usually do that also. Your parents need to model at home what they want you to do at school. ❖❖❖





TEACHERS

*Courage is the most important virtue,
because without it, you're not very likely
to practice any of the other virtues.*

—ARISTOTLE

At SS we believe that moral courage and willingness to sacrifice oneself for others are the most important qualities a teacher can have.

We find these qualities by looking for men and women who want to teach, care about, and protect their students, just like they were their own children.

That might sound funny, and it's certainly something you don't hear very often. But the idea of having teachers think and care about their students in this manner is actually a very historical law that is supposed to be practiced by *all* our nation's teachers and at all our schools.

The legal phrase is *in loco parentis*. In regard to schools, it means the teacher is authorized to act in place of your parents while you're under their supervision. So

at SS, our teachers base every action and decision that concerns you on one question: *If this student were my own son or daughter, what would I do?*

- *That means our teachers sacrifice* whatever time and trouble it takes to prepare the highest quality lessons *for you*; and they accept nothing less than your best effort *from you*.
- *That means our teachers care about you* as a person, and not just as their third period English student. Our teachers' schedule is arranged so they always have time to sit down and talk with you individually. They're always ready to listen to you, counsel you about any problems you're having, and can be contacted by you and your parents after the school day.
- *That means our teachers have the moral courage to stand up and tell the truth* about the best way to help you learn – even when no one wants to hear it – even if it could threaten their jobs – to parents, students, other teachers, and administrators.
- *That means our teachers will risk their personal safety to protect you* if physically dangerous situations occur.

Your experience at SS will change your life, but not because of our impressive: buildings, technology, athletic complexes, classroom equipment, field trips, or awards. We will transform you because our teachers will stretch your mind with new ideas, and open your heart to embrace the entire world, in more ways than you can imagine.

Having a school full of teachers that act this way produces great results for SS. It gives our school a loving, family feeling, and makes it a wonderful place to be. It creates lifetime friendships among teachers, their students, and their students' families. And as an inevitable side effect, teachers of this kind produce a quality of education that you can't get in any other way.◆◆◆



ADMINISTRATORS

Something there is that doesn't love a wall.

—ROBERT FROST

And, something there is that doesn't instinctively love administrators either. Especially when they act like a wall, blocking communication and new ideas. Plus, *nobody*, especially an adult, likes being told what to do, and that's a big part of an administrator's job.

But we love our administrators at SS. They do their important, difficult job the right way, so that teachers can do their job more easily and their students can learn more. If administrators do their job *wrong*, it's harder for the teachers to teach and the students to learn.

Our administrators at SS do something very unusual, and they do it every day. They teach a class!

Our administrators do this because prior to coming to SS, many of them had been out of the classroom for decades, and teaching helps them remember what that's like.

- It helps them remember how much hard work it takes to teach all day, so they're more patient with our teachers.
- It helps them remember how important it is to keep building-type things working properly, like drinking fountains, heaters/air conditioners, bathrooms, and copy machines. Without these things running smoothly, a teacher's day and a student's learning are totally disrupted.
- It helps administrators remember to cut out unnecessary meetings, because a teacher has little time left in a day after helping kids and parents.
- It helps them remember the importance of not allowing disrespectful behavior by students or parents that makes teaching impossible.

SS administrators make our school better because they have:

- The *courage* to confront any individual or group who tries to disrupt our school;
- The *compassion and vision* to patiently lead our staff to new and better ways of teaching students;
- The *humility* to focus attention on supporting the students and teachers instead of seeking it for themselves. ❖❖❖





DAILY SCHEDULE

*If you always DO what you've always DONE,
you'll always GET what you've always GOT.*

—MARK TWAIN

Longer school days (and years) sometimes sound like a good idea to adults, but there is no proof that students learn more that way. Schedules like the one SS follows have been proven to help students make greater progress.

Here's what a typical week's schedule would look like.

Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., students are taught - without interruption - at our school site. That includes a daily, challenging fitness workout class.

Monday through Thursday, starting after lunch, your education continues out in the community. Students have a combination of off-site activities that includes paid employment, and a choice of quality internships and/or community college/tech school classes.

Fridays from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., teachers and students work together on community service projects. At SS, community service is not something we do only at Christmas or Thanksgiving. It's not just a class you take, finish, and forget about. Service to others is an integral part of every week of school, all year long. This commitment to thinking about the daily needs of others teaches an important lesson: We find joy and purpose in each day of our own lives, by helping others find joy and purpose in each day of theirs.

Once a Week: Students are required to independently participate in an activity of their choosing that promotes moral/spiritual growth. Obviously, church attendance would meet this requirement. But so would scouting – or a 12-Step meeting – or many other possible activities. Why do we have this requirement? Because you build strong values and good character the same way you build physical or academic skills: through constant practice. ❖❖❖



CAMPUS SECURITY

Security is when I'm very much in love with somebody extraordinary who loves me back.

—SHELLY WINTERS

SS has an incredibly safe campus, even though we use no metal detectors and find it necessary to search only a handful of students each year. We've accomplished this high level of campus safety and security because we know and love our students, and they know and love us in return.

Knowing Our Students

Our entire staff circulates among our arriving students every morning, greeting and talking with *all* of them. Because our campus is relatively small, we get to know each student well, and we develop an awareness of his or her typical behavior. If a staff member observes ANY deviation from this typical behavior on ANY given day, he or she immediately checks this out.

Non-typical behavior is usually caused by illness, stress, breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or something relatively ordinary. Occasionally, however,

the behavior is caused by something much more intense, such as extreme anger toward a peer or parents, a serious illness or injury, the death of a friend, the effect of drugs or alcohol, or fear that someone wants to hurt the student.

Students exhibiting non-typical behavior are never ignored. They are referred to a staff member who immediately sits down privately with them and works with them to resolve the problem. Sometimes, all the student needs is some extra comfort and support before going back to class. Sometimes the staff member needs to call the parents or police to pick the student up. Knowing our students well prevents more campus problems than any metal detector ever could.

Loving Our Students

Not only do we, as SS staff, get to know our students, but we also come to love and care for them as dear friends and extended family. As you have read in this handbook, *everything* we do at SS is focused on helping our students. Our students and their parents know this and feel it. They return this sense of friendship and love and develop a loyalty to our school.

When students feel a genuine love for their school, they will often come forward with security-related information that prevents problems and dangerous situations, and can even save lives. No traditional security procedures could uncover this important

information. A school is safe only to the extent that staff and students know and care about each other. ❖❖❖





BEHAVIOR AND DISCIPLINE

*In setting up this school and its regulations,
we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing
burdensome. The good of all concerned, however,
may prompt us to a little strictness in order to
amend faults and to safeguard love.*

—ST. BENEDICT, 5TH CENTURY,
ON ESTABLISHING HIS FIRST SCHOOL

SS’s philosophy toward student behavior is simple. Students must follow the rules or they’re suspended and sent home, repeatedly, until either their behavior improves or they’re expelled.

Students misbehave because they choose to. When they act this way, it interferes with our primary goals: teaching and learning. So we can’t—and don’t—allow inappropriate behavior in speech or action.

What is considered “appropriate behavior?”

- Showing up every day on time, unless there is a genuine crisis.

- Working hard and being respectful at all times with staff and students.
- Avoiding all illegal, immoral, or disruptive behavior that would distract from our focus on learning.

We do not debate with students or their parents about misbehavior. We do not give students a ridiculous number of “second chances” to act appropriately.

Since SS is preparing students for the real work world, we do what that world does when you don’t do your job. If you ignore all our warnings, we suspend you. If the problems continue, we fire you. In school terms, that’s expulsion. We have a great Education Code that supports this policy. And we have a great school, because we *enforce* that Education Code.

