



Spruce Community School

Employee Handbook
(2025-2026)

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Section 1

Welcome to Spruce

Welcome Letter to Spruce Community School Staff

Dear Spruce Community School Staff,

We are thrilled to have you join our founding team as we embark on an exciting journey to create an innovative and supportive learning environment in Colorado Springs District 11.

Spruce began with a fundamental belief: that all students and staff should love going to school; and that schools should prepare students for their dreams. At Spruce, we are dedicated to fostering curiosity, kindness, and courage in our students and our staff.

We believe that teachers are the heart of our school, and our mission is to support you in achieving excellence in the classroom while maintaining a strong sense of community and well-being. Education is often filled with buzzwords and promises of the next big fix. But at Spruce, we believe there is, and has always been, one enduring truth: high-quality educators drive phenomenal outcomes for students and families. Excellent teaching changes lives. When educators are supported, valued, and nurtured, transformational learning happens. That is our commitment to you, and we ask you to hold us to it if we ever fall short.

This is a different kind of school. Some of the all-too-common habits of traditional school culture— isolation, gossip, negativity—have no place here. We believe in direct communication, professional collaboration, and a workplace where adults genuinely care for one another. We strive to be a school that nurtures people first: a place where you feel seen, supported, and empowered to do your best work.

We dream of a future where the impact of Spruce extends far beyond our school walls. In the next decade, as you walk the city streets of Colorado Springs, we hope you'll see the "fingerprints" of Spruce students through the projects they create for our town. Their artwork will brighten public spaces, their engineering solutions will address community challenges, and their civic initiatives will strengthen neighborhoods. Citizens will point with pride to murals, gardens, infrastructure improvements, and community programs, saying, "Spruce kids made that."

At Spruce, we work hard! Not for the sake of busyness but because we believe in doing work that matters. We challenge ourselves and one another to pursue excellence, not perfection, in a community that values purpose, collaboration, and care. Rigor here means engagement with ideas that spark curiosity, ownership of meaningful projects, and the joy of creating something real alongside others who are just as committed. We believe that when we are connected to our purpose and surrounded by like-minded people, hard work becomes deeply rewarding (and maybe even fun).

This handbook is more than a policy document. It is a source of guidance, a reminder of our ideals. When challenges arise, it will help us choose courage over comfort and show up as our best selves for our community.

Spruce is a school designed by a teacher for teachers. Your well-being and the art of teaching are at the heart of every decision. Our handbook is not meant to be prescriptive but to provide clarity because we believe that clear communication is an act of kindness.

Take the time to familiarize yourself with these pages. Reach out with questions and share your insights. This is a living document that will evolve as we grow and learn together.

In gratitude and service,

Loren Koszowski
Executive Director, Spruce Community School

Our Vision, Mission, and Core Values

Our Vision

Together, we inspire curious, kind, and courageous life-long learners who are equally prepared to listen and lead.

Our Mission

At Spruce Community School students find their purpose through adaptive thinking and joyful engagement as we reimagine academic excellence.

Our Promise

Our students leave Spruce Community School equipped to pursue their dreams, grounded in academic excellence, emotional intelligence, and the confidence to learn from success and failure.

Our Values



Curious

We explore each day as if it's our first, honoring childhood with a sense of awe and wonder.



Kind

We believe our attitudes and actions are contagious when we see the best in each person.



Courageous

We listen to our hearts and do what we believe is right, even in the face of fear.

Our Logo



Our Mascot



Our Working Norms

[Added after summer institute]

Policies that Support Purposeful Work

This Employee Handbook is designed to give you a clear, supportive overview of employment at Spruce Community School (“Spruce”). It outlines the expectations, policies, benefits, and shared agreements that guide our work together. While it’s not a substitute for direct communication or collaboration, it is a resource to ensure clarity and consistency across our community.

These guidelines are here to support your experience as an employee and to ensure fairness, consistency, and transparency. While this handbook offers a strong foundation, it cannot anticipate every scenario. As circumstances evolve, whether due to changes in law, district policy, or school-wide needs, some policies may be updated. We will make every effort to communicate any changes clearly and in a timely way. This handbook replaces any prior versions or documents that conflict with the information presented here.

We ask that all employees read this handbook carefully and refer back to it as needed. If you have questions or uncertainties about anything contained within, please reach out to your Head of School. If additional support is needed after that conversation, Human Resources (Kelly Moore with G&G) or Spruce’s Leadership Team will be happy to assist you.

Learning by Becoming: Our Educational Philosophy

At Spruce Community School, education is more than the transfer of knowledge; it's the transformation of people. Our philosophy is rooted in the idea that students (and adults) learn best when they are engaged in meaningful work, trusted with real responsibility, and surrounded by a caring, curious community.

We describe our approach as “learning by becoming.” This means our students don’t just study courage, they practice it. They don’t just memorize facts about the world, they create products that shape it. Our educational practices are intentionally designed to help students grow not just academically but personally and socially. Learning is a process of becoming the kind of person who can think critically, act compassionately, and contribute bravely.

Our educational model is guided by these core beliefs:

1. Learning is purposeful. We design learning experiences that connect to students’ lives, dreams, and communities. Every project has an authentic purpose, audience, and real-world impact.
2. Learning is social. We grow through collaboration, shared challenges, and reflective dialogue. We believe that relationships are the foundation of all great learning.
3. Learning is active. At Spruce, students explore questions, tackle problems, and create solutions. Whether they are engineering, storytelling, researching, or building, students engage with their hands, hearts, and minds.
4. Learning requires courage. We encourage risk-taking, revision, and honest feedback. We help students build the confidence to persist through challenges and develop pride in meaningful work.
5. Learning is for everyone. Every child is capable of growth, achievement, and contribution. We uphold inclusive, high expectations for all students, with supports that honor each learner’s journey.

This philosophy also extends to our staff. Educators are seen not as deliverers of content but as designers, facilitators, and mentors. We are committed to growing as learners alongside our students. We take risks, revise our practice, and support one another in the pursuit of deeper learning.

What about Projects?

At Spruce, project-based learning (PBL) is not a trend or classroom strategy. It is the foundation of our entire school design. While “PBL” is often used as a buzzword, we treat it as a systems-level lens through which we view all that we do. For us, a project is not an activity at the end of a unit, it is the learning.

We define project-based learning as the collaborative or individual development of knowledge, skills, and mindsets through pursuing a defined goal that is relevant to the community. Projects give students the opportunity to solve real problems, create public products, and explore essential questions that matter to them and the world around them.

Whether designing a safe play structure for a neighborhood park, creating persuasive campaigns to protect wildlife habitats, or using data to redesign school lunch systems, students work in authentic contexts where every lesson, skill, and reflection has a clear purpose. The answer to "Why do we need to learn this?" becomes: "Because real people need our ideas."

This approach shifts rigor from standardized test prep to professional-level expectations. Students create work that meets the standards of scientists, artists, engineers, and civic leaders. They revise, present, and persist because their audience is real, and their impact is felt. Our exhibitions, twice a year, invite families and community members to engage with student work firsthand, often leaving with the words: "I can't believe a student made this."

PBL also serves as a powerful lever for access. The same learning opportunities often reserved for the most privileged (hands-on experiences, public speaking, real-world inquiry) are embedded in every classroom at Spruce. We believe that deeper learning should not be a luxury. Every child deserves to engage in the kind of education that develops leadership, confidence, curiosity, and voice.

Section 2

Working at Spruce

Employment Classifications

To promote clarity in employee roles, expectations, and benefit eligibility, Spruce Community School classifies employees according to the categories outlined below. These classifications do not guarantee employment for any specific duration and do not alter the at-will nature of employment (unless otherwise specified by contract or law).

1. *Exempt vs. Non-Exempt (FLSA Status)*

In accordance with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and applicable Colorado wage laws:

- Exempt Employees are not eligible for overtime pay. They typically include employees in executive, administrative, or professional roles who meet specific duties and salary thresholds as defined by law.
- Non-Exempt Employees are eligible for overtime pay for hours worked beyond 40 hours in a workweek, or as otherwise defined by Colorado law. These employees must track all time worked and adhere to designated schedules.

2. *Full-Time vs. Part-Time*

- Full-Time Employees are regularly scheduled to work 30 or more hours per week. Full-time employees are generally eligible for Spruce's full range of benefits, subject to plan terms and waiting periods.
- Part-Time Employees are regularly scheduled to work fewer than 30 hours per week. They may be eligible for limited benefits, as defined by policy and applicable law.

3. *Regular vs. Temporary*

- Regular Employees are hired with the expectation of ongoing employment, subject to performance and organizational needs.
- Temporary Employees are hired for a specific short-term assignment or seasonal need. Temporary employment typically does not exceed six months and may not include benefit eligibility.

4. *Interns and Volunteers*

Spruce may engage individuals in unpaid positions (e.g., interns, student teachers, fellows, or volunteers) for educational, service, or support roles. These individuals are not considered employees and are not entitled to wages or benefits. However, they are expected to adhere to Spruce's professional standards, confidentiality agreements, and policies while on campus or in service.

Employment At-Will

Unless otherwise stated in a written agreement signed by both the employee and the Executive Director or Governing Board, all employment at Spruce Community School is considered at-will. This means that either the employee or Spruce may terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause or notice, and for any lawful reason or no reason at all.

Nothing in this Employee Handbook or any other document, communication, or practice shall be interpreted as creating a contract of employment for a specific term, nor shall it alter the at-will status of employment. Only the Governing Board or Executive Director, acting with delegated authority, may modify an employee's at-will status, and such modification must be in a signed, written agreement.

Spruce reserves the right to make changes to an employee's job duties, title, schedule, compensation, work location, and reporting structure at its sole discretion, consistent with applicable law. This flexibility allows us to respond to the evolving needs of our students, programs, and community.

At-Will Agreements

Certain employees at Spruce—particularly teachers and administrative staff—may be issued annual employment agreements aligned with the academic calendar. These agreements are typically offered in the spring for the upcoming school year and outline compensation, working days, and assignment details. However, such agreements do not alter the at-will nature of employment.

Receiving a contract for a school year does not guarantee continued employment for the full duration of the year, nor does it ensure re-employment in future years. All agreements issued by Spruce are considered at-will unless they explicitly state otherwise and are signed by the Executive Director and the employee.

Standard contract periods may follow the academic calendar for instructional staff (e.g., August 1 to June 30) or a fiscal/calendar year for non-instructional personnel (e.g., July 1 to June 30). In some cases, part-year or modified agreements may be issued, depending on operational needs.

Contract Renewals

Spruce Community School may offer eligible employees contract renewals based on performance, school needs, and available funding. Annual agreements are typically reviewed and issued in the spring for the following academic or fiscal year. While Spruce endeavors to provide timely renewal notices, continued employment is not guaranteed.

Contract renewal decisions may take into account multiple factors, including but not limited to: instructional quality, collaboration, adherence to Spruce values, student outcomes, professional conduct, and compliance with policies.

Employees are responsible for returning signed agreements by the specified deadline. Failure to return a contract by the stated due date may be treated as a voluntary resignation.

Non-Renewal of Employment

As an at-will employer, Spruce Community School retains the right not to renew any employment contract for any lawful reason or no reason at all, without the need for cause or prior disciplinary action.

Employees whose agreements will not be renewed will receive written notice of non-renewal. While Spruce aims to communicate non-renewal decisions in a timely and respectful manner, the school is not obligated to provide advance notice beyond what is required by law or contract. Non-renewal is not considered disciplinary and does not reflect a negative employment action unless otherwise stated.

Employees are encouraged to request a meeting with the Executive Director or their supervisor if they have questions about a non-renewal decision.

Voluntary Resignation

Employees who choose to resign from their position at Spruce Community School are asked to provide written notice of their intent to resign at least fourteen (14) calendar days prior to their intended last working day. Earlier notice is appreciated and supports a smooth transition for students and colleagues.

Employees in leadership, instructional, or mission-critical roles are encouraged to provide at least thirty (30) calendar days of notice when feasible.

Written resignation notices should be submitted to the employee's direct supervisor and copied to Human Resources. The notice should include the intended final working day and a forwarding address for final pay and employment documentation.

Failure to provide reasonable notice may impact rehire eligibility or result in the forfeiture of certain accrued benefits, consistent with school policy and applicable law.

Commitment to a Safe and Inclusive Workplace

Spruce Community School is committed to creating and sustaining a work environment that is respectful, inclusive, and free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. We expect all employees to contribute to a workplace culture that reflects our core values of kindness, curiosity, and courage. We are committed to maintaining an ethical and transparent workplace. Our policies are carefully crafted to proactively prevent potential misconduct, empower staff to report concerns without hesitation, and ensure swift and fair resolution of any workplace challenges. We believe that a culture of open communication and accountability is fundamental to creating a safe, supportive professional environment where every team member can thrive and contribute meaningfully to our shared mission.

All employees are expected to maintain a professional work environment in accordance with the following policies. We foster a culture of transparency and collective responsibility. We encourage all staff members to come forward promptly with any potential policy concerns, viewing each report as an opportunity to strengthen our community and address challenges constructively. If you believe you have been subjected to, witnessed, or have knowledge about discrimination, please follow the complaint procedure outlined later.

Our commitment to maintaining a supportive workplace means that every team member—particularly those in leadership roles—has a critical responsibility to quickly bring forward any observed irregularities. When concerns are raised, our leadership commits to responding swiftly, thoroughly, and with a focus on resolving issues while protecting the dignity of all individuals involved.

The Executive Director serves as the primary point of contact for any questions, concerns, or formal complaints related to our workplace policies. We approach each report with careful consideration, understanding that open communication is essential to maintaining the trust and integrity of our professional community.

Our goal is not to punish but to understand, correct, and prevent potential misconduct. By creating a safe environment where staff feel empowered to speak up, we strengthen our collective ability to uphold the highest standards of professional conduct.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

In compliance with federal and Colorado state law, Spruce Community School is an equal opportunity employer. We prohibit discrimination in all employment practices—including hiring, promotion, training, compensation, discipline, and termination on the basis of:

- Race, color, or national origin
- Sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions)
- Sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- Religion or creed
- Disability, genetic information, or medical condition
- Age (40 and over)
- Marital status, military or veteran status

- Any other status protected by applicable federal, state, or local law

All employment decisions are made based on qualifications, merit, and organizational need.

Covered Individuals

This policy applies to every member of the Spruce community, including employees, interns, residents, volunteers, and job applicants. It is the responsibility of all individuals, regardless of role or title, to uphold these expectations. This includes team members at every level, from classroom teachers to leadership.

Discrimination

For the purposes of this policy, “discrimination” is defined as any adverse employment action taken against an employee or applicant that is based, in whole or in part, on the individual’s actual or perceived membership in a protected class. Such actions may include, but are not limited to, decisions regarding recruitment, hiring, assignment, promotion, discipline, compensation, benefits, or termination. Consideration of protected characteristics in employment decisions is strictly prohibited except where otherwise permitted or required by applicable law.

Adverse Employment Action

For the purposes of this policy, an “adverse employment action” refers to any employment-related decision or conduct that negatively affects the terms, conditions, or privileges of an individual’s employment. This may include, but is not limited to: termination, demotion, suspension, reduction in compensation, denial of a merit-based increase, failure or refusal to hire or promote, limitation of job opportunities, reassignment of duties, or failure to provide legally required accommodations (such as those related to disability, pregnancy, workers’ compensation, military service, or domestic violence). Any such action that is motivated by or results in unequal treatment on the basis of a protected characteristic may constitute unlawful discrimination.

Protected Categories

Under federal and Colorado state law, individuals are protected from discrimination and harassment based on certain characteristics, known as protected categories. These include, but are not limited to: race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy (including related conditions), age (40 and over), religion or creed, disability (physical or mental), genetic information, marital status, military or veteran status, and status as a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. These protections also extend to perceived membership in a protected category, as well as association with an individual who has, or is perceived to have, one or more of these protected characteristics. Spruce Community School is committed to upholding these legal protections and ensuring that all employment decisions are free from bias, whether actual or perceived.

Unlawful Harassment

Harassment is prohibited whether it occurs in person, in writing, electronically, or through a third party. This policy applies to conduct between employees, as well as conduct involving third parties such as students, volunteers, vendors, and applicants. Harassment is strictly prohibited regardless of the harasser’s or the victim’s position or status.

