

# **MARS Parent Manual**

**By: Jennifer Wolverton**

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# Introduction

## Welcome Letter

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to the founding year of MARS (Microcollective of AI, Robotics, and the Sciences)! We are thrilled to embark on this exciting educational journey with you and your children. Our mission is to provide a cutting-edge 6TH GRADE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL STEM education to small groups of students, fostering a new generation of technology producers rather than mere consumers. Together, we will explore the frontiers of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, all while integrating the arts and humanities to create well-rounded, innovative thinkers.

At MARS, we believe in the power of project-based learning. Our students will dive into hands-on technology projects, from coding and cybersecurity to digital media production. Imagine your child designing a website, developing a VR game, or even publishing a novel with AI assistance! Our unique hybrid learning model combines the best of both worlds: immersive in-person sessions and dynamic online collaboration.

As the Founder and Executive Director of MARS, I am committed to working closely with you to ensure the success of our students. We are not just building a school; we are building a community of learners, creators, and future leaders. Thank you for joining us on this pioneering adventure. Let's make this inaugural year one to remember, full of discoveries, achievements, and growth. If you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Warm regards,

Jennifer Wolverton  
Founder and Executive Director  
Microcollective of AI, Robotics, and the Sciences (MARS)

## Mission

At MARS, our mission is to provide a cutting-edge 6TH GRADE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL STEM education that transforms students into technology producers and innovators. We are dedicated to equipping our students with the technical skills, creative thinking, and entrepreneurial spirit needed to excel in a rapidly evolving world. Through hands-on projects, real-world applications, and a supportive learning environment, we aim to inspire curiosity, foster ingenuity, and cultivate a passion for lifelong learning.

## Vision

Our vision at MARS is to revolutionize 6TH GRADE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL education by creating a new generation of learners who are not only proficient in STEM but also possess the creativity and critical thinking skills to become leaders in their fields. We envision a future where our graduates are trailblazers in technology and science, seamlessly integrating knowledge across disciplines to solve complex problems and drive innovation. By expanding our unique educational model across Alabama and beyond, we aim to build a vibrant community of forward-thinking individuals who are prepared to make a positive impact on the world.

## Educational Philosophy

At MARS, our educational philosophy is rooted in the belief that every student has the potential to be a creator and innovator. We strive to cultivate an environment where curiosity is encouraged, creativity is nurtured, and critical thinking is developed. Our approach to education is guided by the following principles:

1. **Hands-On Learning:** We believe that students learn best by doing. Our curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, where students engage in hands-on activities that challenge them to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts. From coding and robotics to digital media production and VR game development, our students tackle projects that are both exciting and educational.
2. **Integrated STEM and Arts:** We recognize the value of a holistic education that integrates STEM with the arts and humanities. By blending technical skills with creative expression, we prepare our students to think critically and approach problems from multiple perspectives. This interdisciplinary approach fosters innovation and helps students see the connections between different fields of knowledge.
3. **Personalized Education:** We understand that each student is unique, with their own interests, strengths, and learning styles. Our small class sizes and project-based learning allow us, alongside parents, to tailor our instruction to meet the individual needs of each student.
4. **Real-World Applications:** We believe in the importance of connecting classroom learning to real-world applications. Our students work on projects that address real-world problems and create tangible technology products. This not only enhances their understanding of the subject matter but also helps them develop practical skills that are relevant to their future careers.
5. **Community and Collaboration:** We foster a sense of community and collaboration among our students, teachers, and parents. Learning at MARS is a collective experience, where students work together on projects, share ideas, and support each other's growth. We also engage with the broader community through partnerships with local businesses and organizations, providing students with opportunities to connect with industry professionals and gain real-world experience.
6. **Lifelong Learning:** We aim to instill a love of learning in our students that extends beyond the classroom. By encouraging curiosity and independent thinking, we prepare our students to be lifelong learners who are always eager to explore new ideas and challenges. We believe that education is an ongoing journey, and we are committed to supporting our students every step of the way.