Used properly, suspension is the most powerful tool we have for helping students to improve their behavior, but it’s frequently misunderstood.

- We don’t *like* to suspend students. Your failure to behave properly is also our failure to teach you how to behave properly. But we can’t sacrifice our entire school’s learning and undermine respect for our teachers for the sake of a few students who choose to be disruptive.
- Our school loses money when we suspend students, so sometimes it’s tempting to tolerate bad behavior for the sake of maintaining our income. But our school’s primary goal is not to make money.

We're here to teach students how to have successful futures, so we can't allow behavior that interferes with that goal.

- Sometimes parents don't want us to suspend their children. They say that their kids "like to be suspended, because they just sit home and play around." If that's true, it's a very serious problem and needs to be addressed... by your *parents*, who are responsible for your behavior. Done correctly, suspensions help schools by maintaining order. Suspensions also help parents by sending them a message that their parenting style isn't working and some serious changes need to be made.

In-School Suspension

Many schools have tried to compromise with parents on the issue of suspension by practicing something called In-School Suspension (ISS).

Some parents like ISS because it doesn't inconvenience them. Students who are suspended are not sent home but kept in another room at school.

Some schools like ISS because, by keeping suspended students on campus, the school continues to get paid for each student.

The problem is that even though it makes parents happy and helps schools make money, ISS harms kids.

- It harms students academically because they're not learning in their regular classes. The ISS room typically provides nothing more than babysitting.
- It harms students behaviorally because letting them sleep or play in another room sends the message that breaking school rules is no big deal. Not surprisingly, ISS students usually continue to break the rules.
- It harms students' relationships with their families because ISS encourages parents to delay making the needed corrections in their children's behavior.
- It harms students morally. Because students know that schools and parents support ISS only because it is convenient and profitable, students lose respect for the adults. This is not the best way to improve the students' behavior.

For all these reasons and more, SS does not practice In-School Suspension. ❖❖❖





DRESS CODE

What a strange power there is in clothing.

—ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

We don't waste time enforcing the dress code at SS because all students wear the same thing ... with very few exceptions.

The key word for us is “appropriate.”

Because you'll have a vigorous fitness workout class every day and because we have no locker room facilities, the “appropriate” clothing for typical school days is any combination of plain black or grey sweatpants/basketball shorts worn with T-shirts/sweatshirts and black or white athletic shoes. Period.

Our clothing policy works, for a variety of reasons.

- It's the only logical way to dress for PE.
- It avoids wasted time arguing about whether or not your clothes are appropriate for school.
- It saves your families money, because our uniforms are inexpensive.
- It eliminates the distraction and pressure of having to look fashionable every day.

When we go off campus for activities or field trips, students are allowed to wear clothing of their choosing that is informal but still appropriate. “Appropriate” means that the clothes fit in a way considered “normal” in the workplace. It means that the clothes don’t send messages that support illegal or immoral activities.

These are very reasonable expectations, but we do something with them that’s unusual. We *really* enforce them. We don’t argue with or scold students who show up in clothing that doesn’t conform. We call their parents and send the students home to put on appropriate clothes.

We don’t keep extra sets of clothing to loan students who show up out of uniform. Students who defy the dress code do it solely because they choose to. They’re testing our commitment to enforcing our dress code. It’s not that students “can’t afford the clothes” or “forgot.” It’s pure defiance, and if it happens repeatedly, we suspend them for it. Because we deal with the real issue, violations of our dress code don’t happen very often.

At SS, we do everything we can to help our students become mature, responsible young adults. We feel it’s childish and a waste of valuable school time to argue constantly about clothes being too short or too long, too tight or too baggy, or too distracting. So we don’t.





RACE, SEX, DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

*If you're out to describe truth,
leave elegance to the tailor.*

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

At SS, we never stop talking and teaching about race, sex, drugs, and alcohol.

