

Parent Handbook

Pottstown Dance Theatre

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Table of Contents

About This Handbook	3
Mission Statement	3
About the Studio	4
Rep Ensemble	5
Classes	5
Academy Program	6
<u>Parent Info</u>	
Tuition	7
Snow/Inclement Weather Closing	8
Attendance	9
Tardiness	9
Makeups	10
Smoking	10
<u>Student Info</u>	
Dress Code	10
Classroom behavior	11
Cell phones	11
Gossip	12
<u>Both Student and Parent Info</u>	
Private Appointments	12
Technology	12
A Final word from Ms. Michelle	13

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Our school has been a leader in dance education for over 53 years. We believe that our success comes as a result of providing solid training and quality service, as well as our underlying belief in the strength of our organization. We have created this handbook to offer our students and their parents a clear understanding of their commitments and responsibility to the school.

This handbook will serve as your guide to the Pottstown Dance Theatre, and its philosophy of dance education. We take our roles as mentors and teachers in your child's life very seriously. It is our objective to inspire a passion for the art of dance in every child who passes through our doors.

Our Mission Statement

Pottstown Dance Theatre focuses on the growth of students as individuals. We believe that since dance is a performing art, performance experience is integral to dance education. We do not, however, place a heavy emphasis on a spring recital, and our teaching curriculum spans the entire school year.

We place students in the level that will challenge the student technically, yet build and maintain self-confidence. It is quite common to remain in the same level for more than one year. This does not indicate any failure; students are most successful in the long run when they progress at their own rate. Many times, fundamental levels need to be repeated to ensure mastery; and advanced skills require constant practice to maintain consistent success.

We welcome the student who works toward a career in dance, as well as the student that dances purely for the joy of movement and the benefits that transfer into daily living. The focus of the school is on training dance students to be their very best while under our tutelage, regardless of long term goals.

Through dance, we hope our students will develop a self-discipline that will last them the rest of their lives. We also try to instill in our students a general knowledge and love of different types of music. In this time of technology, many children do not get the physical activity they need to stay healthy and in shape. At Pottstown Dance Theatre, we offer a fun physical activity that targets all muscles of the body and also enhances stretching and flexibility skills.

About the Studio

As you may already know, Pottstown Dance Theatre has a reputation for providing excellent and professional standards in the art of dance. We were hand selected by the American Alliance of Performing Arts Educators to perform in London during the 2012 Olympic Games, and have already been invited to Tokyo for 2020.

Our director has international reputations as choreographers, performers, and instructors. Please see our website for a full listing of teachers and their credentials.

Rep Ensemble

Pottstown Dance Theatre is the home to “Pottstown Dance Theatre Repertory Ensemble”, which was founded in 2012. This company will give dancers who are age seven and up, two to three performing opportunities annually, including “The Nutcracker”.

One of the long term goals for this organization is to prepare willing students to work for and compete (if they so desire) on a more international and advanced level. We are hoping to eventually take some interested dancers to the “Youth American Grand Prix Festival” where professional schools come and award scholarships, dancers from around the world learn from each other, and students get master workshops with international stars. If you would like to see how this organization works, we encourage you to watch the documentary film “*First Position*”. The film focuses on students working as soloists, but the organization has ensemble opportunities as well. We are working to raise the bar and make our dancers stronger, both technically and artistically.

This regional group is under the direction of Michelle Jones Wurtz with an artistic advisory staff of Diane Alex Brody and Megan Schultz. These artists will work together to provide the best possible standards with “excellence in the art of dance” being the number one focus. Any student aged seven and older wishing to participate will need to audition for them and details are available in the studio.

We also encourage you all, as dancers and parents, to read ‘The Parents Book of Ballet’ by Angela Whitehill and William Noble, cover to cover but paying strong attention to Chapter 15: The Regional Ballet Experience, as this will give you an excellent understanding of our vision.

Classes

The school offers classes in Ballet and Pointe, Tap, Modern, Jazz, African, Hip-Hop, Creative Movement, Irish, Break Dance, Musical Theater, and Pilates. We base the ballet program on the Vaganova Syllabus, as set up by the school of the Kirov Ballet in Russia.