Unlawful harassment is defined as unwelcome conduct based on an individual's protected characteristic (see "Protected Categories") that interferes with work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. Harassment does not need to be severe or pervasive to be unlawful under the Colorado Protecting Opportunities and Workers' Rights (POWR) Act; a single incident may be sufficient if it alters the conditions of employment.

Harassment may take many forms, including but not limited to:

Verbal harassment

includes, but is not limited to, offensive or demeaning comments, slurs, epithets, or jokes based on protected characteristics; comments about a person's body, identity, or appearance; repeated unwanted remarks about an individual's religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation; and threatening or intimidating language.

Physical harassment

includes, but is not limited to, any unwanted touching, blocking of movement, physical intimidation, patting, stroking, grabbing, whistling, making sexual gestures, assault, damage to personal property, or invading the space of another. It may also involve the use of gestures or proximity intended to harass or degrade.

Visual harassment

refers to the display or circulation of offensive or derogatory images, cartoons, posters, or gestures; the sharing of inappropriate content through email, text, letters, gifts, or social media; and the wearing of clothing that includes harassing or discriminatory messaging.

Sexual harassment

is a specific form of unlawful harassment. It is harassment based on sex, gender, pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition. It includes, but is not limited to, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It can occur between individuals of any gender or sexual orientation and may be committed by a supervisor, coworker, or non-employee. Sexual harassment does not need to be motivated by sexual desire. Sexual harassment may include situations that began as reciprocal but later ceased to be reciprocal.

Sexual harassment may be either:

1. Quid pro quo sexual harassment occurs when submission to or rejection of sexual conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions—such as hiring, promotion, discipline, or continued employment. For example, a supervisor suggesting a raise or favorable evaluation in exchange for a date or threatening termination for refusal of sexual advances constitutes quid pro quo harassment.
2. Hostile work environment sexual harassment exists when sexual conduct unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance or creates an intimidating, abusive, or offensive work environment. Examples include repeated flirtatious behavior or unwelcome sexual comments, the display of sexually explicit materials, telling sexual jokes or using

suggestive gestures, and spreading rumors about a colleague's sexual behavior or orientation. Sexual harassment does not require physical contact or economic harm to be unlawful.

Third-Party and Bystander Harassment

Harassment may also be committed by individuals outside the organization, including parents, vendors, or community members. In addition, employees who witness inappropriate behavior directed at others are encouraged to report it. Bystander reports are protected, and employees who speak up in good faith will not be subject to retaliation.

Reporting and Responsibility

Every employee is responsible for contributing to a respectful work environment. If you experience or observe harassment, you are expected to report the conduct to your supervisor, the Executive Director, or Human Resources. Reports may be made verbally or in writing and will be handled promptly, impartially, and with sensitivity to confidentiality. Retaliation for reporting harassment in good faith is strictly prohibited and constitutes a separate violation of policy.

School leaders and supervisors are expected to model respectful conduct at all times and are required to respond promptly and appropriately to complaints or concerns. Failure to act on a known issue may result in disciplinary consequences.

Corrective Action

Any employee found to have engaged in unlawful harassment, including sexual harassment, will be subject to corrective action, up to and including termination of employment. Conduct that does not meet the legal definition of harassment but violates Spruce's standards for professionalism and respect may still result in disciplinary measures.

Retaliation

Spruce Community School strictly prohibits retaliation against any individual for engaging in protected activity. Retaliation undermines our legal obligations, our values as an organization, and our commitment to maintaining a safe and respectful workplace. All employees, regardless of role or position, are entitled to raise concerns, report misconduct, and participate in investigations without fear of adverse consequences.

Retaliation is any adverse action taken against an employee, applicant, intern, volunteer, or other covered individual because they engaged in protected activity. Protected activity includes, but is not limited to:

- Filing a complaint of discrimination, harassment, or other unlawful conduct
- Participating in an investigation, grievance, or hearing
- Requesting a reasonable accommodation for disability, pregnancy, religious beliefs, or other legally protected reason
- Reporting workplace safety concerns or violations of law
- Opposing or refusing to engage in unlawful practices

Retaliation may be explicit or subtle and is unlawful even if the original complaint is ultimately unsubstantiated, so long as it was made in good faith.

This policy protects not only the individual who made the complaint or participated in an investigation but also those who are perceived to have done so or are associated with someone who engaged in protected activity. This includes current and former employees, job applicants, interns (paid or unpaid), contractors, and volunteers. Retaliation can take many forms.

Adverse Employment Action

is any decision or conduct that could reasonably dissuade a person from engaging in protected activity. These actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Termination, demotion, suspension, or reduction in hours or pay
- Negative performance evaluations or disciplinary actions without justification
- Exclusion from meetings, communications, or professional opportunities
- Reassignment to less desirable duties or shifts
- Creating a hostile or isolating work environment
- Threats, intimidation, or unwarranted scrutiny

Even if the action does not result in a formal change to employment status, it may still be considered retaliatory if it causes harm or chills participation in protected activity.

Employees found to have engaged in retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Leaders and supervisors have a special responsibility to ensure that retaliation does not occur under their supervision, whether direct or indirect.

Complaint Procedure

It is our collective responsibility to maintain a professional working environment. It is brave work to stand up when there is wrongdoing. Our goal with our complaint procedure is to support this courageous act. We are committed to providing a fair, accessible, and responsive complaint process that complies with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

Where to Report Complaint

The Board of Directors assigns the following individuals to receive and investigate unlawful discrimination and harassment complaints and to ensure Spruce's compliance with the law;

Uniform Complaint

- Loren Koszowski - loren@sprucecommunityschool.org

Title IX - Staff

- Elizabeth Duthoy - Elizabeth@sprucecommunityschool.org

Title IX - Students

- Elizabeth Duthoy - Elizabeth@sprucecommunityschool.org

Employees may report a complaint to any supervisory or leadership personnel at Spruce, including but not limited to their direct supervisor, the Executive Director, Head of School, or Director of Students and Families. There is no requirement to follow a chain of command when submitting a complaint; employees are encouraged to report concerns to the individual with whom they feel most comfortable.

All supervisors and individuals in leadership roles have an affirmative duty to report any conduct that they know of—or reasonably should know of—that may constitute a violation of Spruce’s policies on discrimination, harassment, or retaliation. Failure to report such conduct to the Executive Director may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Official Procedure

1. Filing a Complaint

Any employee, applicant, intern, volunteer, or individual working with Spruce who believes they have experienced unlawful discrimination, harassment, or retaliation may file a complaint. Complaints may be submitted verbally or in writing to any of the following:

- The individual’s direct supervisor or team lead
- The Executive Director
- The Human Resources representative
- The designated Title IX Coordinator (for issues involving sex-based discrimination or harassment): Elizabeth Duthoy

Anonymous complaints will be reviewed to the extent possible, though specific information helps facilitate a thorough investigation.

2. Initial Response Assessment

Upon receiving a complaint, Spruce will:

- I. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint
- II. Conduct a preliminary assessment to determine whether the complaint falls under general employment policy or Title IX
- III. Provide supportive measures, if appropriate, such as temporary schedule changes, no-contact directives, or workplace accommodations
- IV. Initiate an investigation (or Title IX process, if applicable)

3. Complaint Response and Investigation Procedures

Upon receipt or discovery of a complaint involving alleged discrimination, harassment, or retaliation, the Executive Director, Human Resources, or other designated officer will initiate the response process outlined below. These procedures apply to all reports involving potential violations of Spruce Community School’s policies and are designed to ensure timely, thorough, and impartial review.

- I. Notification of Rights: The complainant will be informed of their rights under relevant laws and policies, including the right to report, to be free from retaliation, to access supportive measures, and to participate in a fair investigation process.

- II. Interim Measures: Spruce may implement interim remedial measures as necessary to protect the safety and well-being of involved parties during the investigation. These may include schedule changes, workspace adjustments, no-contact directives, or temporary leave.
- III. Investigation Initiation: A prompt and impartial investigation will be authorized and conducted. This will include interviews with (1) the complainant, (2) the individual accused of misconduct, and (3) any witnesses or other individuals who may have relevant knowledge or have experienced similar conduct. All parties will have an opportunity to provide evidence.
- IV. Evaluation of Evidence: All relevant facts will be reviewed, including the nature and context of the alleged behavior, the credibility of individuals involved, and the totality of the circumstances. Verbal, physical, and visual elements will be considered when determining whether the conduct constitutes unlawful harassment or discrimination.
- V. Findings and Determination: Upon completion of the investigation, a determination will be made as to whether a policy violation occurred. To the extent permitted by applicable law, the results of the investigation and the rationale for the decision will be shared with the complainant and the respondent.
- VI. Remedial Action: If the investigation determines that misconduct occurred, prompt and effective remedial measures will be implemented. Disciplinary action will be proportionate to the severity of the offense and may include written warnings, suspension, or termination.
- VII. Protection from Further Harm: Reasonable steps will be taken to prevent further misconduct and to safeguard the complainant and others from additional harassment.
- VIII. Protection from Retaliation: Individuals who report concerns or participate in the process will be protected from retaliation. Any attempt to intimidate, threaten, or penalize a participant in this process will be treated as a separate and serious violation.
- IX. Confidentiality: All efforts will be made to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved and the confidentiality of the investigation process, consistent with the need to conduct a thorough review and comply with applicable legal obligations.
- X. Restorative Measures: Where possible, additional steps will be taken to alleviate the effects of the misconduct, including access to resources, adjustments to work environments, and follow-up check-ins with affected parties.

At the conclusion of the investigation, a written report will be generated summarizing findings and recommendations for corrective action, if warranted.

4. Title IX-Specific Procedures

Title IX applies to any instance of sex-based harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, or other forms of gender-based misconduct occurring in the context of Spruce's programs or activities.

Under Title IX, Spruce is required to:

- I. Appoint a trained Title IX Coordinator to oversee compliance and response
- II. Follow a formal grievance process for Title IX complaints, which includes:
 - Written notice of allegations to both parties
 - An opportunity for each party to present evidence and respond
 - The right to have an advisor present during the process
 - A written determination provided to both parties

- An opportunity to appeal the outcome

Title IX complaints will never be resolved through informal resolution (e.g., mediation) without the voluntary, written consent of both parties and only if the allegations do not involve an employee sexually harassing a student.

5. Resolution and Corrective Action

If it is determined that a policy violation occurred, Spruce will take prompt and appropriate corrective action based on the severity of the misconduct, the surrounding circumstances, and the need to prevent future violations. Disciplinary actions may include verbal or written warnings, suspension, reassignment, demotion, or termination of employment. In some cases, individuals may also face legal consequences under state or federal law. Due to privacy protections, Spruce may not be able to disclose the full scope of any disciplinary action to the complainant.

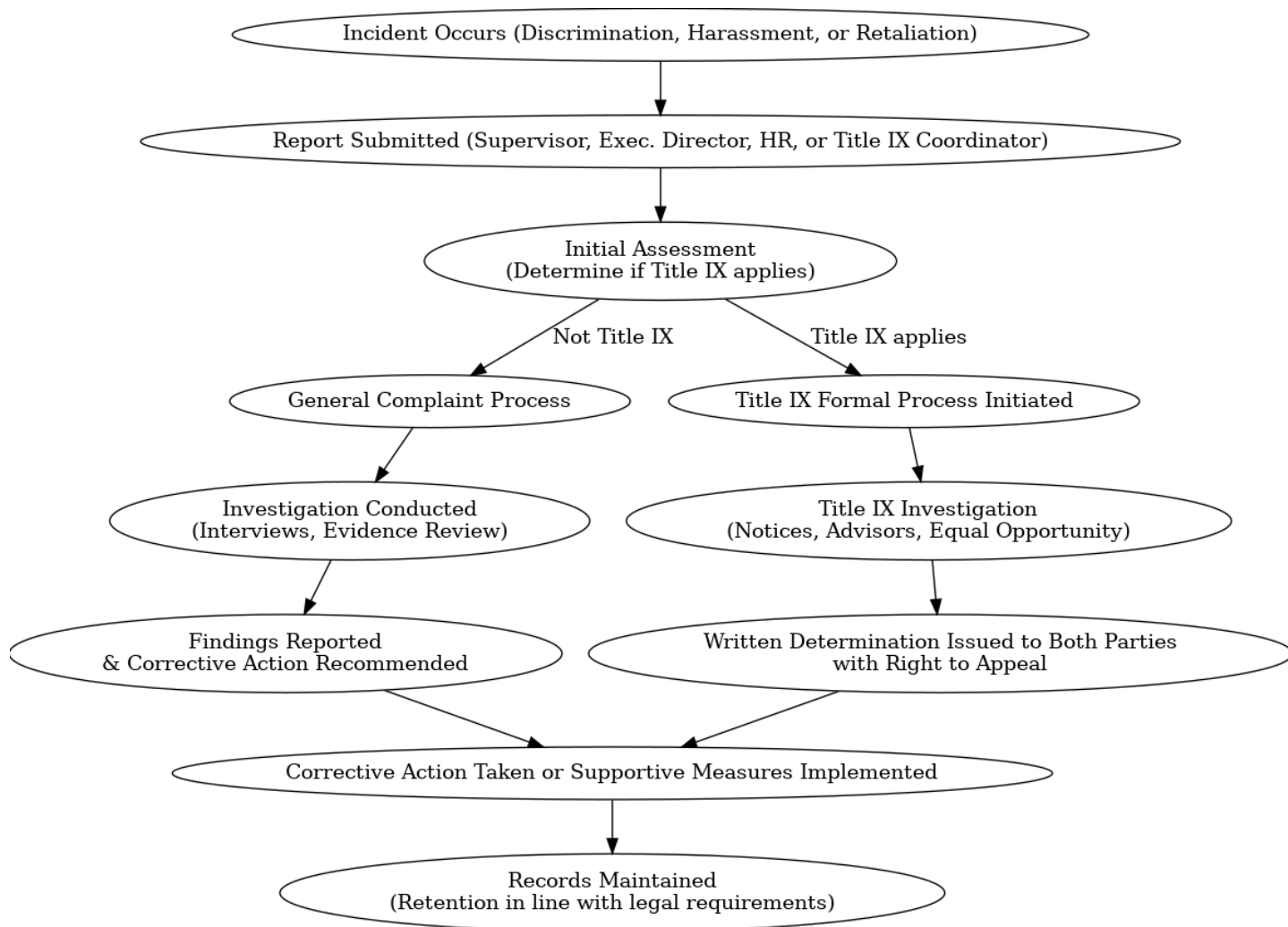
6. Protection Against Retaliation

Retaliation against anyone who files a complaint, participates in an investigation, or supports another employee in doing so is strictly prohibited and constitutes a separate policy violation.

7. Recordkeeping and Compliance

All complaints and investigation records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws, including Title IX recordkeeping requirements (7 years minimum). The Title IX Coordinator will track compliance, monitor repeat patterns, and ensure training and reporting standards are met.

The following flowchart showcases the complaint procedure:



Investigations Without a Formal Complaint

Spruce Community School reserves the right to initiate an investigation into potential misconduct, even in the absence of a formal complaint, if there is reason to believe that a violation of school policy or applicable law has occurred. Similarly, Spruce may continue an investigation if the original complainant withdraws or no longer wishes to proceed, particularly where the alleged behavior poses a risk to the school community or involves serious misconduct.

Appeal Procedure

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of an investigation, they may submit a written appeal within fifteen (15) calendar days of receiving notice of the decision. Appeals should be filed with the Executive Director, who will transmit the appeal to the Spruce School Board or its designated representative. The Board may choose whether or not to meet directly with the complainant and will issue a written decision. The Board's decision will be final and binding.

Employee Cooperation Requirement

All employees are expected to fully cooperate with any investigation conducted by Spruce. This includes providing truthful information, submitting relevant documents or evidence in a timely manner, and refraining from any conduct that may interfere with the process. Employees must also

maintain discretion and confidentiality regarding the investigation. Failure to cooperate may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

How to Report a Complaint to Government Agencies

Employees who believe they have experienced unlawful discrimination, harassment, or retaliation may file a complaint with a government agency, regardless of whether they have reported the matter internally at Spruce.