At MARS, we are dedicated to empowering our students to become the innovators and leaders of tomorrow. By providing a dynamic and supportive learning environment, we help them develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to succeed in an ever-changing world.

## Program Overview

### About MARS

MARS is the culmination of a visionary journey led by Jennifer Wolverton, a passionate educator and innovator. Jennifer's dream of transforming 6TH GRADE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL education began years ago when she recognized the urgent need for a more dynamic, hands-on approach to learning, particularly in the field of STEM.

#### **Jennifer: Empowering Future Innovators in Math and Technology**

Meet Jennifer, an enthusiastic engineer turned STEM educator, dedicated to revolutionizing math and technology education for K-12 students. With a deep belief in the potential of every child, Jennifer is on a mission to inspire and empower the next generation of world-changing mathematicians and innovators.

Jennifer's journey began in the field of engineering, where she excelled as a process and systems engineer. Her experiences in this male-dominated field, coupled with her own love for mathematics and technology, ignited a desire to address the cultural barriers that often keep young girls and students from exploring their potential in STEM fields.

As a consummate educator who enjoys the playful art of doodling in notebooks, Jennifer has developed a unique, gamified teaching style that resonates with young minds. She believes in making learning fun, engaging, and inclusive. "First, we raise the confidence. Then, we create the mathematician," is her motto. Her approach is about setting a high bar for math education while ensuring the journey is enjoyable and fulfilling.

Jennifer is particularly enthusiastic about introducing students to historical mathematicians who have shaped our world, like her favorite, Al-Khwarizmi, a Persian mathematician from 800 AD. She advocates for math as a language that is best learned collaboratively, encouraging students to find "math friends" and explore together.

But Jennifer's vision extends beyond traditional education. She is an advocate for integrating innovative technologies like AI in learning. Enthusiastic about the possibilities that AI offers in creative fields, Jennifer guides students and aspiring writers in writing and self-publishing novels using tools like ChatGPT, Novelcraft, Dall-E, Microsoft Office, and Amazon KDP.

**The Birth of MARS:** Inspired by these successes and motivated by the growing demand for a more personalized and forward-thinking education, Jennifer envisioned a new kind of learning environment. She imagined a place where students could learn through hands-on projects, harnessing the power of AI, robotics, and cutting-edge technology. This vision led to the creation of MARS, a network dedicated to fostering the next generation of innovators and technology producers.

**Building a Community:** Jennifer's journey has always been about more than just education; it's about building a community. At MARS, she is bringing together like-minded educators, parents, and industry professionals who share her commitment to transforming education. Through collaborative efforts and a shared vision, this community will create a nurturing environment where students can explore their passions and develop the skills needed to excel in the modern world.

**Looking Ahead:** MARS is more than an educational program; it is a movement towards a brighter future in education. Jennifer's dedication to innovation and excellence drives the ongoing development of our programs

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and the expansion of our campuses. Each MARS location will be a testament to her belief that education should be an adventure, a place where curiosity is ignited, creativity is celebrated, and every student is empowered to achieve their fullest potential.

Join us at MARS and become part of a transformative educational experience, inspired by Jennifer Wolverton's vision and passion for making a lasting impact on the lives of students. Together, we are reaching for the stars, just like the planet Mars, charting new territories and exploring endless possibilities.

## Operational Model

### 1. Hybrid Learning Structure:

#### ○ In-Person Learning:

- Students in the founding campus of MARS will attend on Tuesdays at DiVRgence in Huntsville, Alabama.
- These sessions focus on hands-on projects, collaborative activities, and face-to-face interactions with teachers, professionals, and peers.
- Facilities are equipped with the necessary technology and resources to support immersive learning experiences. They will have access to top notch computers and virtual reality equipment.

#### ○ Online Learning:

- Three to four days per week, students engage in online learning through Microsoft Teams.
- Online work sessions with peers include virtual classrooms, group projects, and independent study.
- The use of VR environments and AI tools enhances the online learning experience, making it interactive and engaging.