The reason is that these issues can ruin our students' lives.

Among teens, violence, racial incidents, pregnancy, drug use, and binge drinking are increasing.

Currently, one of every six teens has a sexually transmitted disease.

We would consider our school morally irresponsible if we didn't take strong steps to help you learn how to avoid these problems.

If you don't deal with these issues, they destroy your focus and desire to learn, your health and disposition, and they limit your future options.

Over the years, SS has had great success in getting its students to stop these behaviors. Our campus is virtually free of racial incidents and drug alcohol issues, and our female student pregnancy rate is several times lower than the norm.

We accomplish this as follows:

RACE

- We tolerate no racial/ethnic slurs of *any* kind, by *anybody*, about *anything*. We do not tolerate anyone's attempts to speak for, represent, or incite all the students of their race. Each student is an individual, and SS works out all student issues on an individual basis, including those pertaining to race. NO race gets a free pass on this policy. Our staff will not let students or their parents intimidate them in this regard. This policy has led to one of SS's proudest accomplishments: When you observe our students socializing, you will see virtually no self-segregation. Students of all races and ethnicities interact and make friendships based on who they are as individuals, not by the color of their skin.
- Because race and ethnicity issues are a daily part of world (and campus) events, we debate them honestly and openly in class. Racial/ethnic perspectives are interwoven into virtually all our teaching. This is necessary in teaching students how to express their feelings, recognize and eliminate negative stereotypes, and find solutions in a respectful honest way.

SEX

- We teach the law.
 - a) Sexual intercourse involving one or more minors is a felony.
- We teach the Education Code.
 - b) Sexual intercourse is best accommodated in a committed, responsible marriage.
- We teach that the only “safe sex” is no sex.
- We don’t get involved in comparative birth control discussions about the “best way” for two teens to have intercourse, because there is no right way to do the wrong thing.
- We teach the truth and avoid euphemisms.
 - Having multiple sex partners is promiscuous.
 - Having sex with someone you’re not committed to marrying shows selfish disregard for a potential new life you are not prepared to support.
 - Being sexually active and refusing to get a test for STDs is cowardly and potentially lethal.
 - “Sexually active” really means “morally inactive.”
 - Abortions and unwanted children are *both* horrible options. We teach the third option: a responsible lifestyle that rules out having to make either of the two bad choices.
 - When two teens start having sex, *everyone* is lying: the boy and the girl about their level of commitment to each other, and the parents to themselves, refusing to believe that their kids are having sex.

- SS offers the most effective “birth control.”
The two greatest factors in reducing a girl’s likelihood of getting pregnant are a job and school success. SS requires the first one and guarantees the second one. It works.
- We involve the families.
When we become aware that any student is in a sexual relationship, we immediately call a parent conference with the parents and the student(s) involved.
- We provide consequences.
When one of our students become pregnant or impregnates someone, she or he is immediately dropped from SS and encouraged to enroll in adult school or independent study. Our rationale is that the students involved soon will be responsible for a new life and will need full-time jobs as soon as possible to pay for their baby’s expenses.

DRUGS/ALCOHOL

We drug test all students and keep parents informed of the results. The purpose of drug testing is not to “catch” you using or to use the test to file a police report. The purpose is to stop parental denial and student lying so we can work together to solve a problem that can destroy lives. Our students actually like this policy, because it gives them a reason not to use when they’re with peers who are pressuring them.





GANGS

Things are seldom what they seem.

—GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SS has no real gang problems, because we constantly deal with the issues and behavior that cause them.

We avoid gang activity because we do the following.