You may contact any of the following agencies:

- Colorado Civil Rights Division (CCRD)
<https://ccrd.colorado.gov>
 Phone: (303) 894-2997 | Toll-Free: 1-800-262-4845
 The CCRD investigates complaints related to employment discrimination, harassment, and retaliation under Colorado law.
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
<https://www.eeoc.gov>
 Phone: 1-800-669-4000 (TTY: 1-800-669-6820)
 The EEOC investigates claims of discrimination and harassment under federal law, including Title VII, the ADA, and the ADEA.

These agencies provide legal remedies and have their own complaint and investigation processes. Employees are encouraged to seek additional information directly from these agencies if they wish to file a formal charge.

Training Requirements

Spruce Community School is committed to providing all employees with clear, practical training to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. To comply with legal requirements and promote a respectful work environment, all staff will participate in regular training.

Members of the Governing Board, supervisors, and employees with managerial responsibilities are required to complete at least two hours of qualified sexual harassment prevention training every two years. All other nonsupervisory employees must complete at least one hour of training by September 1, 2026, and every two years thereafter.

Supervisors who are newly hired or promoted after July 1, 2025, must receive this training within six months of assuming a supervisory role.

“Qualified training” refers to classroom-based or interactive online instruction that meets applicable legal standards and is led by individuals with demonstrated expertise in the prevention of sexual harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. The training will cover federal and state laws, provide practical guidance on identifying and responding to misconduct, and outline available remedies for those who experience harassment in the workplace.

Whistleblower Policy

Spruce Community School is committed to maintaining transparency, integrity, and public trust. This policy is designed to encourage employees and affiliated individuals to raise concerns about serious misconduct that may affect the school's legal obligations, financial operations, or ethical standards.

This policy applies to concerns related to institutional wrongdoing, such as:

- Financial misconduct (e.g., fraud, embezzlement, misuse of public funds)
- Conflicts of interest or abuse of authority
- Violations of laws, regulations, or grant requirements
- Serious breaches of board policy or school governance procedures
- Unlawful orders or cover-ups
- Retaliation against whistleblowers

This policy is not intended to address interpersonal grievances (e.g., harassment, discrimination, retaliation)—such concerns should be reported using Spruce's Complaint Procedure.

Reporting Misconduct

Anyone who becomes aware of potential wrongdoing is encouraged to report it to:

- The Executive Director
- The Board Chair
- The School's Legal Counsel (if applicable) Reports may also be submitted anonymously through an internal reporting channel or ethics hotline, if available.

Good Faith Protection

Anyone who reports a concern under this policy is protected, even if the concern turns out to be unfounded, provided the report was made honestly and in good faith. No evidence of wrongdoing is required at the time of the report—just a sincere belief that misconduct may have occurred.

Protection from Retaliation

Spruce prohibits any form of retaliation against individuals who report concerns or participate in related investigations. This includes demotion, dismissal, denial of opportunities, or any adverse change in working conditions. Retaliation under this policy is itself a serious violation and may result in disciplinary action.

Investigations and Outcomes

All reports under this policy will be reviewed promptly, impartially, and with appropriate confidentiality. If wrongdoing is found, corrective or legal action will be taken.

Section 3

Shared Agreements

Professional Conduct & Culture

Spruce Community School staff are held to high professional standards that reflect our mission, values, and commitment to students and the community. Professionalism includes how we show up, communicate, collaborate, and model integrity every day. All staff are expected to:

- Maintain punctuality and consistent attendance
- Follow through on responsibilities and commitments
- Uphold appropriate boundaries with students, families, and colleagues
- Engage in continuous reflection and professional learning
- Represent Spruce positively within and beyond the school community
- Maintain a solutions-oriented mindset and demonstrate adaptability

This professional culture is all about modeling the habits and character we seek to cultivate in our students and teacher residents.

A Culture of Communication & Collaboration

At Spruce, we believe that strong relationships and open communication are the foundation of a thriving school. We are committed to a culture where adults speak truth with kindness, listen with curiosity, and engage in conversations that build trust—even when those conversations are uncomfortable.

Inspired by the work of Dr. Brené Brown, we approach difficult conversations as opportunities to rumble—to lean into vulnerability, ask questions, and work through discomfort together. We rumble not to win or avoid conflict, but to better understand, grow, and move forward with clarity and connection.

We use “rumble starters” as tools for communication, especially when navigating disagreement or tension. These include:

- “I’m curious about...”
- “Help me understand...”
- “The story I’m telling myself is...”
- “I’m wondering...”
- “Walk me through your thinking...”
- “I’m not sure what to say right now, but I’m glad we’re talking about this.”
- “Tell me more.”
- “What does support look like from me right now?”

These sentence stems help us approach dialogue with courage, humility, and empathy. They remind us that clarity is kind, and that curiosity builds bridges where assumptions create distance.

We expect staff to:

- Communicate directly and respectfully with colleagues

- Seek to understand before seeking to be understood
- Use “rumble starters” when conversations get hard or stakes feel high
- Approach feedback and conflict with curiosity, not blame
- Uphold confidentiality and psychological safety in all interactions
- Reach out—not around—when misunderstandings arise
- Ask permission to give feedback
- Engage in “tough” conversations from a space of regulation
- Honor the pause and create spaces of silence so all voices are heard

At Spruce, we don't avoid hard conversations—we embrace them as part of what it means to grow as a community.

Staff Norms and Code of Conduct

At Spruce Community School, we expect every staff member to model the values we teach. Our Code of Conduct is more than a list of rules—it is a reflection of our shared belief that adults set the tone for a healthy, thriving school culture. When we embody kindness, curiosity, and courage, we create the conditions for students to do the same.

We commit to the following professional norms:

1. **Kindness in Action** - We build a culture of care by:
 - Speaking and acting with respect, even in moments of stress or disagreement
 - Avoiding gossip, exclusion, or passive-aggressive behavior
 - Creating inclusive environments where every person feels seen, valued, and safe
 - Remembering that everyone is going through their own invisible battles, sometimes, a little kindness changes a person's day
 - Model emotional regulation and empathy
2. **Curiosity in Practice** - We remain open, reflective, and willing to grow by:
 - Listening deeply and asking questions before jumping to conclusions
 - Seeking feedback and engaging in professional learning
 - Approaching conflict with a learning mindset, not blame or defensiveness
 - Considering how identity, power, and context impact our actions and assumptions
3. **Courage in Community** - We show up fully and lead with integrity by:
 - Naming hard things and having direct conversations with care
 - Addressing concerns through the proper channels, not through side conversations
 - Holding ourselves and each other accountable with compassion
 - Standing up for students, colleagues, and families when equity, safety, or dignity are at stake
4. **Professional Responsibilities** - We uphold Spruce's professional standards by:
 - Maintaining appropriate boundaries and confidentiality

- Using technology and resources responsibly
 - Limiting personal phone use during the school day to essential instructional needs or emergencies
 - Modeling presence by avoiding texting or non-urgent device use in front of students (just as we expect students to be phone-free and engaged, we hold ourselves to the same standard)
- Adhering to all school policies and procedures
- Showing up on time, prepared, and ready to contribute meaningfully
- Having each other's back and being a dependable teammate

Violations of this Code may result in restorative conversations, coaching, or formal disciplinary action, depending on the nature and frequency of the conduct. Our goal is always to restore trust, repair harm, and grow stronger together.

5. Professional Dress & Appearance - We dress with care to reflect our role and respect our community by:

- Following a smart casual dress code for regular school days. This means staff are expected to look polished and professional while still feeling comfortable and authentic. Smart casual is more put-together than casual wear but less formal than traditional business attire. It's not about dressing up—it's about showing up with care and intention.
- Here's what smart casual might look like:
 - Tops: Button-downs, polos, sweaters, blouses, and well-fitting t-shirts (especially when layered under a cardigan or blazer).
 - Bottoms: Chinos, tailored pants, dark-wash jeans (avoid ripped or overly casual styles), skirts, and dresses.
 - Shoes: Clean sneakers, flats, loafers, boots, or dress shoes—whatever allows you to move comfortably and safely throughout the day.
 - Accessories: Items like belts, scarves, watches, or hats can add personality and polish, as long as they don't distract from your role as an educator.
- A few additional guidelines:
 - Shorts, skirts, and dresses should be long enough to allow for movement, sitting on the floor, or supervising recess (typically mid-thigh or longer).
 - Sleeveless shirts should have straps at least two fingers wide, and all clothing should allow for safe, active work without revealing undergarments.
 - Clothing that includes offensive, exclusionary, or non-curricular political messaging is not permitted.
- Fieldwork & hands-on days: We recognize that learning at Spruce is active and sometimes messy. On project days, fieldwork, outdoor excursions, or arts-based activities, staff may wear clothing suited to the day's tasks—think athletic wear, durable pants, sturdy shoes, or layered outdoor gear. Even on these days, attire should still be respectful, allow for safe movement, and reflect the role of educator.
- If you're unsure whether something is appropriate, please check in with your Head of School.

- We trust our staff to use good judgment and to model a balance of professionalism, personality, and readiness for hands-on teaching.

Conflict Resolution & Grievance Process

We recognize that in any professional environment, conflicts may arise. At Spruce, we are committed to resolving disputes with respect, transparency, and fairness. When concerns emerge, we encourage the following process:

- **Direct Dialogue:** Whenever possible, concerns should first be addressed directly and respectfully between the individuals involved.
- **Collaborative Mediation:** If direct conversation is not successful or not appropriate, staff should seek support from a supervisor or designated mediator to facilitate a resolution.
- **Formal Grievance Process:** If the matter remains unresolved or involves serious policy violations (e.g., discrimination, harassment, retaliation), the staff member may file a formal complaint in accordance with the Complaint Procedure outlined in this handbook.

All concerns will be addressed in a timely, confidential, and impartial manner. Retaliation for raising concerns in good faith is strictly prohibited.

Section 4

Daily Operations

Work Hours & Schedules

Spruce Community School values both professional accountability and personal sustainability. We believe in setting clear expectations while trusting educators and staff to manage their time with integrity, care, and a commitment to our shared mission.

Standard Work Hours

Employee work hours may vary by role and calendar (e.g., instructional staff, support staff, leadership, or extended-year employees). Standard full-time schedules generally align with the following expectations:

Instructional Staff:

Typically on campus from 7:30 AM to 3:45 PM, Monday through Friday, during the school year. Staff are expected to be present for student arrival and dismissal, staff meetings, planning periods, and family engagement events, as applicable.

Administrative and Support Staff:

Work hours are based on individual assignments and school needs and are generally between 7:00 AM and 4:00 PM, with specific schedules set in collaboration with supervisors.

Part-Time and Hourly Staff:

Work according to an agreed-upon schedule, which may vary based on assignment. Accurate timekeeping is required for hourly staff, and all overtime must be pre-approved by a supervisor.

Flexibility and Professional Judgment

We recognize that not all work happens within fixed hours. Staff are encouraged to use professional judgment in meeting responsibilities such as:

- Responding to families and colleagues in a timely manner
- Preparing for instruction or events outside of contracted hours
- Attending required school functions (e.g., back-to-school night, exhibitions, professional development)
- Making time for collaboration, grading, planning, and student support

We ask all employees to communicate proactively with supervisors if personal circumstances affect their availability or schedule.

Attendance and Punctuality

Consistent and timely attendance is essential to the smooth operation of the school and the success of students. Employees are expected to:

- Arrive on time and remain on duty throughout their scheduled shift
- Notify their supervisor as soon as possible in the event of illness, emergency, or unforeseen delay
- Follow call-in or absence reporting procedures described later

Chronic lateness, unexcused absences, or early departures without prior approval may result in disciplinary action. Employees who are absent without just cause for three consecutive days and have not contacted their supervisor will be assumed to have voluntarily resigned from their employment (job abandonment) as of their third day missed unless otherwise prohibited by applicable law.

Plan Time, Lunch, and Breaks

Teachers are provided a daily average of 110 minutes of plan time as part of their scheduled day, which includes the unpaid 30-minute meal period required under Colorado law for employees working more than five hours per day. Plan time is scheduled in coordination with the Head of School to ensure consistent student coverage. Additional rest breaks may be taken as needed, consistent with Colorado labor law.

Early Release Days and Extended Hours

Spruce Community School may adjust regular work hours to accommodate early release days, professional development, and school-wide events such as exhibitions, family nights, student performances, and celebrations of learning.

Early Release Days

On days when students are dismissed early, staff may be required to:

- Attend professional development sessions
- Engage in team planning, student support, or family communication
- Participate in data reflection or collaborative instructional design

Unless otherwise specified by a supervisor, staff are expected to remain on campus during standard contract hours on early release days, even if students leave early.

Extended Hours for Events Full-Time Employees

All full-time instructional staff are expected to attend a limited number of required after-hours events each semester. These may include but are not limited to:

- Curriculum nights or back-to-school night
- Student exhibitions or project showcases
- Student-led conferences
- School-wide community celebrations

Advance notice of required events will be provided. While we respect personal boundaries and work-life balance, participation in these moments is essential to community building and family partnership. Flex time may be granted at a supervisor's discretion for hours worked outside of the regular schedule.

School Year Calendar

Spruce Community School follows an annual academic calendar aligned to Colorado instructional time requirements and designed to support high-quality teaching, family engagement, and restorative breaks.

The official calendar is published each spring for the following school year and includes key dates such as:

- First and last day of school
- Staff training and professional development days
- Family conferences and student exhibitions
- Breaks for holidays and seasonal recesses
- Designated half-days and early release schedules

2026–2027 School Year Highlights

- First Day of School: August 19, 2026 (Half Day)
- Fall Break: November 23–30, 2026
- Winter Break: December 21, 2026 – January 4, 2027
- Spring Break: March 22 – March 29, 2027
- Last Day of School: June 4, 2027 (Half Day)
- Student Contact Days: 175
- Staff Contract Days: 191

Staff are expected to review the full calendar annually and confirm attendance at required professional development, student-led conferences, and community exhibitions. The School Calendar for 2026–2027 can be found in the Appendix.

Spruce staff have varying work calendars depending on role and contract type:

- Instructional Staff (Teachers): Typically follow a 191-day contract aligned with the academic year. This includes student contact days, staff training, professional development, and family engagement events.
- Administrative and Year-Round Staff: Generally follow a 220-day or 12-month schedule. Time off is scheduled in coordination with the Executive Director and aligned with school needs.

Specific calendars and workdays are provided in individual agreements and clarified during onboarding each year.

School Closures and Emergency Protocols

Spruce Community School prioritizes the safety and well-being of our students, staff, and families. In the event of inclement weather, facility emergencies, or other threats to school operations, Spruce may close the campus, delay start times, or transition to remote learning.

Closures and Alerts

Spruce will communicate all emergency-related decisions through:

- Email and text alerts to staff and families
- Announcements on our website and social media
- Local news outlets and school messenger notifications

Spruce follows Colorado Springs District 11's guidance and weather service alerts when making closure decisions.

Emergency Response Protocols

Spruce Community School is committed to fostering a physically and emotionally safe environment for all students and staff. Our approach to emergency preparedness is grounded in the belief that safety is not created through fear, but through calm, clarity, and consistent practice.

All staff receive annual safety training in compliance with OSHA and Colorado School Safety regulations, including assigned roles within Spruce's broader Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). New hires complete this training as part of onboarding.

We utilize the "I Love U Guys" Foundation's Standard Response Protocol (SRP), which provides a shared language and set of actions for emergency response. The SRP includes five clear actions: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter. Each protocol is designed to be simple, easy to follow, and effective in real-time situations. The complete SRP handbook can be found in the [Appendix](#).

The SRP Includes Five Clear Actions: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter.

IN AN EMERGENCY TAKE ACTION



HOLD! In your room or area. Clear the halls.

STUDENTS

Clear the hallways and remain in room or area until the "All Clear" is announced
Do business as usual

ADULTS

Close and lock door
Account for students and adults
Do business as usual



SECURE! Get inside. Lock outside doors.

STUDENTS

Return to inside of building
Do business as usual

ADULTS

Bring everyone indoors
Lock outside doors
Increase situational awareness
Account for students and adults
Do business as usual



LOCKDOWN! Locks, lights, out of sight.