We offer ‘Intensive’ classes for students which our instructors have identified as having some natural ability that needs/deserves to be developed. This program includes three ballet classes weekly and at least one other technique. You are under no obligation, but it is strongly recommended. Graduate students from this program have gone on to dance at San Francisco Ballet, Atlanta Festival Ballet and the Paul Taylor Dance Company to name only a few. Others have received upwards of \$25,000 in scholarships for college, even to major in something other than dance; they were merely asked to work on the college dance team.

All dancers aged four and up will have an opportunity to perform at the End of School Year Demonstration Concert.

Academy

Our Academy program meets twice weekly earlier in the day than our regular classes. Academy classes are offered Monday 3:30-4:45-5 and sometimes Thursday 3:30-4:45 with unlimited classes in the evenings. Dancers study with Ms. Michelle and at times, guest instructors. The student will learn not only dance technique, but dance history, music appreciation, visual art skills, and many other things that can enhance a dancer’s background. Home schooled students often easily enjoy the extra time, and many schools allow students to take a ‘study hall’ in place of gym since this is such an intense physical schedule, allowing for homework to be done at school itself. Students may also arrive no later than 3:45 to assist with bussing schedules.

The cost is \$2,750 yearly and can be paid in ten (10) monthly installments of \$275. If you need a paper signed for school purposes to excuse someone from gym, let Michelle know. She will be happy to do so.

Movement is the best thing for the human body. Feel free to read Joseph Pilates' essay "Return to Life".

Parent info

Tuition

There is a once yearly registration fee of \$20.00 payable when the student is registered.

The school year is divided up into four sessions. Tuition is due the first week of each session. A discount is given to those who pay within the first week of the session. If payment is not received by the first week of each session, parents will be charged the undiscounted rate. If no payment is received by the third week of the session, the student will not be allowed to attend classes until the balance is paid. See the class sheet for rates.

NO refunds or credits will be given for tuition and session tuition is due in full regardless of whether a student drops a class prior to the end of the session. In cases of severe injury or extreme illness, tuition issues will be handled on a case by case basis. If a student misses a class, it is their responsibility to make it up.

If there are any individual issues, please contact the desk worker BEFORE the payment is late.

The Pottstown Dance Theatre is closed for several days during the year, including the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. The dates we are closed will be posted in advance and these are already factored into tuition, therefore no make-ups are available for these holidays.

Snow/Inclement Weather Closing

If you have any questions about if the school is open, please call before venturing out.

Classes missed for snow/inclement weather may be made up, either at the end of the school year during special make-up days, or by taking any other class, see make-ups below.

Some days that fall into "extra" winter break days can be made up depending on what day of the week Christmas actually falls. For example, if Christmas is on a Wed. those who take class on Tues. and/or Wed will have a make-up day. Christmas Eve for Tues. will get a make-up. Mon., Thurs., Fri., and Sat. students all will be exempt as one day off for every week day is built into the break.

Attendance

Attendance to dance class is *very important* because dance is a cumulative learning experience with each class building on the previous one. If your child will not be attending class, please be polite and call to inform the teacher. The teacher spends a substantial amount of time preparing for each class, and when a student misses, it takes time away from the whole class to teach the child what was missed.

Tardiness

Regular attendance is necessary to maintain steady progress in the class. Poor attendance will result in poor training. Absences and tardiness can have a negative effect on the entire class. Please make sure to be on time; it is disrupting to a class when a student comes in after the lesson is in progress or needs to leave early.

Being on time is very important because not only does each class build on the previous one, but in class, each exercise builds on the one before. If a dancer misses more than the first fifteen minutes of class, she/he would not be properly warmed up. Injuries are less likely with properly warmed up muscles. Thus, if a student misses more than the first 15 minutes of class, he/she will be asked to sit and watch the rest of class, unless they are coming from another class and already warmed-up.