### 2. Project-Based Curriculum:

- Education at MARS is centered around project-based learning, where students tackle real-world problems and create tangible products.
- Projects span various STEM disciplines, including
  - Coding with Code Combat, Esports, and Minecraft Education Edition.
  - Novel writing with ChatGPT, Novelcraft, and Microsoft Office
  - WordPress website design while telling the US History story.
  - Podcasting while telling the US History story.
  - Biology labs in virtual reality.
  - Creation of a School MascotBot.

- Each project is designed to develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creativity.

### **3. Interdisciplinary Approach:**

- The curriculum integrates STEM with the arts and humanities to provide a well-rounded education.
- Students explore subjects like history, literature, and art through the lens of technology and innovation.
- This interdisciplinary approach fosters a deeper understanding of how different fields intersect and complement each other.
- No longer will students be able to classify themselves as either math people or art people. It will become impossible to separate them. Every student can do all things.

### **4. Community Engagement:**

- MARS actively involves parents, local businesses, and community organizations in the educational process. Or you could say that parents actively involve MARS in their homeschooling.
- Partnerships with industry professionals provide students with unique opportunities for internships, mentorships, and real-world experiences.
- Community events, such as workshops and seminars, foster a collaborative spirit and connect students with the broader community. We will be looking for conventions and other opportunities where technical adults convene for our students to volunteer and learn. We are currently considering STEAMfest, the AI Symposium, and WordCamps.

### **5. Technology Integration:**

- Advanced technologies, including AI and VR, are integral to the learning experience at MARS.
- Students use tools like ChatGPT, Novelcraft, Dall-E, and Microsoft Office to enhance their projects and learning outcomes. They learn these tech skills in ELA and then will apply them in other subjects this year.
- The integration of these technologies prepares students for the future and equips them with skills relevant to modern industries. Even teaching is becoming an endeavor for entrepreneurs where tech skills are a big benefit. Let's face it. Even our modern kitchen appliances are becoming so technologically infused that a stay at home parent is going to benefit from these skills.

### **6. Assessment and Feedback:**

- Continuous assessment and feedback are essential components of the MARS operational model.
- Students are evaluated based on their project outcomes, participation, and personal growth.

- Regular feedback through rubrics and mastery grading from teachers and peers helps students reflect on their progress and identify areas for improvement.

**7. Scalability and Expansion:**

- MARS is designed to be scalable, with plans to expand to multiple locations across Alabama and beyond.
- Each new campus follows the same operational model, ensuring consistency and quality in education.
- The use of community spaces like recreation centers, libraries, and corporations allows for flexibility and cost-effective expansion.

This section should provide parents and stakeholders with a clear understanding of how MARS operates and what makes its approach to education unique and effective.

## Key Problems Addressed

MARS was founded to tackle some of the most pressing challenges in 6TH GRADE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL STEM education. Our goal is to create an inclusive, dynamic learning environment that empowers all students to become future innovators and leaders in technology and science. Here are the key problems we address:

### 1. **Lack of Access to Qualified STEM Teachers:**

- Public schools often struggle to afford highly qualified STEM teachers, especially those with industry experience. This limits students' exposure to current practices and cutting-edge technologies. MARS bridges this gap by integrating professionals and educators who bring real-world expertise into the classroom, ensuring students receive a high-quality STEM education.

### 2. **Gender Disparities in STEM:**

- Many young girls feel discouraged from pursuing careers in STEM due to cultural stereotypes and a lack of female role models. At MARS, we actively work to dismantle these barriers by promoting an inclusive culture that celebrates the contributions of women in STEM. We provide mentorship opportunities, highlight successful female STEM professionals, and create a supportive environment where girls feel empowered to explore their interests in science and technology. We also wrap the humanities in together with technology to ensure they are both seen as necessary to the learning experience.

### 3. **Underrepresentation of Minorities in STEM:**

- Minority students are often excluded from STEM opportunities due to systemic biases and a lack of resources. MARS is committed to fostering diversity by ensuring our programs are accessible and inclusive. We hope to offer scholarships, outreach programs, and community partnerships to engage minority students and provide them with the tools and support they need to succeed in STEM fields.