STUDENTS

Move away from sight
Maintain silence
Do not open the door

ADULTS

Recover students from hallway if possible
Lock the classroom door
Turn out the lights
Move away from sight
Maintain silence
Do not open the door
Prepare to evade or defend



EVACUATE! (A location may be specified)

STUDENTS

Leave stuff behind if required to
If possible, bring your phone
Follow instructions

ADULTS

Lead students to Evacuation location
Account for students and adults
Notify if missing, extra, or injured students or adults



SHELTER! Hazard and safety strategy.

STUDENTS

Use appropriate safety strategy for the hazard

ADULTS

Lead safety strategy
Account for students and adults
Notify if missing, extra, or injured students or adults

Hazard

Tornado
Hazmat
Earthquake
Tsunami

Safety Strategy

Evacuate to shelter area
Seal the room
Drop, cover and hold
Get to high ground

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Spruce conducts regular drills each semester, including at least one Evacuation, Lockdown, and Secure drill. All drills are announced in advance and conducted with care and developmental sensitivity to ensure students feel supported, not scared. Staff are expected to know their assigned roles, model calm leadership, and supervise students with confidence and compassion during drills and emergencies.

We believe drills should build confidence, not fear. Staff are trained to introduce safety practices to students in age-appropriate ways and to follow up with debriefs that reinforce emotional safety and self-regulation. Safety is always explained as a form of care—something we do together, just like buckling a seatbelt or washing our hands.

Spruce staff are trained in trauma-informed practices, risk and threat assessment protocols, and restorative approaches to behavior. We believe mental health is a key component of safety and work to support the emotional well-being of all students through proactive routines, access to support, and family partnerships.

In accordance with workplace safety regulations, any workplace injuries or hazards must be reported immediately to HR for documentation and appropriate response.

A more comprehensive overview of our approach, roles, reunification process, and campus security measures can be found in our [Safety at Spruce Community School](#) document, available on the staff drive and by request from the Executive Director.

Environmental Health and Safety

Our project-based learning approach often involves hands-on work with tools, materials, and equipment. Safety must be intentionally embedded in the planning, supervision, and execution of all learning activities.

Staff are expected to:

- Ensure students are properly trained in the safe use of equipment and materials.
- Provide appropriate supervision to minimize risks of injury.
- Follow established safety protocols and immediately report unsafe conditions or injuries to the Head of School.

If you have questions about the use of any tools, chemicals, paints, or other materials, please contact your designated Head of School or the Executive Director. All tools and materials must be approved for use and properly stored.

Spruce maintains compliance with OSHA and applicable state laws through documented safety procedures, including:

- An Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP)
- A Hazard Communication Plan (HazCom)
- A Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure Control Plan

Staff must report all injuries, accidents, or near misses—no matter how minor—to their supervisor immediately. Prompt reporting is essential for addressing hazards, supporting employee care, and processing workers' compensation claims when needed.

Reporting Suspicious Activity

The safety of our school community relies on the awareness and proactive response of all staff. Employees are expected to remain alert to suspicious activity or individuals and report concerns immediately to the Executive Director or Head of Schools.

This includes:

- Individuals on campus without a visitor badge
- Unattended packages or unusual items
- Any behavior that appears threatening or out of place

Employees are encouraged to work with the front office to ensure visitors sign in, wear proper identification, and follow school protocols.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse or Neglect

In accordance with Colorado law (C.R.S. § 19-3-304), all Spruce employees are mandated reporters. If a staff member has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected, they are required by law to report it immediately.

Reporting Procedure:

1. Immediately report by phone to the Department of Human Services or local law enforcement.
 - Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 1-844-CO-4-KIDS (844-264-5437)
2. Notify your supervisor or the Executive Director after making the report (but not before).
3. Do not investigate or seek confirmation before reporting. The duty to report is triggered by suspicion, not proof.

Staff must submit a written follow-up report if directed by authorities. Mandated reports are confidential and protected by law. Failure to report may result in criminal and civil penalties, as well as disciplinary action up to and including termination.

No employee shall be penalized for making a good-faith report of suspected abuse. The safety of children is a collective responsibility, and Spruce maintains a zero-tolerance policy for failure to report.

Field work and Student Transportation

Field work is an extension of classroom learning and must be thoughtfully planned, supervised, and approved in accordance with school policy.

Planning and Approval

All field work must be pre-approved by the Executive Director or designee. Staff members leading trips are required to:

- Submit a completed [Field Work Permission Form](#) at least two weeks in advance
- Clearly communicate trip objectives, logistics, and safety measures
- Ensure all parent/guardian permissions and waivers are signed prior to the trip
- Coordinate with the Business Office to confirm insurance, transportation, and any associated costs

Staff must not take students off campus without formal approval and documentation.

Supervision and Student Safety

The safety and well-being of students is the top priority on all school-sponsored trips. Staff are responsible for:

- Maintaining appropriate student-to-adult supervision ratios
- Carrying emergency contact and medical information for all students
- Reviewing behavioral expectations with students prior to departure
- Ensuring that all school rules and conduct standards apply during the trip

Inappropriate student behavior may result in the student being sent home at family expense and/or being subject to disciplinary consequences upon return.

Transportation

If a staff member or volunteer transports students in a personal or school vehicle, the following must be on file with the school:

- Valid driver's license
- Proof of current insurance
- Completed fingerprints

All drivers must follow Spruce's transportation safety guidelines. Spruce reserves the right to deny transportation privileges for any reason related to safety, liability, or compliance. All passengers must wear seatbelts and the driver must comply with all rules and regulations of the road. Drivers must drive directly to the destination with no unplanned stops.

Liability and Waivers

Parents/guardians must sign a waiver acknowledging the risks associated with participation in off-campus activities and releasing Spruce Community School, its employees, and affiliates from

liability, except in cases of willful and wanton misconduct, in accordance with the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act.

Section 5

Compensation & Payroll

Salaries & Pay

Pay Schedule

Employees at Spruce Community School are paid on a monthly schedule, with paychecks issued on the last day of each month. If a pay date falls on a weekend or holiday, payment will be issued on the closest preceding business day.

Spruce operates on a 12 pay period schedule per calendar year. All deductions and contributions for benefits (e.g., health, dental, vision, retirement) will be evenly distributed between these monthly paychecks. Teachers that will be working the entire School Year (10 months) will have their salary paid throughout 12 months, including the summer months.

Employees are expected to enroll in direct deposit, and will receive a digital pay stub detailing gross earnings, deductions, and net pay. Until direct deposit takes effect, a paper check will be mailed to the employee at the address listed in the payroll system utilized by Spruce.

Employees will receive electronic pay stubs each payday via the school's payroll system (Paylocity). These stubs include a breakdown of gross pay, taxes, deductions, and net earnings. Employees are encouraged to regularly review their stubs and report any discrepancies.

Any discrepancies or questions related to payroll should be reported to the Executive Director promptly for review and correction.

Pay Deductions

Spruce is required by law to make certain mandatory payroll deductions from each employee's paycheck. These include:

- Federal and state income tax withholdings
- Unemployment insurance contributions
- FICA taxes
- Colorado FAMILI premiums
- Court-ordered wage garnishments
- Retirement plan contributions (PERA)

The amount of these deductions is based on earnings and the information provided on the employee's W-4 (federal) and applicable state withholding forms.

Employees may also elect to authorize voluntary payroll deductions, including but not limited to:

- Health, dental, and vision insurance premiums
- Flexible spending or health savings accounts
- Other approved deductions for school-supported services

If Spruce receives a wage garnishment order from a court or government agency, we are legally obligated to comply and withhold the amount stated in the order. We will follow all federal and state limits that protect a portion of your income from garnishment.

Spruce will never make payroll deductions that are prohibited by federal, state, or local law. If an error or improper deduction is identified, the employee will be reimbursed in full no later than the next regular payday. Employees who notice an error or have questions should immediately contact the Executive Director or their Head of School/Supervisor.

Termination and Final Pay

Colorado law requires that final wages be paid according to specific timelines depending on how employment ends.

If an employee is involuntarily terminated, all wages and compensation are due immediately at the time of separation. If Spruce's payroll function is not available at that moment, final wages will be made available no later than six hours after the start of the next regular business day, or twenty-four hours if payroll is administered off-site.

If an employee resigns or voluntarily leaves Spruce, final wages will be paid by the next regular payday. Final pay includes all earned wages, along with any applicable deductions outlined in this policy. Spruce will comply fully with the Colorado Wage Act (C.R.S. § 8-4-109) regarding timing and delivery of final pay.

Salary Schedule

Spruce Community School uses a transparent salary scale for instructional staff that rewards education, performance, and years of service. Salaries are structured across three bands:

- Level I – Typically educators with a bachelor's degree or equivalent.
- Level II – Typically educators with a master's degree or equivalent experience.
- Level III – Typically educators with a doctorate or demonstrated advanced proficiency.

Employees move up one step each year of full-time, effective service. Steps correspond to years of experience and are associated with predictable salary increases.

Employees may advance to a higher salary band by submitting official transcripts showing completion of an advanced degree. To take effect for the upcoming contract year:

- Transcripts must be submitted to Human Resources no later than July 25th
- Degree conferred must be from an accredited institution

Placement on the salary scale is determined using verified credentials and prior experience.

To advance one step on the salary framework, employees must meet both of the following:

1. Be contracted to work at least 75% of the full-time schedule (e.g., 142.5 out of 190 days)
2. Fulfill 75% or more of scheduled hours (e.g., 1,140 hours in a 190-day year)

Employees serving in two or more part-time roles may qualify for advancement if their combined FTE reaches at least 75%

Leave covered by federal/state law (e.g., FMLA, ADA) may count toward service time; other unpaid leave will not

The Teaching Salary Scale can be found in the **Appendix**. Spruce reserves the right to adjust compensation policies annually based on budget availability and organizational needs. Spruce may implement a hiring or step freeze during periods of financial hardship or statewide funding reductions. Advance notice will be provided.

Partial Year agreements

If you are hired after the start of the school year or do not work a full contract year, your salary will be prorated. The annual salary will be divided by the number of contract days and adjusted based on the actual days worked.

For example:

An annual salary of \$41,027 based on 190 days equals an approximate daily rate of \$216. If you work 150 days, your prorated salary would be $150 \times \$216$.

Timekeeping and Overtime (Non-Exempt Employees)

All non-exempt (hourly) employees are required to accurately record all hours worked using Spruce's designated timekeeping system. This includes start and end times, paid meal breaks, and any additional work time.

Employees must not work "off the clock" or falsify time records. Overtime must be pre-approved by a supervisor.

Spruce Community School complies fully with all federal and state labor laws regarding overtime and employee compensation. The following guidelines apply to all non-exempt (hourly) employees.

Overtime Pay

Non-exempt employees are entitled to overtime pay at the rate of one-and-a-half times their regular hourly wage under the following conditions:

- All hours worked in excess of 40 hours in a workweek
- All hours worked in excess of 12 hours in a single workday
- All hours worked on the seventh consecutive day in a workweek

Double-Time Pay

Employees will be compensated at twice their regular rate of pay for:

- All hours worked in excess of 12 hours in a single day
- All hours worked beyond 8 hours on the seventh consecutive day in a single workweek

Employees must receive prior written approval from their supervisor before working any overtime. Unapproved overtime may still be paid (as required by law) but may result in disciplinary action for failing to follow procedures.

Stipends & Additional Pay

Spruce may offer stipends for specific roles or responsibilities beyond the scope of a standard position. Stipends are non-recurring unless specified otherwise and are awarded at the discretion of the Executive Director based on school needs and funding availability.

Examples include:

- Leading a major school initiative or grant-funded project
- Coaching a club, enrichment, or extracurricular program
- Serving as a mentor teacher or instructional coach
- Teaching during summer school
- MLL, GT, MTSS, Assessment Coordinator
- Translation services

All stipend agreements will be documented in writing and must be approved prior to the work being performed. Additional pay opportunities may also be available for evening events, family workshops, or professional development leadership.

Purchasing and Reimbursement

Project-based learning environments required additional materials and resources. We are committed to ensuring that employees have the resources they need to support high-quality instruction and school operations. To ensure responsible stewardship of public funds and clarity for staff, the following purchasing and reimbursement procedures apply.

Purchasing Procedures

All purchases of materials, supplies, or services made on behalf of the school must be pre-approved by the Head of School or designated supervisor. Purchases must be aligned with instructional goals or operational needs. Staff should work with the administrative team to submit purchase requests in advance; approved purchases will be coordinated through the Business Office or designated school purchasing system.

Failure to receive prior approval may result in non-reimbursement.

Credit Card Use

Staff may be issued a school credit card for instructional or authorized operational purchases. Cards are to be used only for approved expenses and may not be used for personal or unapproved items.

Cardholders are required to submit itemized receipts and expense reports on a regular basis, in accordance with school policy. Repeated failure to submit timely documentation may result in loss of credit card privileges.

Out-of-Pocket Expenses

If a staff member needs to purchase an item out-of-pocket, they must first receive approval from the School Director or designee. Reimbursement will be issued only for approved purchases with an

attached receipt. A completed expense report must accompany the request, and original receipts are required.

Spruce encourages staff to use school purchasing procedures or credit cards whenever possible to avoid unnecessary personal expense.

Required Forms

The following forms to ensure accuracy, accountability, and timely processing of school-related purchases and reimbursements:

1. [Purchase Order Form](#)
 - To be completed prior to making a purchase.
 - Submit to the Head of School for approval. Two signatures are required before forwarding to the Back Office for processing.
2. [Employee Expense Reimbursement Form](#)
 - To be used when requesting reimbursement for pre-approved out-of-pocket expenses.
 - All requests must be submitted within 30 days of the receipt date and must include itemized receipts and appropriate budget coding.

Completed forms should be submitted electronically to the Head of School and Site Manager. Processing may take up to 30 business days from the date of submission.

Section 6

Benefits

Benefits

General Overview

This section provides a general summary of the employee benefit programs available to eligible staff at Spruce Community School. These benefits are designed to support your physical health, mental well-being, professional development, and financial security.

More detailed and legally binding information is available in official plan documents, provider materials, or policy booklets issued by carriers and third-party administrators. These documents are available through Human Resources (HR) and are distributed during the onboarding process and open enrollment period each year.

Important Note:

While this handbook outlines Spruce's intent to offer meaningful benefits, it does not include all terms, limitations, and exclusions of each plan. If there is a conflict between the language in this handbook and the official plan documentation, the official plan documents will govern.

There is no guarantee that all current benefits will remain unchanged. Spruce reserves the right to revise, suspend, or terminate any benefit plan at any time. Likewise, plan administrators may alter the terms, conditions, or eligibility criteria of their plans, including premiums, coverage limits, and provider networks.

Employees are encouraged to review the full documentation of each plan carefully before enrollment and to consult with HR if they have any questions or require assistance interpreting plan information.

Health, Dental, Vision

Full-time employees working 30 hours or more per week are eligible for medical, dental, and vision insurance coverage. Spruce contributes a portion of the premium cost for employees, and coverage options are available for dependents at the employee's expense.

- Health Insurance: Includes preventive care, prescription coverage, and access to a network of providers.
- Dental Insurance: Covers preventive, basic, and major dental services.
- Vision Insurance: Covers annual exams and vision hardware such as glasses or contacts.

Coverage begins the first of the month following the employee's start date, provided enrollment paperwork is completed within 30 days of hire.

Life & Disability Insurance

Spruce provides basic life insurance and long-term disability coverage to all full-time benefit-eligible employees. Additional voluntary life and short-term disability insurance may be available at the employee's expense.

- Life Insurance: Provides financial support in the event of the employee's death. Coverage typically equals 1x or 2x annual salary.
- Long-Term Disability: Optional coverage that begins after the short-term disability period ends.

Retirement

Spruce Community School participates in the Colorado Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) in accordance with state law. PERA is a mandatory defined benefit retirement plan for eligible employees that provides guaranteed lifetime monthly income upon retirement, based on a formula of salary and years of service—not market performance. All employees are eligible for PERA.

Contribution Details

PERA contributions are shared between the employee and the employer:

- Employee Contribution: 11% of gross salary (pre-tax deduction)
- Spruce (Employer) Bases Contribution: 10.4% of gross salary
- Total Contribution to PERA: 21.4% of the employee's salary

These contributions are made automatically each pay period and are reflected on your pay stub.

Vesting

Employees become vested in PERA after 5 years of service, meaning they become eligible to receive a lifetime retirement benefit when they reach retirement age, even if they leave public employment before retiring.