- We make sure all our students learn and are successful, so there's no need to drop out.
- We don't allow racial animosity of any kind, so there's no need to "pay-back" anyone.
- We drug test our students, and clean, sober kids rarely join gangs or commit crimes.
- We meet with parents regularly and counsel when necessary, so families stay functional and supportive of each other.
- We insist on and promote respectful behavior, so disrespectful actions get no peer support.
- We enforce our dress code and allow no overt gang talk, so students do not promote gang activity.
- We teach moral courage and stand-up behavior, so that students challenge rather than submit to attempted gang intimidation.
- Staff members offer to get "jumped out" with any

gang member who is afraid to get out by himself, so our students have no excuse for staying in that life.

- We celebrate the courage of any gang member who jumps out by proudly exhibiting his or her photo at school, ceremoniously throwing all their former gang clothes in the dumpster, and taking them shopping for “real boy (or girl)” clothes.
- We constantly patrol our campus and adjacent streets, and immediately confront and report any gang activity to the police.
- We vigilantly supervise any students who are on probation, report any violations directly to their probation officers, and follow up with the juvenile courts when there’s been a violation.

In the history of SS, many students who came to us as gang members are now among our most accomplished graduates. ❖❖❖





VANDALISM

Accountability breeds responsibility.

—STEVEN R. COVEY

SS has few vandalism problems for two reasons.

1. Our students are made to feel like co-owners, not guests at SS. We tend to take care of things we own.
2. If students insist on vandalizing property, their families are required to pay for everything their child destroys— from pencils to computers.

In a case of large-scale vandalism or theft, we file criminal charges against the perpetrator and suspend him or her. We do not consider this too harsh. We think we are protecting the facility for all the people who pay for it. This is part of our job. If you haven't learned to value public property by the time you get to SS, it is our duty to help you master that important objective.

Our school budget is tight. We have no money to replace or repair equipment and supplies that are intentionally damaged. We work hard to maintain our school in perfect condition with spotless

restrooms, clean books and school furniture, and graffiti-free walls. The \$93 million in vandalism damage to U.S. schools every year is an inexcusable waste that could be stopped.

Everything works and looks good in our school, and we know you will help us keep it that way. ❖❖❖





HOMEWORK

*For men are prone to go it blind,
along the calf-paths of the mind,
and work away from sun to sun,
to do what other men have done.*

—SAM WALTER FOSS

SS gives no traditional homework of any kind.

We do this because current research says that traditional homework:

- has almost no positive learning effect;
- frequently has a negative effect on the student's learning;
- encourages cheating;
- is a constant source of family conflict that negatively impacts teacher/parent relations.

Daily reading outside of school is important, and all students should do it, but it is your parents' duty to require and monitor this.

SS requires a different kind of “homework” for its students, one that has proven to be both valuable and fun. Our students may pick the type of “real

homework” that appeals to them from the following choices:

- paid part-time jobs,
- career-quality internships,
- concurrent classes at the community college or tech school.
- enrichment activities such as art/music/dance classes or athletic teams. ❖❖❖





SPECIAL EDUCATION & STUDENT MEDICATION

*Whether you think you can –
Or whether you think you can't –
you're right.*

—HENRY FORD

Stronghold School believes that the majority of students who qualify for Special Education services would do better without them.

It's not because we're insensitive or don't care. It's because our experience with many students (and the historical record of many famous people) shows that there are no limits to what anyone can accomplish. The best way to help you reach your potential, is to show you a way to succeed, rather than giving you an excuse for failing.

If you were not successful in your previous schools, you may have been told you have a defect that keeps you from learning or paying attention as well as other students. SS will never tell you that, because we don't believe it.

We believe EVERY problem has an answer, and that includes yours.

Most SS students who qualify for special education programs choose not to be in them. Most SS students with a previous history of behavioral medication soon find they have no need for those drugs at SS and stop taking them.

There are three reasons for this.

- 1) Most of our parents and students feel that, in the past, their special education classes not only didn't help them, but in many cases, discouraged learning and increased poor behavior.
- 2) As an alternative to traditional special education services, SS offers ALL students a "special kind of education" that produces incredible results in learning and behavior.
- 3) You and your parents have nothing to lose if you choose the SS method rather than special education. If our way works for you, great! If it doesn't, you can always re-apply for special education services at your local public school. So far, no SS students who left special education ever wanted—or needed to get back in.