### 4. **Insufficient Math Education:**

- Traditional math education often falls short in preparing students for advanced careers in technology and data science. Many students lack the foundational skills needed for high-level math courses. MARS addresses this by providing a robust math curriculum that emphasizes practical applications and critical thinking. Our approach includes personalized learning plans and project-based activities that make math engaging and relevant.

### 5. **Technology Consumers vs. Producers:**

- The current educational system tends to produce technology consumers rather than technology producers. Students are often taught to use technology but not to understand or create it. MARS shifts this paradigm by focusing on hands-on projects that require students to build, code, and innovate. This empowers students to become creators and problem-solvers in the tech world.

### 6. **Limited Exposure to Cutting-Edge Technologies:**

- Students in many public schools have limited access to the latest technologies, such as AI, robotics, and VR. This puts them at a disadvantage compared to peers in more resource-rich environments. MARS ensures that all students have access to state-of-the-art technology and the opportunity to learn and experiment with these tools, preparing them for the future workforce.

**7. Standardized Testing Emphasis:**

- The overemphasis on standardized testing in traditional education often stifles creativity and critical thinking. MARS prioritizes a holistic approach to learning that values creativity, collaboration, and innovation. Our project-based curriculum allows students to explore their interests deeply and develop a portfolio of work that demonstrates their skills and knowledge beyond test scores.

**8. Inadequate Career Preparation:**

- Many students graduate without the practical skills and experience needed for STEM careers. MARS addresses this by providing real-world projects, internships, and mentorship opportunities that connect students with industry professionals. This hands-on experience is invaluable in preparing students for successful careers in STEM fields. Beyond preparation, we find that students don't know what jobs are even out there for them because they were kept inside of a school building full time for 12 years.

By addressing these key problems, MARS aims to create a transformative educational experience that equips all students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to excel in the rapidly evolving fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

## Target Customers and Early Adopters

At MARS, we understand that our innovative approach to education appeals to a specific group of parents and students who are seeking a transformative and dynamic learning experience. Our target customers and early adopters are those who value cutting-edge STEM education, personalized learning, and a nurturing community. Here's a detailed look at our target audience:

### Target Customers:

#### 1. 6<sup>th</sup> grade through high school Parents:

- Our primary customers are parents of 6<sup>th</sup> grade through high school students who are passionate about providing their children with the best possible education. These parents are often dissatisfied with traditional schooling methods and are looking for alternatives that emphasize STEM, creativity, and real-world applications.
- They value personalized attention, hands-on learning, and opportunities for their children to engage in innovative projects that prepare them for future careers.
- They also want to be involved in their student's education in a meaningful way.

#### 2. Parents Seeking STEM Opportunities:

- Many of our target customers are parents who specifically want their children to excel in STEM fields. They recognize the importance of STEM education in today's world and are eager to find a program that offers advanced and engaging STEM learning opportunities.
- These parents are particularly interested in programs that provide access to the latest technologies, including AI, robotics, and VR, and that foster skills in coding, engineering, and scientific inquiry.

#### 3. Parents of Girls in STEM:

- We target parents who want to encourage their daughters to pursue interests and careers in STEM. These parents are aware of the gender disparities in STEM fields and are looking for programs that actively support and empower girls in science and technology.
- They seek an inclusive environment where their daughters can thrive, find role models, and participate in projects that build their confidence and skills in STEM.

#### 4. Parents of Minority Students:

- MARS aims to attract parents of minority students who may feel that their children are underserved by traditional education systems. These parents are looking for a supportive and inclusive community that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all students.
- They are drawn to programs that offer scholarships, mentorship, and outreach initiatives designed to engage and support minority students in STEM.

#### 5. Parents of Neurodivergent Children:

- We also pursue parents of neurodivergent children, including those with ADHD, autism, and other learning differences. These parents are seeking educational environments that understand and accommodate their children's unique needs.
- MARS provides a flexible curriculum, and a supportive atmosphere where neurodivergent students can excel.