Benefits

In addition to retirement income, PERA may provide:

- Disability benefits
- Survivor benefits
- Access to health care plans in retirement (optional, with eligibility)

Not Enrolled in Social Security

As a PERA-covered employee, you do not contribute to Social Security through Spruce. Instead, your PERA participation fully replaces Social Security contributions and benefits. However, any Social Security benefits earned from previous employment outside the PERA system may still apply, though they may be impacted by federal offsets (e.g., the Windfall Elimination Provision).

Section 7

Time Away from Work

Annual Leave

Spruce Community School provides Annual Leave to all eligible employees. Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted to limit or interfere with employee rights under the Colorado Healthy Families and Workplaces Act (HFWA). Employees receive a single bank of leave days to use at their discretion for health, personal, and family needs.

For purposes of this policy, one “day” of leave is defined as the employee’s regularly scheduled workday.

Eligibility

All employees—regardless of full-time or part-time status, classification (salaried, hourly, exempt, or non-exempt)—are eligible for annual leave beginning on their first day of employment. Annual leave is a protected benefit and may be used as soon as it is allotted.

Allotment

Annual leave is not accrued hourly but is allotted annually.

On July 1 of each school year, eligible employees receive annual leave based on contract days:

Contract Days	Annual Leave
Less than 80 days	3
80-99	6
100-119	7
120-139	8
140-159	9
160-179	10
180-199	11
200-219	12
220-239	13

- Employees not actively working on July 1 (e.g., leave of absence) will receive their allotment upon return for use during the remainder of the fiscal year.
- Employees hired after January 1 will receive 50% of their annual allotment for their initial partial year of employment.

Carry Over & Maximum Balance

Employees may carry over annual leave up to a maximum of 125% of their annual allotment (rounded to the nearest half-day).

Annual leave is posted on July 1 of each fiscal year and is subject to maximum balance limits described below.

Any unused leave above the maximum carryover balance will be forfeited at the end of the fiscal year.

Examples of Maximum Balances:

- 9-day allotment → maximum 11.5 days
- 10-day allotment → maximum 12.5 days
- 11-day allotment → maximum 13.75 days
- 12-day allotment → maximum 15 days

Employees may not use annual leave that has not yet been allotted or made available under this policy.

Use of Leave

Annual leave is a front-loaded, non-accrued benefit and is not considered earned wages. As such, unused annual leave is not paid out upon resignation, retirement, or separation from employment. Annual leave under this policy is a discretionary benefit subject to eligibility and balance limitations and is not intended to constitute earned or vested compensation.

The final leave balance at separation will be determined based on the employer's official records.

Permitted Use

Annual leave may be used in increments of no less than 1 hour, consistent with payroll procedures. Employees may use annual leave for any reason, including but not limited to:

- Diagnosis, care, or treatment of a health condition (including preventive care) for themselves or a family member
- Inability to work due to personal illness, injury, or medical condition
- Medical appointments or procedures, including pregnancy-related care
- Caring for a family member who is ill, injured, or seeking medical treatment
- "Safe time" needs related to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking
- When the school is closed due to a public health emergency
- Caring for a child whose school or care provider is closed due to a public health emergency
- Family commitments, religious observances, personal milestones, legal appointments, or other personal needs

Family Member Definition

For purposes of this policy, "family member" includes:

- A child: biological, foster, adopted, stepchild, legal ward, or child of a registered domestic partner, or a person standing in loco parentis
- A parent: biological, foster, adoptive, stepparent, or legal guardian (or spouse's/domestic partner's parent)
- A spouse or registered domestic partner
- A grandparent, grandchild, or sibling
- Any person with whom the employee has a close personal bond equivalent to a family relationship

Notice & Approval

Foreseeable leave: Employees must submit a Leave Request Form to the Executive Director (or designee) at least five business days in advance.

Unforeseeable leave: Employees must notify their supervisor as soon as practicable, ideally by 6:15 a.m. so the school can secure coverage.

Leave requests will be approved when staffing coverage can reasonably be maintained, except as otherwise required by law.

Blackout Dates & Restrictions

Annual leave may be restricted for non-HFWA leave during blackout dates, including school days immediately before or after scheduled breaks (fall, winter, spring breaks). Leave requests on blackout dates will not be approved unless the Executive Director determines extenuating circumstances exist. Blackout dates are established annually and communicated in advance. HFWA-protected leave may not be restricted, delayed, or denied due to blackout dates. Employees may not be discouraged or penalized for using HFWA-protected leave.

Separation & Recordkeeping

Spruce reserves the right to modify this policy in accordance with applicable law. The school's official leave records shall be maintained by the Human Resources department (or designee). These records shall be the final and controlling record of leave balances for all administrative and payroll purposes.

Bereavement Leave

Spruce recognizes the emotional toll and logistical demands that come with the loss of a loved one. We are committed to supporting our staff through such times with compassion and flexibility.

Spruce provides up to five (5) consecutive paid days of bereavement leave following the death of an immediate family member. This time may be used for attending funeral or memorial services, managing family or legal responsibilities, or travel related to the loss.

Employees who require additional time may request the use of annual leave. Additional unpaid bereavement leave may be granted at the discretion of the Executive Director based on individual circumstances.

Definition of "Immediate Family"

For the purpose of this policy, immediate family member includes:

- A child (including foster, adopted, stepchild, or legal ward)
- A parent (including foster, adoptive, step, or legal guardian)
- A spouse or registered domestic partner
- A sibling
- A grandparent or grandchild
- A parent-in-law, sibling-in-law, or person who raised the employee

Spruce may, on a case-by-case basis, consider extending bereavement leave for individuals not listed here when the employee can demonstrate a close familial or caregiving relationship.

Eligibility

All full-time employees are eligible for bereavement leave immediately upon hire. Part-time employees may request unpaid leave or use other accrued paid leave, subject to administrative approval.

Notification and Approval

Employees must notify their supervisor or the Executive Director as soon as reasonably possible to allow for planning and coverage. Bereavement leave must be approved by school leadership and will not be deducted from annual leave balances unless extended time is requested.

Documentation may be requested to support the leave (e.g., obituary, funeral notice), but this is done with sensitivity and minimal burden on the employee.

Leave of Absence & Disability Benefits

We recognize that there are times when employees may need extended time away from work due to personal health needs, the care of a loved one, or other life circumstances. Our leave policies are designed to comply with federal and state laws, while honoring the dignity and well-being of our staff.

Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)

Spruce complies with the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows eligible employees to take up to twelve workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave within a twelve-month period. Qualifying reasons for FMLA leave include the birth or adoption of a child, caring for a spouse, child, or parent with a serious health condition, recovering from one's own serious health condition, addressing needs related to military service of a family member, or attending IEP meetings for a child or foster youth in the employee's care.

To be eligible, an employee must have been employed by Spruce for at least twelve months (not necessarily consecutively) and worked at least 1,250 hours in the previous twelve months.

Notification and Documentation

Employees must notify the Executive Director or Human Resources at least thirty days in advance of a foreseeable need for leave. When the need is unexpected, notice should be given as soon as possible. Medical documentation may be required to certify the need for leave or to authorize a return to work. Documentation must be sufficient to confirm eligibility for leave, the necessity of care, or the employee's ability to resume duties. Delays in providing documentation may result in a delay of the leave's approval or return-to-work clearance.

Length of Leave

The maximum duration of FMLA leave is twelve workweeks in a rolling twelve-month period. In special cases, such as military caregiver leave, up to twenty-six workweeks may be granted in a single twelve-month period. Spruce uses a "rolling" calendar, meaning the twelve-month period is measured backward from the date an employee uses any FMLA leave.

Compensation and Benefits During Leave

While FMLA leave is unpaid, Spruce requires employees to use any accrued annual leave concurrently with FMLA leave, when applicable.

Group health benefits will be maintained as if the employee were actively working, provided the employee continues to pay their share of the insurance premiums. If payment is not received, coverage may lapse. While on extended unpaid leave, annual leave – including hourly accrual for part-time employees – is temporarily suspended and resumes upon return to active employment. However, during approved FMLA leave, leave allotment and hourly accrual, if applicable, will continue.

Return to Work

Upon return from FMLA leave, employees will be reinstated to their previous position or an equivalent one with the same pay, benefits, and working conditions, provided they return within the approved timeframe and meet any return-to-work documentation requirements. Failure to return as scheduled may be considered a voluntary resignation unless an extension is requested and approved in advance.

Colorado Paid Family and Medical Leave (FAMLI)

In addition to federal FMLA protections, eligible employees may also qualify for paid leave through Colorado's FAMLI program. The two may run concurrently, depending on the situation and eligibility. Beginning in 2024, the Colorado Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Program provides eligible employees with partial wage replacement when they need to take time away from work for qualifying family or medical reasons. Spruce Community School participates in the FAMLI program, in compliance with state law.

Eligibility

Employees become eligible for FAMLI benefits after earning at least \$2,500 in wages subject to Colorado unemployment insurance during the base period, which may include wages from Spruce or other Colorado employers. Eligibility is not dependent on the length of time employed at Spruce.

Qualifying Reasons for FAMLI Leave

FAMLI may be used for:

- The birth, adoption, or placement of a child and bonding within the first year
- A serious health condition of the employee
- Caring for a family member with a serious health condition
- Military family needs arising from deployment
- Safe leave for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking

Duration and Compensation

Employees may receive up to 12 weeks of paid leave per year, with an additional 4 weeks available for pregnancy or childbirth-related complications. FAMLI benefits are administered and paid by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), not directly by Spruce.

The benefit provides partial wage replacement, with amounts based on a percentage of the employee's average weekly wage, up to a state-defined maximum.

Coordination with Other Leave

Employees must coordinate FAMLI benefits with other leave options, including:

- Federal FMLA leave (if eligible), which will run concurrently
- Spruce's paid leave policies (e.g., annual leave)
- Short-term disability or workers' compensation (as applicable)

Spruce may require employees to use available paid leave concurrently with FAMLI, provided it does not reduce the total benefit the employee is entitled to under FAMLI.

Application and Notice

Employees apply directly through the Colorado FAMLI portal. Spruce encourages employees to provide at least 30 days' notice when the need for leave is foreseeable. For emergency or unplanned leave, notice should be provided as soon as possible.

Job Protection and Benefits

Employees who have worked at Spruce for at least 180 days prior to the start of FAMLI leave are entitled to job protection under Colorado law. Group health benefits will continue during the leave period, as long as the employee continues to pay their share of premiums.

If an employee moves into unpaid leave and is not receiving a paycheck, they must make timely payments directly to maintain coverage. Failure to do so may result in cancellation of coverage, in which case COBRA continuation options will be offered.

For more information or assistance in applying, employees can contact Human Resources or visit famli.colorado.gov.

Coordinating Leave for Birth, Recovery, and Bonding

This is best illustrated with an example. Scenario: "Ava," a full-time teacher, is expecting a baby in mid-January. She plans to take time off for childbirth, recovery, and bonding with her baby.

Medical Recovery (First 6–8 weeks postpartum)

Ava begins her leave when her doctor certifies that she is unable to work due to childbirth recovery. She uses Annual Leave first, as required by Spruce. This time also qualifies as FMLA leave, assuming she meets eligibility (12 months at Spruce + 1,250 hours worked). Ava applies for FAMLI benefits through the state and receives partial wage replacement during this time. Ava's leave during this period is covered by Annual Leave, FMLA, and FAMLI (running concurrently). Spruce does not offer short-term disability coverage.

Baby Bonding (Remaining FAMLI and FMLA weeks)

Once Ava's doctor releases her from medical recovery, she transitions to bonding leave to care for and connect with her newborn. FAMLI medical and bonding leave draw from the same 12-week combined pool per benefit year (up to 16 weeks if Ava has a certified pregnancy or childbirth complication). If she used 6 weeks of FAMLI for medical recovery, she has 6 remaining weeks for bonding. The same applies to FMLA: if she used 6 weeks of FMLA for recovery, she has 6 more weeks available for bonding. Any bonding time beyond her remaining FAMLI and FMLA weeks is unpaid and not job-protected under these programs, though Ava may use remaining annual leave days to extend or cover that gap.

Return to Work

Ava's total leave, combining medical recovery and bonding, will typically span up to 12 weeks (up to 16 weeks with a certified pregnancy or childbirth complication), plus any unpaid time she chooses to take

beyond that using remaining annual leave. If Ava has worked at Spruce for at least 180 days, her job is protected under both FMLA and Colorado FAMLI for this period. If she continues beyond the protected period, additional leave may be granted as unpaid discretionary leave (subject to approval).

Leave Type	Duration	Source	Paid?	Job-Protected
Annual Leave	Up to 15 days	Spruce	Yes, full	Yes (HFWA)
FAMLI – Medical & Bonding (combined)	Up to 12 weeks total per benefit year (up to 16 weeks with certified pregnancy/childbirth complications)	Colorado State (CDLE)	Partial	Yes (if 180+ days at Spruce)
FMLA	Up to 12 weeks	Federal Law	Unpaid	Yes (if eligible)

Additional Leave Policies

Discretionary Unpaid Leave (Non-Medical)

In rare or extenuating circumstances, Spruce may grant a discretionary unpaid leave of absence to employees who do not qualify for other leave types. Employees must submit a written request as far in advance as possible and remain in regular contact with their supervisor and Human Resources during the leave. If a return-to-work date is not communicated by the end of the approved leave, it may be considered a voluntary resignation.

Employees must use any accrued annual leave during unpaid time off. Benefits such as health insurance will not be continued during discretionary unpaid leave unless required by law. However, eligible employees may elect COBRA continuation coverage.

Workers' Compensation

Spruce provides leave and coverage for employees who experience a work-related injury, in accordance with Colorado workers' compensation laws. Colorado law establishes a three-day waiting period before wage-replacement benefits begin; these days are unpaid unless the disability extends beyond two weeks, in which case they are paid retroactively by the insurance carrier. Insurance payments are administered through Spruce's workers' compensation provider thereafter. All time off that qualifies under state or federal leave laws will run concurrently with workers' compensation leave.

Military Leave

Employees called to active military duty or training are eligible for an unpaid military leave of absence. Upon timely request and proper documentation, employees are entitled to reinstatement following military service, consistent with federal law. While on military leave, employees may use accrued leave, but will not accrue additional annual benefits during the unpaid period.

Jury Duty and Witness Leave

Employees summoned for jury duty or subpoenaed as a witness must inform their supervisor as early as possible. Non-exempt employees will receive up to five paid days of jury duty leave. Additional days, or time off for witness duty, will be unpaid unless otherwise required by law. Exempt employees will receive their regular salary as long as they work any portion of the workweek.

Time Off to Vote

Spruce encourages employees to participate in elections. If an employee's work schedule prevents them from voting outside of working hours, they may request up to two hours of paid leave to vote. Advance notice is required, and employees must submit a voter's receipt upon return.

Leave for Victims of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, or Stalking

Employees may take time off to seek medical attention, obtain a restraining order, attend court proceedings, or access counseling and safety planning services. Leave may be paid using accrued annual leave otherwise, it will be unpaid. Employees are encouraged to provide advance notice when possible, or documentation (e.g., court order or healthcare provider note) afterward.

Spruce will maintain confidentiality and provide reasonable accommodations where appropriate. Retaliation or discrimination related to this leave is strictly prohibited.

School and Daycare Leave

Employees who are the parent or guardian of a child in grades K-12, or attending a licensed childcare facility, may take up to 40 hours of unpaid leave per year (maximum 8 hours/month) to attend school-related events, address childcare emergencies, or enroll/re-enroll a child. This leave may be taken unpaid or with available annual leave.

Organ and Bone Marrow Donation Leave

Spruce will provide up to five paid business days of leave within a 12-month period to employees who donate bone marrow, and up to 30 business days for organ donation. Employees may be required to use some accrued leave during this time. Continued insurance coverage is provided under the same terms as active employment.

Military Spouse Leave

Employees working 20 or more hours per week are eligible for up to 10 days of unpaid leave if their spouse or domestic partner is on leave from active military deployment. Employees must provide documentation and give notice within two business days of receiving the deployment schedule.

Emergency Duty Leave

Employees serving as volunteer firefighters, emergency medical responders, or similar roles may take unpaid leave of up to 14 days per year for training or emergency response. Employees may use accrued vacation if desired.