All our students are special to us. We've found that great teachers, small class size, lots of individual attention, and involved parents are the best way to help all our students succeed.

As we work together and get to know each other, we'll be able to tell if you're not working as hard, or behaving as well as you're capable of. We'll show you lots of ways to do better in both those areas. But if you don't give us your best effort at all times, we won't blame anyone or anything but YOU.. ❖❖❖





STUDENT ASSESSMENT

*There are three kinds of lies:
lies, damned lies, and statistics.*

— BENJAMIN DISRAELI

We evaluate how much you've learned each year at SS, with two types of assessments:

- 1) a daily assessment,
- 2) twice-per-year assessment.

The daily assessment is the most important to us and tells us whether or not you're learning as much as we want you to learn. Our teachers watch you every day, asking the following questions:

- Are you showing up every day and on time?
- Are you giving your best effort in class and asking for help when you're struggling?
- Are your parents supporting your teachers' efforts to teach you?
- Are your character, integrity, and respect towards staff and peers growing as much as your academic learning?

The *twice-per-year assessment* measures your academic growth with pre- and post- standardized tests. These tests prove that a morals-first education is the best way to achieve outstanding academic growth.

To determine your academic growth for each year, we test you in a common sense way that is done by virtually no other schools.

We pre-test students when they enter the classroom each fall, and post-test them when they finish their year in the spring. That way, we can measure the growth made by *each student that year in those subjects with that teacher.*

Testing this way eliminates most arguments about teacher evaluation, and provides a very objective method for comparing instructional effectiveness.





ATHLETIC TEAMS

*It's better to do a few things well,
than to do many things poorly.*

—ANONYMOUS

SS has no inter-school athletic teams or large athletic complex. Here's why.

- We think that athletic teams are great for families and communities that choose to participate in them, but those families and communities should pay for them.
- Athletic departments are expensive, and we would rather spend that money doing our main job: getting you the best possible teachers and education.

A healthy lifestyle and good physical condition are very important. Our students participate in vigorous PE classes every day, but they get in great shape doing basic exercises using inexpensive equipment. ❖❖❖

ALTERNATIVE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

*An ounce of prevention
is worth a pound of cure.*

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

SS has no alternative secondary school program for students who are failing in academics or behavior. That's because virtually none of our secondary students *are* failing.

SS's education system is a good one, but when we first started, some students still had trouble learning and behaving.

In most cases, we could identify these students by no later than 8 or 9 years old; we didn't have to wait until they were teenagers to see that their problems required special attention.

We immediately used alternative activities with these students to figure out and solve their problems. We did this:

- before drug/alcohol use were involved.
- before gangs or sex-related issues were involved.
- before their academic and behavioral failures became long-standing habits and put them many years behind their peers.

Today, SS's Alternative Program deals with only our youngest students. As soon as we see negative patterns in classwork or behavior, we immediately meet with the parents. And we *keep* meeting with them, and we *keep* meeting with them until they are willing to join us in getting their child back to doing his or her best.

Using this method, our students' behavior and academic work improve very quickly. This way, they are able to return to regular classes, be with their friends, and enjoy school.

This early intervention is a primary reason why SS has a low dropout rate. ❖❖❖



PROMS, DANCES AND GRADUATIONS

Change brings opportunity.

—NIDO QUBEIN

We don't have traditional proms, formal dances, or graduation ceremonies at SS.

These traditions are outmoded and were actually hurting our students' progress, so we replaced them with better events and activities.

Proms and Formal Dances

We stopped sponsoring these events, because none of our students really wanted to go to a ballroom and do formal dancing. Most students spent only a few minutes at the dances, if they came at all. Their dresses became increasingly inappropriate, and their dancing too lewd to be allowed. "Prom Night" turned into a lot of negative pressure for our students to spend money they couldn't afford on clothes, limousines, drugs, alcohol, and hotel rooms.