**Early Adopters:**

**1. Parents in Huntsville, Alabama:**

- Our initial focus is on parents in Huntsville, Alabama, a city known for its strong ties to technology and space exploration. These parents are likely to be early adopters who appreciate the value of a STEM-focused education and are eager to participate in an innovative program like MARS.
- Huntsville's vibrant tech community provides an ideal environment for MARS to thrive and attract families who are invested in the future of STEM education.

**2. Tech-Savvy Families:**

- Families with a strong interest in technology and innovation are among our early adopters. These families often have parents who work in STEM fields and understand the importance of equipping their children with advanced technical skills from an early age.
- They are excited about the prospect of their children learning to code, build robots, and explore AI and VR technologies in a hands-on, project-based setting.

**3. Homeschooling Families:**

- Homeschooling families who seek a structured yet flexible STEM program are also likely to be early adopters. These families value personalized education and are looking for a comprehensive curriculum that offers both in-person and online learning opportunities.
- MARS provides a unique blend of structure and flexibility, making it an attractive option for homeschooling families who want to ensure their children receive a high-quality STEM education.

By focusing on these target customers and early adopters, MARS aims to build a strong community of engaged, forward-thinking families who are committed to providing their children with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the rapidly evolving fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

# MARS Rules and Policies

## Code of Conduct

At MARS, we are committed to creating a positive, respectful, and inclusive learning environment. Our Code of Conduct outlines the expectations for behavior to ensure a safe and productive experience for everyone.

### Respect for Others

- **Treat everyone with kindness and respect:** This includes fellow students, teachers, and staff. Bullying, harassment, or discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated.
- **Listen actively:** Pay attention when others are speaking and allow them to share their thoughts without interruption.

### Responsibility

- **Be accountable for your actions:** Take responsibility for your behavior and its impact on others. Own your mistakes and learn from them.
- **Follow the rules:** Adhere to all MARS policies, including those related to safety, technology use, and academic integrity.

### Integrity

- **Be honest:** Always tell the truth and act in an ethical manner. Cheating, plagiarism, and dishonesty are unacceptable.
- **Do your own work:** Complete your assignments and projects to the best of your ability without copying from others.

### Safety

- **Maintain a safe environment:** Avoid actions that could harm yourself or others. Report any unsafe conditions or behaviors to a teacher or staff member immediately.
- **Use technology responsibly:** Follow guidelines for using MARS technology and the internet. Avoid accessing inappropriate content or engaging in cyberbullying.

### Collaboration and Participation

- **Work together:** Collaborate with your peers on group projects and activities. Share ideas, provide constructive feedback, and support each other's learning.
- **Be engaged:** Participate actively in discussions, activities, and projects. Attend all scheduled classes and events, and complete assignments on time.

### Growth Mindset

- **Embrace challenges:** View challenges as opportunities to learn and grow. Do not be afraid to take risks and make mistakes, as they are part of the learning process.

- **Seek improvement:** Continuously strive to improve your skills and knowledge. Set personal goals and work diligently to achieve them.

### **Community Involvement**

- **Contribute positively:** Be an active and positive member of the MARS community. Participate in events, support your peers, and help maintain a welcoming atmosphere for everyone.
- **Respect community spaces:** Take care of MARS property and help keep shared spaces clean and organized.

### **AI Ethics in Education**

- **Use AI responsibly:** Ensure that any use of AI tools and technologies adheres to ethical guidelines. Use AI to enhance learning and creativity, not to replace genuine effort or engagement.
- **Respect privacy:** Protect your own and others' privacy when using AI. Avoid sharing personal information without consent and be mindful of data security.
- **Promote fairness:** Ensure that AI applications are used in a fair and unbiased manner. Avoid using AI to discriminate or unfairly disadvantage anyone.
- **Stay informed:** Keep up-to-date with best practices and ethical considerations regarding AI in education. Participate in discussions about AI ethics and contribute to a responsible AI community.
- **Be transparent:** Always be honest about the amount of AI usage when asked. Transparency fosters trust and accountability within the MARS community.