Section 8

Growth & Development

Professional Development

We believe that growth is a shared responsibility and a joyful process. Just as we challenge students to reflect, revise, and produce work they're proud of, we hold ourselves to the same standard as educators. Our approach to professional learning is built around collaboration, curiosity, and continual reflection.

Professional Learning Expectations

All staff are active participants in ongoing professional development (PD) that aligns with Spruce's mission, instructional model, and student-centered values. Our Annual PD Calendar outlines schoolwide learning days, coaching cycles, and collaborative inquiry time.

Professional learning includes:

- Full-staff PD days and after-school sessions focused on instructional excellence, project-based learning, and whole-child
- **Daily PD & Collaboration:** Teachers meet from 3:00–3:45 PM each day. These sessions include grade-level team meetings, data analysis, targeted instructional coaching, and community engagement strategies. Below is the weekly cadence of our meetings.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Area of Focus	<u>Grade-Level Meeting</u> (Special Education teacher meets with team)	<u>MTSS + Targeted PD based on coaching trends</u> Rotate Biweekly	<u>Staff Meeting</u>	<u>Data-Driven Instruction</u>	<u>Family Communication</u>

- Department/team-based collaboration and shared planning
- Reflective practices grounded in student work, classroom data, and feedback
- Optional learning opportunities aligned to teacher-driven goals
- **Pre-Year Training:** Before the start of the academic year, teachers participate in 10 full days of professional development focused on instructional alignment, student engagement, and classroom culture.

Staff are expected to attend all required PD and may be asked to share learning artifacts or reflections.

Observation and Feedback Cycles

Spruce uses a strengths-based Teacher Observation Framework organized around four domains:

1. Learning Environment & Classroom Culture
2. Student Engagement & Intellectual Curiosity
3. Instructional Design & Delivery
4. Responsive Teaching & Student Supports

Each domain includes essential questions and specific teacher and student indicators. Observations are used to provide actionable, non-punitive feedback that supports teacher growth and student success. Staff receive feedback through:

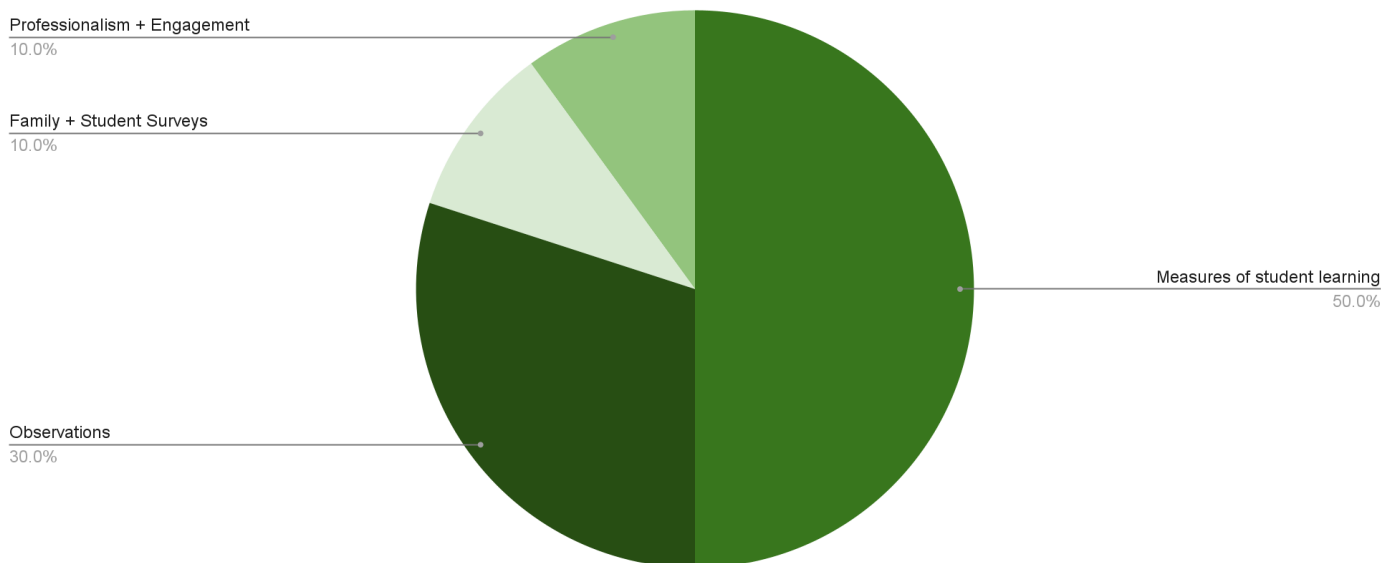
- Regular informal classroom visits
- Coaching conversations
- Mid-year and end-of-year reflection meetings
- Self-assessments and goal reviews

In the fall, schoolwide instructional priorities anchor our feedback. In the spring, coaching shifts toward personalized teacher goals.

Formal Evaluation

Spruce Community School is committed to fair, transparent, and growth-oriented teacher evaluations that align with Colorado SB 10-191, which requires at least 50% of teacher evaluations to be based on student academic growth.

Teacher Evaluation Framework



Measures of student learning encompass student academic achievement data, measured by proficiency and growth, project impact rubrics, and student portfolios. Academic performance and growth data are measured by Dibels and iReady assessments as well as CMAS results. All data are disaggregated and analyzed to ensure that achievement gaps are being addressed and narrowed. Teachers will be evaluated annually.

Advancement and Leadership Pathways

Spruce believes leadership can take many forms—from mentoring a colleague to leading a professional learning session to piloting a new instructional strategy. Opportunities for growth may include:

- Peer mentorship roles
- Leading PD or team-based learning
- Participation in hiring, curriculum design, or school-wide initiatives
- Advancement into formal leadership roles when available

Decisions about advancement are based on demonstrated practice, alignment with Spruce's values, and the needs of the school. We are committed to an equitable and transparent process in our leadership development.

Section 9

Conduct & Communication

Confidentiality & Technology Use

Confidentiality and Data Security

All Spruce Community School employees are required to maintain the confidentiality of student and staff information in accordance with FERPA, HIPAA (as applicable), and relevant state and federal privacy laws. This includes, but is not limited to, academic records, health information, behavior or discipline records, and family data.

Staff must:

- Only access student data that is necessary for their role
- Store confidential information securely (e.g., password-protected devices, locked cabinets)
- Never share student or family information with unauthorized individuals—including through casual conversation or social media

Any suspected breach of confidentiality or data security must be reported to the Executive Director or the school's data protection officer immediately.

Digital Citizenship & Acceptable Use

Spruce provides access to technology to support teaching, learning, and school operations. All staff are expected to use these tools responsibly and in alignment with our mission and values.

Acceptable use includes:

- Using school-provided devices and software for professional and instructional purposes
- Communicating with students and families using school-approved platforms (e.g., email, LMS)
- Modeling digital citizenship and appropriate technology use at all times

Prohibited use includes:

- Accessing, creating, or sharing inappropriate content
- Using personal devices or accounts for student communication without explicit approval
- Sharing login credentials or leaving devices unsecured
- Downloading unauthorized software or bypassing security systems

Staff found in violation of the Acceptable Use Policy may face loss of access privileges, disciplinary action, or legal consequences, depending on the severity of the offense.

Professional Boundaries and Student Interactions

Staff are expected to maintain appropriate physical, emotional, and digital boundaries in their interactions with students. As role models, we must demonstrate professionalism at all times, whether in person or online.

Staff should avoid situations that could be perceived as overly personal, secretive, or inappropriate. Any relationship or communication—whether in-person, via text, email, or social media—that crosses personal boundaries, or could reasonably be perceived as doing so, is prohibited.

Staff must not:

- Engage in or suggest romantic or sexual relationships with students (current or former)
- Share personal contact information unless explicitly required for school purposes
- Communicate with students through personal devices or platforms not approved by the school
- Use profanity, sexualized language, or share inappropriate jokes or content
- Provide gifts, personal favors, or private attention to individual students in a manner that could be seen as favoritism

Staff must immediately report any concerns about boundary violations—whether observed or suspected—to the Executive Director. Spruce will investigate any reports thoroughly and with discretion. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination, and will be reported to authorities when legally required.

Staff Use of School Property

Spruce Community School provides staff with access to school property and resources to support high-quality instruction and effective school operations. These resources include, but are not limited to, laptops, tablets, classroom equipment, instructional materials, furniture, keys, and school-issued credit cards.

All school property must be:

- Used responsibly and solely for school-related purposes
- Maintained in good condition, with care taken to avoid loss, damage, or misuse
- Returned upon separation from employment or upon request by the school administration

Employees must not:

- Remove equipment from campus without prior written approval from the Executive Director or designee
- Use school-owned materials or technology for personal, commercial, or non-school purposes
- Transfer, lend, or share school-issued property with unauthorized individuals

Staff are financially responsible for the replacement or repair of property that is lost, stolen, or damaged due to negligence or misuse. Misuse of school property may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Spruce reserves the right to inspect and audit the use of school property at any time to ensure appropriate use and safeguarding of public resources.

Internal Communication Norms & Meetings

We believe that strong communication is the foundation of a thriving community. Whether collaborating with colleagues, engaging with families, or representing the school publicly, we aim to communicate with clarity, respect, and purpose.

Clear, timely, and respectful communication among staff is essential to our collective success. All employees are expected to:

- Check and respond to school email daily during the workweek
- Use school communication platforms (e.g., email, shared drives, calendars) appropriately and professionally
- Communicate with a tone of curiosity, solution-seeking, and care
- Assume best intentions and seek clarification directly when misunderstandings arise

Important announcements and logistics are shared via email and during weekly staff meetings. When in doubt, ask!

Staff Meetings and Planning Time

Regular staff meetings and planning blocks are protected time for connection, learning, and alignment.

Staff are expected to:

- Attend all scheduled staff meetings, team meetings, and PD sessions unless otherwise excused
- Arrive on time and prepared to contribute
- Use planning time effectively for instructional preparation, collaboration, and reflection

Collaborative planning is a core part of our professional culture. We respect each other's time by using shared planning tools, honoring deadlines, and communicating openly about workload.

Family & Community Engagement Expectations

We value families as partners in learning. Staff are expected to build positive, proactive relationships with families and the broader community. This includes:

- Communicating early and often about student learning, celebrations, and concerns
- Responding to family inquiries within 48 hours (on school days)
- Using inclusive, strengths-based language in all communications
- Participating in school-wide family events, exhibitions, and conferences
- Weekly reports of classrooms activities should be sent every Friday (holidays excluded)

Staff are also encouraged to collaborate with community partners, invite guest speakers, and support student engagement with the local environment—aligned with Spruce’s place-based mission.

Representing Spruce in Public Spaces and Online

All staff are ambassadors of Spruce Community School. Whether on social media, at a conference, or in conversation with community members, staff are expected to represent the school’s values of kindness, courage, and curiosity.

Staff should:

- Use respectful, accurate language when discussing the school in public or online
- Avoid posting confidential student or staff information
- Maintain professional boundaries in online spaces, including social media
- Seek approval before using the school’s name, logo, or student images for public-facing materials

If a staff member is unsure whether something is appropriate to share publicly, they should consult with the Executive Director.

Section 10

Leaving Spruce

Spruce Community School values the contributions of every staff member and is committed to ensuring that the transition process—whether through resignation, retirement, or other forms of departure—is handled with clarity, professionalism, and care.

Resignation and Exit Process

Employees who plan to resign are asked to provide written notice **at least two weeks** in advance, or longer when possible, to allow for a smooth transition. Resignations should be submitted to the Executive Director or designee and include the intended final date of employment.

As part of the offboarding process:

- An exit interview may be offered to reflect on the employee's experience and gather feedback for organizational improvement.
- All school property (e.g., keys, devices, materials) must be returned on or before the final working day.
- Final paychecks will include all wages earned through the last date of employment; unused paid leave will not be paid out unless required by law or contract.
- Information regarding benefits continuation (e.g., COBRA) will be provided as applicable.

Spruce encourages departing employees to engage in the offboarding process with the same thoughtfulness and professionalism they brought to their role.

Retirement Guidelines

Employees planning to retire should notify the Executive Director as early as possible—ideally three to six months in advance—to support succession planning and appropriate recognition.

While Spruce does not operate a formal retirement system, staff may be eligible for benefits through PERA (Public Employees' Retirement Association of Colorado) or other plans depending on employment history. Retiring staff may also qualify for transitional roles or emeritus-style recognition depending on need and interest.

Rehire and Alumni Educator Opportunities

Spruce celebrates the long-term impact of our educators and welcomes former staff members to remain connected as part of our educator alumni network. Employees who leave in good standing may be considered for rehire in future positions.

Opportunities for alumni may include:

- Substituting or supporting project-based residencies
- Mentoring new staff
- Participating in professional learning or exhibitions
- Reapplying for open roles through the standard hiring process

We are grateful for the contributions of all who serve at Spruce and aim to support lasting relationships, even beyond employment.

Section 11

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the Spruce Staff Handbook. I agree to comply with all aspects of this Handbook and understand that violations may result in disciplinary action.

I understand that this Handbook is not a contract of employment and does not alter my at-will employment status. I understand that Spruce may revise this Handbook at any time and that I will be notified of any material changes.

Staff Member Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Teacher Compensation Philosophy & Salary Schedule

Our Philosophy

At Spruce Community School, we believe that teaching is a craft that is honed over time through intentional effort, reflection, and continuous improvement. Just as we encourage our students to produce work they are proud of through critique and revision, we hold ourselves to the same standard as educators.

We affirm that the single most powerful factor in student success is an educator who builds strong relationships, fosters deep student thinking, and intentionally cultivates a thriving learning community. This compensation framework is designed to support, challenge, and empower our teachers as they refine their craft.

Our teachers are:

- *Rooted in Relationships:* They know that trust, care, and connection are the foundation of learning.
- *Data-Driven & Results-Oriented:* They ensure every student has access to rigorous, joyful learning.
- *Innovative & Visionary:* They bring creativity to the classroom and challenge what academic excellence looks, sounds, and feels like.
- *Flexible & Committed:* They thrive in building something from the ground up and are ready to invest in Spruce's founding years.

Base Salary Schedule

Spruce's base salary structure recognizes two dimensions of educator growth: years of experience (steps) and academic credentials (lanes).

What counts as a year of experience: Spruce credits experience from a range of teaching contexts, because we believe strong teaching is strong teaching regardless of sector or setting. The following count toward step placement, provided each year of service met a minimum of 140 days:

- Full-time classroom teaching in a public school (including charter schools), in Colorado or out-of-state — counts as one full year.
- Full-time classroom teaching in a private or independent school, including Montessori, faith-based, and independent programs — counts as one full year.
- Full-time PreK teaching in any of the above settings — all PreK licensed experience is credited as one year toward placement on our salary schedule.
- Support teaching roles (paraprofessionals, instructional aides, and similar positions) — counts as 1 full year

Experience verification: All prior experience must be verified through official documentation from the employing school or district prior to the first day of employment. Spruce reserves the right to request additional documentation as needed.

- **Lane I** — Bachelor's degree
- **Lane II** — Master's degree
- **Lane III** — Doctoral degree (PhD or EdD)



	I Bachelor's Degree	II Master's Degree**	III Doctoral Degree**
1	50,000	51,940	58,549
2	51,500	53,000	60,305
3	53,045	55,000	62,114
4	54,636	56,650	64,078
5	56,275	58,350	66,000
6	57,964	60,100	67,980
7	59,703	61,903	70,019
8	61,494	63,760	72,120
9	63,339	65,673	74,284
10	65,239	67,643	76,512
11	66,543	68,996	78,042
12	67,874	70,376	79,603
13	69,232	71,783	81,195
14	70,616	73,219	82,819
15	72,029	74,683	84,476
16	73,469	76,177	86,165
17	74,939	77,701	87,888
18	76,437	79,255	89,646
19	77,966	80,840	91,439
20	79,526	82,457	93,268
21	81,116	84,106	95,133
22	82,738	85,788	97,036
23	84,393	87,504	98,977
24	86,081	89,254	100,956
25	87,803	91,039	102,975
26	89,559	92,859	105,035
27	91,350	94,717	107,135
28	93,177	96,611	109,278
29	95,040	98,543	111,464
30	96,941	100,514	113,693

Note: Annual step increases reflect a 3% cost-of-living adjustment for Years 1–10. After Year 10, the adjustment transitions to 2% to maintain the long-term financial sustainability of the organization.