We replaced our proms and formal dances with regular weekend group activities that feature

good food, good music, movie nights, fun sports activities, and group participation in community service projects. Our students really enjoy these get-togethers. Without the pressure to take part in “adult” activities, they can still enjoy being kids.

Graduation

We stopped doing typical group graduations because they had become unmanageable. Audience (and student) behavior had become so rowdy and disruptive that the whole spirit of the ceremony was ruined.

We replaced group graduations with individual celebrations, because each student completes his or her schooling at SS at a different time. What we have are wonderful, unforgettable ceremonies at school, individualized for each student. Typically, graduations are held in our school auditorium during the school day. The graduate’s family, friends, and the entire student body and staff attend. The graduate’s progress and accomplishments are praised by both individual staff and students. The graduate’s family also gets a chance to congratulate their child. Finally, the graduate gives a short speech of appreciation and gratitude. The ceremonies are brief, touching, and followed with light refreshments and photo opportunities.

Our students and parents love the dignified way we do graduation and look forward to having their moment to be individually celebrated and honored. ❖❖❖



TEXTBOOKS AND TECHNOLOGY

*Technology does not run an enterprise,
relationships do.*

—PATRICIA FRIPP

At SS almost all our instructional materials come from the internet, and we use the most current education technology to maintain school data.

But we believe that *nothing* can replace the multi-dimensional benefits of direct, inspired teaching.

For this reason, except in rare circumstances, our students do not do independent study or online classes during the school day.

Student Electronic Devices

We have no specific rule at SS that applies to students' electronic devices. If we did, we'd have to update the rule almost weekly, because technology changes so rapidly.

What we *do* have is Education Code laws that prohibit defiance and disruption of any kind. Those rules apply to all student behavior, including misusing electronic devices.

Cell phones, music players, etc. are great to use during break times. However, if they're used in class, they're totally disruptive and unacceptable.

Our teachers tell the students that no personal electronic devices can be used during class. If the students insist on using them, the issue is no longer electronics—it's defiance.

Our teachers won't take your phones or music players away from you. They won't put them in a drawer until the end of the year or call your parents to come pick them up. This would be childish, a tremendous waste of time, and could lead to many other related problems.

If you repeatedly defy your teachers' reasonable requests and continue to use electronic devices in class, you will be suspended for defiance. And you will be suspended again and again until the behavior stops or until you're dropped from our school. We respect your right to carry these devices, but you need to respect your teachers' need to maintain a focused learning environment. ❖❖❖



EPILOGUE

Nobody likes change, but business as usual in the public education system is going to put us out of business.

—ALBERT SHANKER

In the classic fairy tale, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, an arrogant ruler’s ignorance dupes his subjects into believing in the quality and beauty of a non-existent garment. With too few exceptions, our K-12 education system parallels that story.

Every day, our arrogant “emperors” (school leaders) are deceiving 300 million trusting “subjects” (our nation) by refusing to tell them the truth about our failing schools.

- Inspired, comprehensive teaching – instruction that develops a love for learning – has been replaced with soul-dead, test-obsessed memorization of factoids that makes both students and teachers hate going to school.
- The retreat from anchoring schools on strong moral values has caused much damage. It

has resulted in campuses that endanger our children's health and safety, stunt their character, limit their future employability, and drive many potentially great teachers into other professions.

- School funding continues to be wasted on archaic practices and bloated administrative costs.
- Visionary leaders who act with moral courage have been replaced by fearful, amoral reactionaries, whose highest principle is to follow the path of least resistance and continued employment.

These problems are worsening, because our schools' "emperors" will not risk public dissatisfaction and make the systemic change that is required. Instead, our leaders settle for temporarily distracting the "subjects" who trust them.