Make-ups

Missed classes can be made up by the student taking any class that is the same level or below or slightly above with instructor permission. We encourage the families to keep track of absences. We also suggest that if a dancer has a make-up, they take a class in a different discipline other than the one in which they are familiar. We offer a wide range of styles, and using a make-up class gives the dancer the opportunity to try new styles.

Smoking

The Studio has a firm **no smoking** policy in the facility. This includes the sidewalk and walk ways outside the facility.

Student Info

Dress Code

We ask that you maintain the high standards of a professional dance school by maintaining a professional appearance. Please keep in mind that the teachers need to see the dancer's body to make sure that the dancer's movements are correct and not causing damage or 'false' muscle memory. Dancers work harder and stay more focused when properly dressed for class. We want our students to be comfortable with themselves and their

bodies. Denim and other fabrics that restrict movement should not be worn. We require dance clothing to be worn in every class and rehearsal. School clothes are not acceptable. Dancers must always keep their hair pulled back for class. Some teacher may request certain colors for their classes. Please abide by the teachers' requests.

The dress code for each class is as follows:

Ballet: leotard, tights, ballet slippers, skirt (optional), leg warmers and wool shrugs in colder months. Hair in a bun.

Modern: leotard, tights, hip warmers for the floor. Hair up.

Jazz: leotard, tights, jazz pants (optional), jazz shoes. Hair up.

Tap: leotard, tights, jazz pants (optional), tap shoes. Hair up.

Hip-Hop: funky clothes, sneakers or jazz shoes. Hair up.

Classroom behavior

Students are expected to be respectful and attentive in class to teachers and their fellow classmates. Polite behavior and good manners should be displayed throughout the class and lobby. Foul language or actions are not permitted.

Students should not gossip or make their own groups and should work in unison as a class toward a common goal. Good attitude, good grooming, good attendance, and practice at home are expected from each student. We are a private studio and reserve the right to dismiss any student who disregards studio policy, shows inappropriate behavior, or upsets the harmony of the school.

Cell phones

The use of cell phones is restricted to between classes only, not during breaks. Please keep your cell phone in your dance bag until you can use it.

Gossip

The Dance studio is a drama-free zone. We encourage our dancers to support each other, not to gossip and hurt others' feelings. Please be respectful of others, and use the old adage "do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

Both Student and Parent Info

Private Appointments

During the year, if a parent or student has a problem that they would like to discuss with Miss Michelle, or any other teacher, they must make an appointment. Parents may not just come in unexpectedly, or when a class is scheduled, to discuss a problem. We will not discuss problems in front of other parents and the dancers! Please speak first to the workers at the desk, and if they cannot help, they will work with you to coordinate schedules. We value the parents' opinions and concerns, but we have a very busy, tight schedule that we must keep.

Technology

We have a small request from you both as guardians of the generations we are teaching, and as members of those generations. During faculty meetings, members of our team have expressed problems with student memory.

Miss Michelle, who has also noticed the issue, has been researching the problem and has found numerous articles on how the brain is being affected by technology. “Memory, once built up by a verbal and reading culture matters less when everything can be summed up by the touch of a button and now voice recognition” as quoted by Jackie Ashley of “The Guardian” after a symposium with neuroscientist Susan Greenfield.

We encourage you to read articles regarding technology and the human brain, keeping an eye on how much you rely on technology. It’s not possible to hold a cell phone in one hand and dance with the other, or have an app that reminds a student to keep their abdominals engaged and hold their arms at shoulder height.

We ask that you encourage and practice memorization when appropriate and often, as that is the ONLY way to know dance sequences. Ms. Michelle recently choreographed a musical where the singers could not remember step sequencing. All rehearsal time was spent drilling for step patterns for memory and therefore no time was left for fine tuning and altering things as needed. A critic saw the show and raved about the choreography but said it was ‘held hostage’ by the performers inability to do it. The performers were hurt by the comments. We want our dancers to feel good after every performance, so we ask that you push to work the memory part of the brain.

A final word from Ms. Michelle

We hope you are as enthused about the new school year as we are. We have a great reputation and want it to only improve. This is our passion in many ways, our child...our school. We want to nurture it and see it grow in every day, just as you all do as parents. Happy Dancing!