** We also know that certain professional experience can be as valuable as a degree. Therefore, we also consider educational leadership experience (assistant principal, principal, instructional coach), curriculum development, director of educational programs, in our lane 2/3 calculations.

Impact Factors

At Spruce, we recognize that certain credentials and life experiences represent value to our students and community. Impact Factors are annual flat-dollar additions to a teacher's base salary that acknowledge skills and perspectives that directly shape the quality of education we can offer.

Impact Factors may be stacked. A teacher who qualifies for multiple factors receives each addition, because we believe the combination of lived experience, specialized skill, and community connection multiplies rather than merely adds value in our classrooms.

Impact Factor	Annual Stipend	Why It Matters at Spruce
Special Education Certification	+\$3,000	Critical shortage area; among the hardest roles to fill in Colorado Springs.
Bilingual / CLDE Certification	+\$2,000	Serves a high-need student population; rare and high-demand credential in the region.
Math Teaching Certification (5th–8th)	+\$2,000	Ongoing math achievement gap makes certified math educators especially valuable.
Founding teachers for 2026-2027 SY	+\$1,000	There is magic in founding and also tremendous work.
Sports Coach (4th-8th grade) (per sport)	+\$1,000	Sports are important to developing children's confidence, social, and emotional skills. It takes time and intention to facilitate
First-Generation College Graduate	+\$500	Lived experience mirrors many Spruce families; models possibility for students.
Attended Colorado Springs Elementary/Middle/High School for minimum of 3 years	+\$500	Deep roots in the neighborhood; authentic connection to the community we serve.
Mentor Teacher (per semester)	+\$500 (per semester)	Support a teacher resident throughout their year placement at Spruce, we value development and advancing the profession

How Impact Factors Work

Impact Factors are verified annually during the hiring process or the summer prior to each school year. They are added to the teacher's base salary at the applicable step and lane, and carry forward each year as long as the qualifying credential or status is maintained. Teachers who earn new qualifying credentials mid-year will have the applicable factor added to their compensation beginning the following school year.

Illustrative Compensation Examples

The examples below show how base salary and Impact Factors combine to reflect the full value a teacher brings to Spruce.

Profile	Base Salary	Total with Impact Factors
Year 1 teacher, Bachelor's, no Impact Factors	\$50,000	\$50,000
Year 1 teacher + SPED cert + Bilingual cert	\$50,000	\$55,000
Year 5 teacher, MA + SPED + First-Gen	\$58,350	\$62,350
Year 10 teacher, MA + SPED + Math cert	\$67,643	\$72,143

Beyond the Salary

A few things worth knowing that don't show up in the numbers above.

Teaching at Spruce comes with benefits that reflect how we feel about the people doing this work.

- **Full Health, Dental & Vision Coverage.** We offer up to \$550 per month in health, dental, and vision insurance to all teachers. We believe in well-being and paying for health care should never be a concern.
- **PERA Pension.** All Spruce teachers are enrolled in the Colorado Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA). This is one of the strongest defined-benefit pension programs available to educators in the state. We believe in your long-term security.
- **\$1,000 Classroom Supply Stipend.** Teachers receive \$500 per semester to spend on the materials, books, and resources that bring their classroom to life. No lengthy approval process. We trust that you know what your students need.
- **Orton-Gillingham and PBL Training.** Over 60 hours of professional development with top of the line programs and facilitators.
- **Founder.** Your voice will be heard and you will be a key-decision maker. In real time you can see change happen. You are building a dream from the ground up.
- **A Community Worth Showing Up For.** This one is harder to put a dollar amount on. At Spruce, you'll work alongside educators who chose this school intentionally. They are curious, kind, courageous and collaborative people who are deeply committed to kids and our community.
- **Unique teaching opportunity.** You'll be treated as the professional you are, with real autonomy over your craft and genuine support to grow it. Teachers are able to explore their passions and curiosities alongside their students. You want to teach a project on murals, great we will support your vision to become a reality. Our philosophy is student-first rather than script-focus. We trust you will hold your students to high expectations while meeting their unique needs.
- **Secure seat.** Your current and/or future children are prioritized in our lottery and offered a seat to attend Spruce.

Our Approach to Hiring

Our approach to hiring focuses on finding the best educators who combine strong instructional skills with warmth, curiosity, and genuine care for children. An exemplary teacher at Spruce is first and foremost a student of children.

They listen closely, observe carefully, and design learning experiences that begin with curiosity and grow through play, inquiry, and reflection.

They see teaching as both craft and relationship. They plan with intention, using data and observation to guide instruction, and remaining flexible enough to follow a child's question somewhere unexpected. They collaborate with colleagues, welcome feedback as a tool for growth, and model lifelong learning for their students.

Above all, they lead with care. Families experience them as communicative and trustworthy, children experience them as steady and joyful, and the school community experiences them as deeply invested in doing what is right for kids.

Questions about compensation? Contact us at: loren@sprucecommunityschool.org

Spruce Community School · Colorado Springs, CO ·

Safety at Spruce Community School

2025-2026



Rooted in Relationships: Our Philosophy of Safety and Care

At Spruce Community School, we know that choosing where to send your child to school is one of the most important and personal decisions a family can make. You are entrusting your most valuable gift to the care of others for eight hours a day, five days a week—and that is a responsibility we never take for granted.

We honor the weight and the privilege of what it means to educate your child. We believe that learning can only flourish when students feel safe, seen, and supported. That's why we work every day to create a school environment where all children feel a deep sense of belonging and security—physically, emotionally, and socially.

Safety begins not with procedures but with people. We believe that the foundation of all school safety is built on caring, connected relationships. Our values of kindness and courage guide our approach: kindness in how we care for one another and courage to speak up, show up, and protect our community.

We do not see safety as a checklist but as a culture. A culture where every student knows they belong. A culture where trust is built daily and where adults and peers alike take responsibility for one another's well-being. Physical safety measures and emergency protocols matter—and we have them—but they work best when they are grounded in a relational environment where students feel safe to be themselves, to ask for help, and to look out for each other.

While we recognize that no plan can anticipate every possible situation, we approach safety with care, diligence, and a deep commitment to the well-being of our entire community. Safety is not just a protocol—it's part of the loving, intentional community we strive to build together.

Key Roles & Caring Adults

At Spruce, every adult is responsible for student safety. Some staff members hold specialized roles:

- **Executive Director:** Oversees school-wide safety, crisis response, and communication. Conducts risk assessments.
- **Heads of School (K-2, 3-5, 6-8):** Lead daily student life and serve as the first point of support.
- **Director of Student and Family Services:** Leads family communication and reunification protocols.
- **School Counselor:** Provides responsive SEL support, coordinates referrals, and conducts risk assessments. (In our early years, we will contract with Gillem Staffing and Mindsight for licensed clinical social workers or licensed counselors).

Each child will have a trusted adult identified at school. These connections are reinforced through morning meetings, advisory, small groups, and consistent check-ins.

Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

Spruce maintains a comprehensive Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) that is reviewed and updated annually in partnership with our authorizer. This regular audit ensures we are meeting all state requirements and aligning with current best practices in school safety and emergency preparedness. In addition, our Safety Steering Committee meets regularly to guide and monitor safety efforts across the school and shares updates with the full safety team every quarter. A thorough site assessment is also conducted every quarter to identify potential risks and ensure our campus remains a secure, welcoming environment for all students, staff, and families.

Incident Command System and Interagency Coordination

As part of our comprehensive approach to school safety, Spruce has adopted the National Response Framework and the National Incident Management System (NIMS), both of which guide how schools and emergency responders coordinate during a crisis. We implement the Incident Command System (ICS) to ensure that all staff and first responders use a shared language, structure, and set of procedures in the event of an emergency. Staff are trained in their specific roles within the ICS organizational chart, and we refine these roles through regular drills and table-top exercises. After each exercise, we review and reflect on our systems to make them clearer and more effective. One of the key benefits of ICS is that it allows for seamless communication with local law enforcement and emergency services, which is critical during high-stress situations.

Role	Who?	Responsibilities
Incident Commander (IC)	Executive Director	Overall authority, sets goals, makes key decisions
Liaison Officer	Head of Schools	Coordinates with outside orgs (fire, EMS, district)
Public Information Officer (PIO)	Director of Student and Family Services	Communicates with families, media, public
Safety Officer	Site Manager	Monitors site safety, stops unsafe actions

Training

We are committed to the ongoing training of all stakeholders to ensure a safe and responsive learning environment. All members of our Safety Team complete foundational FEMA training in the Incident Command System (ICS), and key staff receive additional training based on their roles. These trainings include First Aid and AED certification, Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI), suicide and threat risk assessment, and Standard Response Protocol (SRP) Reunification training.

Students are also trained in the Standard Response Protocols through regular drills. Each semester, students participate in Evacuation drills, as well as at least one Lockdown, shelter-in-place for weather, and one Secure drill. In addition, students in grades 5-8 learn how to recognize and respond to concerns involving self-harm, suicide, or bullying—both for themselves and their peers. They are introduced to anonymous reporting resources and taught how to seek help in age-appropriate ways, empowering and grounded in care for their community.

Emergency Response: Standard Response Protocols

We believe that safety drills should not only prepare students for emergencies but also reinforce their sense of security and trust in the adults around them. We conduct regular drills—such as fire, lockdown, shelter-in-place, and evacuation—with care, consistency, and clear, age-appropriate explanations so that students understand why we practice and how to respond with calm and confidence. Our staff approaches every drill with care and sensitivity, ensuring that students feel supported—not scared—throughout the process. Our goal is for every child to know that they are safe, that the adults are prepared, and that they, too, have an important role to play in keeping our community secure. Following best practices recommended by the Office of School Safety and the National Association of School Psychologists, we announce drills in advance and ensure students are guided through them in a developmentally appropriate way.

Spruce uses the I Love U Guys Foundation's Standard Response Protocol (SRP), a clear and flexible framework designed to guide our response to a range of potential situations. The SRP uses five simple, action-based directives: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter. During any drill or real emergency, staff and students are guided by these standardized actions, which help ensure everyone responds quickly and calmly. These shared terms also allow for clear coordination with first responders.

Drills are practiced regularly, with sensitivity to student experience and emotional safety.

IN AN EMERGENCY TAKE ACTION



HOLD! In your room or area. Clear the halls.

STUDENTS

Clear the hallways and remain in room or area until the "All Clear" is announced
Do business as usual

ADULTS

Close and lock door
Account for students and adults
Do business as usual



SECURE! Get inside. Lock outside doors.

STUDENTS

Return to inside of building
Do business as usual

ADULTS

Bring everyone indoors
Lock outside doors
Increase situational awareness
Account for students and adults
Do business as usual



LOCKDOWN! Locks, lights, out of sight.

STUDENTS

Move away from sight
Maintain silence
Do not open the door

ADULTS

Recover students from hallway if possible
Lock the classroom door
Turn out the lights
Move away from sight
Maintain silence
Do not open the door
Prepare to evade or defend



EVACUATE! (A location may be specified)

STUDENTS

Leave stuff behind if required to
If possible, bring your phone
Follow instructions

ADULTS

Lead students to Evacuation location
Account for students and adults
Notify if missing, extra, or injured students or adults



SHELTER! Hazard and safety strategy.

STUDENTS

Use appropriate safety strategy for the hazard

ADULTS

Lead safety strategy
Account for students and adults
Notify if missing, extra, or injured students or adults

Hazard

Tornado
Hazard
Earthquake
Tsunami

Safety Strategy

Evacuate to shelter area
Seal the room
Drop, cover and hold
Get to high ground

Family Engagement and Communication

We encourage open communication between staff and families, especially when a student may need additional support before, during, or after a drill. When you're notified that a drill has taken place at school, one of the most supportive things you can do is simply check in with your child in a calm and open-ended way. You might ask if they'd like to talk about it—and then let their response guide you. Some children will want to share their thoughts or feelings, while others may prefer quiet connection, like drawing together, playing, or reading side by side. If your child says they felt okay about the drill, you can affirm their experience and remind them that practicing safety routines helps everyone stay protected. If they express that they felt scared, sad, or uneasy, it's helpful to acknowledge those emotions with empathy and gently shift toward what helps them feel safe: knowing they've practiced, knowing their teacher is with them, and knowing that grown-ups are prepared. You might even share a time when you felt nervous and what helped you through it. Keeping home routines steady—like dinner time, bedtime, and screen-free connection—also helps children return to a sense of calm. And remember: our children take their emotional cues from us. When we treat drills as a regular, caring part of staying safe—like buckling a seatbelt or looking both ways—they're more likely to feel reassured and resilient.

Campus Security

We have taken the following steps to ensure our building and campus are secure for students, staff, and families:

1. Single point of entry for all visitors, monitored by a camera with a clear line of sight to the parking lot.
2. Visitor check-in system and photo ID requirement
3. Background checks for all staff and volunteers
4. Communication app staff for campus-wide communication
5. Re-keyed entire campus; installed fob system
6. Perimeter checks and regular safety audits by leadership.
7. Partnership with D11 for security support
8. Installed interior and exterior cameras
9. Removed any trip hazards

Reunification Procedures

In the event of a school-wide emergency requiring off-site evacuation:

1. Families will receive directions via our communication system.
2. Reunification will require a photo ID.
3. Students will only be released to those listed on the student's emergency contact form.

We ask for patience and cooperation to ensure every student is safely reunited with their caregiver.

Mental Health & Emotional Safety

Spruce is committed to supporting the mental health of every student. Emotional well-being is central to our vision of safety. Just as we can build muscles through physical training, we can strengthen the brain and mind through intentional practice. Our school works to normalize conversations around mental health, cultivate inner resilience, and teach practical strategies for managing thoughts and emotions.

We recognize that stress is a natural aspect of human life and emphasize the importance of learning strategies to regulate our emotions and respond with intentionality. Our staff receives significant training in trauma-responsive and mindfulness practices. Our students practice breathing, movement, and positivity strategies that have been supported by research to decrease symptoms of the stress response and promote calm, kind, and positive responses.

An important aspect of mental health is ensuring our bodies and brains are supported through consistent routines, proper sleep, wholesome nutrition, social connection, rest, sunlight exposure, movement, and prioritizing joy!

At school, we support students by maintaining a campus that is free from social media and phones. Research clearly demonstrates that for developing brains, social media and excessive technology use can have negative mental health outcomes for young people.

At our school we:

- Embed SEL into daily instruction using evidence-based programs from Yale RULER, Harvard EASEL, and the Mindfulness and Positivity Project.
- Train all staff in trauma-informed practices, restorative approaches, and de-escalation strategies.
- Maintain a responsive referral process to connect students with the counselor or outside support.
- Partner with families to create re-entry safety plans following any mental health concern.

Suicide Risk Assessments (SRA)

When a student expresses thoughts of self-harm, staff initiate a safety protocol that includes:

1. Immediate check-in and assessment with trained personnel.
2. Contact caregivers and develop a return-to-school safety plan, if applicable.
3. Regularly follow-up with a counselor and trusted adults at school.

Threat Assessments

If a student indicates a desire or intent to harm another person, we:

1. Conduct a threat assessment using a tiered risk protocol.
2. Notify caregivers and, when necessary, law enforcement.
3. Determine appropriate next steps (e.g., safety agreements, increased supervision, exclusion).

Reporting Concerns & Resources

Students and families are always encouraged to talk to a teacher, Head of School, or any trusted staff member. If you see something, say something. Our strength is in our togetherness.

- **Safe2Tell:** 1-877-542-7233 or safe2tell.org
- **Colorado Crisis Services:** Text TALK to 38255 or call 1-844-493-8255
- **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988

Final Word: Safety as Belonging

At Spruce, safety is not just about preventing harm—it's about creating a place where every child feels they belong. Our children will take risks in learning, stand up for each other, and grow into brave, kind citizens. That is safety worth striving for—and that is the Spruce way.

Questions or Concerns

Clear, open communication with families is a top priority in all aspects of school life—including safety. Our Safety Team is led by Executive Director Loren Koszowski, who ensures that our protocols are well-organized, thoughtfully implemented, and aligned with our community values. While we do not share the full details of our Emergency Operations Plan to protect the integrity of our safety procedures, we are committed to being as transparent as possible. If you have questions or would like more information beyond what is included in this document, please don't hesitate to reach out to Loren at Loren@SpruceCommunitySchool.org. We are always here to support your understanding and confidence in our school's safety practices.