Communities are promised that the key to improving their schools is to spend billions on lavish new facilities, and to adopt an ever-more myopic focus on improving test scores.

But our leaders eventually run out of hype and "spin"; and when they do, community members realize that the money has been spent, but the same troubling school problems remain.

Nothing changes except for the carpetbagging “emperors”, who skip town and move on to the next higher-paying school district who buys into their false promises of school reform.

Nothing will improve the quality of education we provide our children until the foundation of the failed existing system is totally displaced, along with the leadership who brought us to this point.

This displacement could begin now, by implementing this book’s ideas.

- They cost nothing, and actually save money.
- All the policies set forth have proven successful in a variety of school settings.
- These ideas transform students and staff, almost overnight.

In 1776, American Revolutionary Thomas Paine, arguing for the immediate removal of a repressive, ineffective system said,

We have it in our power to begin the world over again.

That promise is still true over 230 years later. But this time, it’s our children and our schools who are waiting to be liberated. ❖❖❖

STAFF COMPENSATION

*Do your job and demand your compensation
— but in that order.*

— CARY GRANT

How much money do SS employees make?

That’s a reasonable question at your age, because it’s definitely something to consider when you’re trying to choose a future career.

The exact amounts we pay our educators are always changing. But here is the rule that SS uses to figure out who gets paid the most:

The person who has the most effect on our “product” earns the most money. The farther you get away from directly affecting our “product,” the less you make.

You, our students, are our “product.” Your teachers have the most effect on you. Schools can function without administrators, but not without teachers.

For that reason, teachers are our most important employees, and they are paid the most money. Just like lawyers make more than judges, pilots make more money than air traffic controllers, surgeons earn more than hospital managers, and star athletes make more than their coaches.

Paying our SS employees this way encourages great teachers to stay in the classroom. They don't have to leave teaching and become administrators to earn a professional wage. It also insures that our administrators choose their jobs because of their interest in management, and not just for the increase in pay. ❖❖❖



DISTRICT OPERATION

*The purpose of schools is not to employ adults,
but to educate children.*

— ELLEN NIMS

SS gets a certain amount of money every year to run our school and provide you with the best possible education. Running a school takes a lot of different people besides teachers and administrators, and SS has to decide who does which jobs.

When we sit down to decide how to spend our budget, we have only one guiding question for every department:

What is the best way to operate our school, so that we can spend as much money as possible on our students?

We really mean this. We act on it, and we're able to provide quality service in all areas and still stay within our budget.

But operating by this principle can make people unhappy with us.

Like most districts, over the years SS gradually built up a large number of program support employees. Unfortunately, many of these individuals were not as efficient or as well trained as outside contractors in those areas. When we replaced support workers with private contractors, we heard a lot of angry complaining because many of these employees lived in our community.

We were sorry to have to eliminate so many of their jobs... but we had to do it. Maintaining all those non-productive positions would have interfered with our Number One Job: Giving you the best teachers and best education. It's a matter of priorities.

We saved money, improved the quality of services, and directed our focus on district goals, by making the following changes.

We CLOSED the following in-house departments and sub-contracted privately for the same services:

- Food Service
- Buildings and Grounds (including custodians)
- Transportation and Vehicle Service
- Printing and Graphics

We ELIMINATED the Free Breakfast and Lunch program.

- Much of the food was wasted.
- We questioned how “needy” many participants were.
- The paperwork was overwhelming and made the

program too expensive.

- Most of all, we feel that providing food for children is the responsibility of the parents, not the school.

We REPLACED our School Nurse with a Healthy Lifestyle Advocate.

- Schools are not intended to be health clinics or hospitals.
- The school's responsibility to our students is to promote healthy lifestyles and to give students factual information.
- It's the parents' responsibility to provide healthcare for their children.

We REDUCED our number of special education resource teachers.

- Our “special approach to education” made them unnecessary. See Chapter 16 on Special Education.