2026-2027 Spruce School Calendar

July 2026						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

August 2026						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

September 2026						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

October 2026						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

November 2026						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

December 2026						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

July	
4	Independence day
20-24	OGL Training

August	
5--7	New Staff Orientation
10 -- 18	Staff Training
14	Meet the Teacher
19	FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL - Half day

September	
7	No School - Labor Day

October	
9	No School - Staff Day
12	Indigenous People's Day - No School
19-23	Student Led Conferences After School
31	Halloween

November	
11	Veteran's Day
23-30	Fall break
30	No school - Staff Day

December	
14-18	Exhibition Week
18	Half Day
21-1/4	Winter Break

January 2027						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

February 2027						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28						

March 2027						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

April 2027						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

May 2027						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

June 2027						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

January	
4	No school - Staff Day
18	No School - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February	
14	Valentine's Day
12--15	President's Day - Break

March	
22--26	No School - Spring Break
29	No School - Staff Day

April	
22	All School Exhibition
23	Half Day
26	No School

May	
21	No School - Staff Day
25--28	Student Led Conferences After School
31	No School - Memorial Day

June	
3	LAST DAY OF SCHOOL - Half Day
4	Staff Day

KEY

	STAFF DAYS
	NO SCHOOL
	HALF DAYS

School Day Schedules

Students - 7:45am - 2:45pm
Teachers - 7:30am - 4:00pm
Half Days - 7:45am - 12:15pm

Child Care Hours

Before School 6:30am - Start of School
After School - 6pm

Totals

175 Student Contact Days
191 Staff Contact Days



SPRUCE
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Spruce Community Schools Social Media Policy

Effective Date: January 2026

Applies to: Leadership Team and Founding Teachers

Last Revised: January 6, 2026

I. Purpose and Scope

This policy establishes guidelines for the appropriate use of social media by Spruce Community Schools staff members. The policy is designed to protect student privacy, maintain professional boundaries, support authentic community engagement, and ensure compliance with federal and state laws including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Colorado statutes.

This policy applies to all leadership team members and founding teachers, and will be extended to all staff as the school grows.

II. Core Principles

A. Personal Social Media Posting is NEVER Required

- No staff member is ever required to post about Spruce Community Schools on their personal social media accounts
- Staff members are free to maintain personal social media accounts without any obligation to promote or reference the school
- Professional success at Spruce is not contingent upon personal social media activity

B. Official School Communications

- All official Spruce Community Schools social media content will be managed through the school's official accounts (referred to as "Spruce" accounts)
 - Staff can choose to share/repost official Spruce content to their personal accounts
-

III. Student Privacy Protection (FERPA Compliance)

A. Prohibition on Student Images on Personal Accounts

Staff members are STRICTLY PROHIBITED from posting any of the following on personal social media accounts:

1. Photographs or videos showing student faces
2. Student names (full names or first names with last initial)
3. Student work that contains identifying information
4. Any personally identifiable information about students, including:
 - Student grades or academic performance
 - Behavioral information
 - Medical or health information
 - Class schedules
 - Addresses or contact information
 - Student ID numbers

Violation of this provision may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

B. Official Spruce Account Posting Guidelines

Staff may post student images and information on official Spruce Community Schools accounts ONLY when:

1. **A current, valid media release waiver has been obtained** from the student's parent/guardian
2. The content has been **reviewed and approved** through the weekly content creation meeting or by designated school leadership
3. The posting serves a legitimate educational purpose and promotes the school's mission
4. Images show students engaged in appropriate school activities

C. Media Release Waiver System

- All families will be asked to complete a media release waiver during enrollment
- The school will maintain a current database of students with/without media permission
- Staff must verify waiver status before capturing or posting any student images
- Media waivers will be reviewed and updated annually
- Parents may revoke permission at any time by notifying the school in writing

IV. Personal Social Media Use Guidelines

A. Understanding the Risks

When staff members choose to post about Spruce Community Schools on personal accounts, they should be aware of the following risks:

1. **Blurred Professional Boundaries:** Personal posts may be interpreted as official school communications
2. **FERPA Violations:** Accidentally sharing protected student information, even without images
3. **Misrepresentation:** Personal opinions may be mistaken for school positions
4. **Copyright Issues:** Using school materials or branding without permission
5. **Community Perception:** Personal content reflects on the school's reputation

B. If You Choose to Post on Personal Accounts

Required Precautions:

1. **Never post student faces or identifiable information** (see Section III.A)
2. Include a disclaimer such as: "Personal account. Views are my own and do not represent Spruce Community Schools."
3. Avoid posting about sensitive school matters, personnel issues, or confidential information
4. Do not claim to speak on behalf of the school or represent school positions
5. Maintain professional tone and language
6. Respect colleague and family privacy
7. Do not "friend" or connect with current students on personal accounts
8. Use groups or pages rather than direct messages if communicating with families professionally

Acceptable Personal Posts About School:

- General enthusiasm about teaching or education
- Non-identifying classroom activities ("Today we explored ecosystems!")
- Professional development experiences
- Sharing official Spruce posts from school accounts
- Community events (without student identification)

Unacceptable Personal Posts:

- Student photographs or videos showing faces
- Complaints about students, families, or colleagues
- Confidential school business or strategic plans
- Inappropriate content (profanity, discriminatory language, illegal activities)
- Content that could compromise student or school safety
- Political advocacy, controversial issues, or sensitive topics while wearing Spruce-branded attire or clearly identifying yourself as a Spruce staff member

C. Representation and School Identification

When Wearing Spruce Attire or Identifying as Spruce Staff:

Staff must exercise heightened caution when posting content where they are identifiable as a Spruce Community Schools employee, including:

1. **Wearing school-branded clothing, gear, or apparel** (shirts, hats, lanyards, etc.)
2. **Using Spruce in profile descriptions** or bios that link to personal accounts
3. **Posting from school locations** that are identifiable
4. **Attending events as a Spruce representative**

In these circumstances, staff should avoid:

- Posting about political candidates, campaigns, or partisan political issues
- Taking positions on controversial or divisive social issues
- Engaging in heated debates or arguments
- Posting content involving alcohol, bars, or adult venues
- Any content that could reasonably be perceived as representing the school's position

Rationale: When staff are visibly identified with Spruce Community Schools, the public may reasonably interpret their personal views as representing the school's institutional position. To maintain the school's nonpartisan educational mission and avoid alienating families across the political and social spectrum, staff should separate their personal advocacy from their professional identity.

Staff Rights: This provision does not restrict staff members' rights to engage in political activity or express personal views on their personal time and in their personal capacity. Staff remain free to:

- Participate in political activities when not representing the school
- Express personal views on personal accounts when not wearing Spruce attire or clearly identifying as Spruce staff
- Exercise their First Amendment rights as private citizens

Guidance: When in doubt, ask yourself: "Could someone reasonably think I'm speaking for Spruce Community School right now?" If yes, reconsider the post or remove visible school identification.

V. Sharing Official Spruce Content

A. Encouraged Practice

Staff can choose to share posts from Spruce Community Schools' official accounts to their personal social media platforms. This is the **safest and most appropriate way** to promote the school on personal accounts.

B. Best Practices for Sharing

1. Use the native "share" or "repost" function to maintain attribution

2. Add personal context if desired, keeping it professional and brief
 3. Ensure shared content has already been approved through official channels
 4. Do not edit or modify official school images or messaging
-

VI. Official School Account Guidelines

A. Account Management

- Official Spruce Community Schools accounts will be managed by designated staff members
- Login credentials will be secured and limited to authorized personnel
- All official accounts must clearly identify themselves as representing Spruce Community Schools

B. Posting Standards for Official Accounts

1. Content must align with school mission and values
2. Maintain professional, inclusive, and welcoming tone
3. Respond to comments and messages in a timely, professional manner
4. Do not delete comments or block users except in cases of harassment, threats, profanity, or spam
5. Protect student privacy in all posts
6. Use high-quality images and proofread all text
7. Credit sources when sharing external content
8. All content featuring students must be verified against media waiver database and reviewed by designated leadership before posting

C. Platforms

Official Spruce accounts may include (but are not limited to):

- Facebook
 - Instagram
 - LinkedIn
 - School website blog
 - Other platforms as determined by leadership
-

VII. Legal and Ethical Considerations

A. FERPA Compliance

- All staff must complete annual FERPA training

- FERPA protects all personally identifiable information in student education records
- When in doubt about whether information is protected, do not post it
- Parents have the right to opt out of directory information sharing

B. Copyright and Intellectual Property

- All content created by staff within their scope of employment belongs to Spruce Community Schools
- Staff must obtain permission before using school logos, branding, or copyrighted materials
- Properly attribute and credit external sources

C. First Amendment Considerations

- Staff have First Amendment rights as private citizens
 - However, content that disrupts school operations or compromises student safety may be subject to discipline
 - This policy does not restrict staff from discussing terms and conditions of employment on personal accounts
-

VIII. Communication with Students and Families

A. Prohibited Communications

- Staff shall not connect with or communicate with currently enrolled students through personal social media accounts
- This includes "friending," following, direct messaging, or private communication

B. Appropriate Professional Communication

- Use school-provided communication platforms (email, learning management systems, official school accounts)
 - Professional communication with families should use groups, pages, or official school channels
 - Maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times
-

IX. Consequences and Enforcement

A. Violations

Violations of this policy may result in:

1. Verbal or written warning

2. Required additional training
3. Removal of posting privileges for official accounts
4. Disciplinary action up to and including termination
5. Legal consequences if violations involve illegal activity

B. Reporting Concerns

Staff who become aware of potential violations of this policy should report concerns to:

- School Director/Principal
- Director of Operations
- School Attorney (for serious FERPA violations)

C. Duty to Remove

If a staff member posts content that violates this policy, they must remove it immediately upon request by school leadership.

X. Training and Support

A. Required Training

All staff covered by this policy must complete:

1. FERPA training (annually)
2. Social media policy training (upon hire and annually)
3. Student privacy and digital citizenship training

B. Resources and Support

- Questions about this policy should be directed to school leadership
 - Staff may request review of potential posts before publishing
 - The school will provide templates and guidelines for appropriate content
-

XI. Policy Review and Updates

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to reflect:

- Changes in applicable laws and regulations
- Emerging social media platforms and practices
- Lessons learned from policy implementation
- Staff feedback and recommendations

Questions about this policy should be directed to Loren Reynolds.

Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the Spruce Community Schools Social Media Policy. I agree to comply with all provisions of this policy and understand that violations may result in disciplinary action.

Staff Member Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____



SPRUCE
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Spruce Community School Technology Policy

Effective Date: July 2026

Applies to: Leadership Team and Founding Teachers

Last Revised: July 21, 2026

I. Purpose and Scope

At Spruce, we believe technology should always be in service of learning, never a substitute for it. When something can be taught by a person, it is. Our families choose Spruce in part because we are intentionally tech-minimal, and because we rely on the craft of teaching and the beauty of relationships to drive learning. It is designed to protect student and family privacy, maintain the security of school systems, ensure responsible stewardship of school resources, and support compliance with federal and state laws including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Colorado statutes.

This policy applies to all leadership team members and founding teachers, and will be extended to all staff as the school grows.

II. Core Principles

A. Technology Is Provided to Support Our Work

Devices, accounts, and network access are provided to support instructional planning, communication, administrative responsibilities, and professional development.

Use of school-provided technology is a privilege tied to employment, not a personal entitlement, and should be treated accordingly.

Occasional, brief personal use is permitted so long as it does not interfere with job responsibilities, network security, or the availability of resources for others.

B. Ownership

All devices, accounts, software licenses, and data created or stored using Spruce systems remain the property of Spruce Community School.

This includes files, documents, and communications created within the scope of employment.

III. Device Issuance and Care

A. *Issuance*

- Staff will be issued a device upon hire, tracked in the school's technology inventory.
- Staff are responsible for the device assigned to them for the duration of their employment.

B. *Treat Equipment with Respect*

- Staff are expected to handle all school technology, including laptops, chargers, peripherals, and shared classroom equipment, with care and respect.
- Devices should be stored securely, kept reasonably clean, and protected from unnecessary exposure to damage (e.g., food, liquids, extreme temperatures).
- Any damage, loss, theft, or malfunction must be reported to school leadership as soon as possible.

C. *Responsibility for Damage*

- Normal wear and accidental damage that occurs during reasonable work use will be handled by the school through repair or replacement.
- If a device is intentionally damaged, or damaged or lost due to clear negligence, the staff member may be responsible for the cost of repair or replacement.
- Repair or replacement costs owed under this section may be deducted from final pay to the extent permitted under Colorado law.

IV. Responsible Use of the Internet and Search

A. *Appropriate Use*

School devices and network access are intended for educational, instructional, and professional purposes.

Staff should exercise sound professional judgment when searching the internet or accessing online content, just as they would in any other professional setting.

Staff may not use school technology to access, search for, download, or distribute illegal, obscene, discriminatory, or harassing content.

B. *Software and Security*

Staff may not install unauthorized software, browser extensions, or applications on school devices without approval from school leadership.

Staff must use strong, secure passwords and may not share login credentials for school accounts or devices.

Devices should be locked or logged out when unattended, particularly when student or family information is accessible.

Two-step authentication should be turned on and utilized.

C. Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools can be a helpful support in planning, research, and administrative work, but they are not a substitute for the thinking, judgment, and relationships that define teaching at Spruce. You were hired for your brilliant and unique brain. We understand that it can make work easier and more efficient but it will never replace your creativity.

Student, family, and staff information, including names, academic records, behavioral information, health information, or any other personally identifiable information, may never be uploaded, entered, or shared with AI tools of any kind. This includes drafting messages, lesson plans, or documents that contain identifying details about a specific child or family.

AI tools may be used to support tasks such as brainstorming, drafting general resources, or streamlining administrative work, so long as no student or family information is involved.

Because Spruce is deeply committed to developing critical thinking in our students, staff are expected to model that same habit of mind in their own work. Use AI to enhance your thinking, not to shortcut it. Final judgment, planning, and instructional decisions should always be your own.

When in doubt about whether something is appropriate to use with AI tools, treat it as confidential and do not enter it.

V. Privacy and Monitoring

School-owned devices, accounts, and network access are meant to support your work, so please keep in mind that activity on these systems isn't private in the way a personal device would be.

Spruce may periodically review activity, files, or communications on school devices and accounts, primarily to keep our systems secure and to support the school's operations.

For anything personal, like personal email or messaging, we'd ask that you use your own device and accounts when possible.

VI. Protecting Student and Family Information

Staff must safeguard any confidential student, family, or staff information accessed or stored on school devices, consistent with FERPA and the school's Social Media Policy.

Devices containing student information should never be left unattended in unsecured locations.

When in doubt about whether information is protected, treat it as confidential.

VII. Return of Equipment

A. Upon Separation from Employment

Staff must return all school-owned devices, chargers, cases, and accessories to school leadership no later than their final day of employment, regardless of the reason for separation.

Outstanding equipment that is not returned will be treated as unreturned school property, and the replacement cost may be deducted from final pay to the extent permitted under Colorado law.

B. Data Handling at Return

Upon return, the school may wipe devices and remove all data and accounts in preparation for reissuance.

Staff are responsible for backing up any personal files stored on a school device prior to their departure; the school is not responsible for personal data not backed up in advance.

VIII. Consequences and Enforcement

Violations of this policy may result in:

- Verbal or written warning
 - Required additional training
 - Restriction or removal of device and network access
 - Financial responsibility for repair or replacement of damaged or unreturned equipment
 - Disciplinary action up to and including termination
 - Legal consequences if violations involve illegal activity
-

IX. Support

Questions about appropriate use, device care, or this policy should be directed to school leadership or IT team.

X. Policy Review and Updates

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to reflect changes in applicable laws and regulations, changes in school technology and systems, lessons learned from policy implementation, and staff feedback and recommendations.

Questions about this policy should be directed to Loren Reynolds.

Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the Spruce Community School Technology Policy. I agree to comply with all provisions of this policy and understand that violations may result in disciplinary action.

Staff Member Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____