By following this Code of Conduct, we can create a thriving, respectful, and innovative learning environment where every member of the MARS community can succeed. Let's work together to make MARS a place where everyone feels valued and inspired to achieve their best.

## Attendance Policy

At MARS, we value the freedom to manage individual schedules while recognizing the importance of good attendance for fostering a team-like environment. Regular attendance is crucial for effective participation in group projects and community-building social events. The calendar is set collaboratively to ensure it accommodates the needs and priorities of all families. Students are expected to attend scheduled classes and events consistently. Absences should be communicated in advance when possible. Maintaining good attendance helps build a strong, supportive community and ensures that all group responsibilities are met effectively.

## Dress Code

At MARS, we have a specific dress code for our Tuesday meetings on campus and for special events in the community to foster a sense of unity and professionalism, especially as we will be inviting many community guests and professionals. Students are required to wear navy blue polo shirts or Esports Jerseys with the MARS logo. Sweatpants are not allowed. Dressing semi-professionally is important to make a positive impression. Outside of these meetings and events, clothing should be appropriate for a learning environment, free of offensive language or imagery, and should not disrupt the learning process.

## Technology Use Policy

Students are expected to use technology responsibly and ethically. This includes respecting privacy, avoiding access to inappropriate content, and using MARS devices for educational purposes only. No food or drinks are allowed near any technical devices to prevent damage. There is a designated area for technical devices and a separate area for the purpose of food and drink. All food and drink must be consumed in the food area only; this provides space for student breaks and protects technical devices from damage. Respecting these areas is imperative for the educational well-being of all students and demonstrates the character of our community. Misuse of technology may result in disciplinary action.

## Bullying and Harassment Policy

MARS has a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and harassment, including cyberbullying. Any behavior that intimidates, harms, or discriminates against others, whether in person or online, will not be tolerated. Students are encouraged to report any incidents of bullying or harassment to a staff member immediately.

## Health and Safety Protocols

The health and safety of our community are paramount. Students should follow all health guidelines, including hygiene practices and any specific protocols related to illness prevention. Report any health or safety concerns to a staff member without delay.

# Curriculum

## Overview of Curriculum

At MARS, our curriculum is designed to provide a cutting-edge 6<sup>th</sup> grade through high school education, focusing on developing students into technology producers rather than mere consumers. Our program integrates hybrid learning, virtual reality (VR) environments, artificial intelligence (AI) tools, entrepreneurial skills, and real-world projects to ensure students are prepared for future challenges and opportunities. Below is an overview of some of our key courses and learning opportunities.

### **AI Writers Guild**

Students will write a novel in a year using ChatGPT and other technology applications as assistants. The course culminates with students self-publishing their novel on Amazon KDP.

### **US History Told Through the Lens of Technology**

This course explores all of US history. Students in high school will tell the story through the development of a WordPress website and middle school students will tell the story through a podcast, providing a modern, engaging way to learn history.

### **Biology in VR**

Dive into the living world with our Biology course, where you'll uncover the mysteries of life from microscopic cells to vast ecosystems. This course offers a full high school credit in biology and uses virtual reality to explore biological concepts and systems, making complex topics accessible and engaging.

### **Introduction to Computer Science**

Students will learn the basics of python and computer science using Code Combat. They will develop programming skills through interactive coding challenges and projects. Esports will be an option as well.

### **Math Workshop**

This course focuses on developing advanced math skills through interactive and practical applications. Students will study mathematicians, explore math topics broken up by subject rather than grade level all the way through algebra, and engage in memory charts and rhetorical exercises to articulate their math studies effectively.

### **School MascotBot**

Students will design and program a moving and talking robot mascot for MARS. This project integrates coding, robotics, and creative design, providing a fun and educational experience for our families. We're hoping to implement a learning language model into the bot using artificial intelligence technology.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

MARS encourages students to participate in volunteer opportunities within the community. These experiences are completely student-led, helping them develop empathy, leadership skills, and a sense of civic responsibility.

### **High School Movie Nights**

Monthly movie nights for high school students will explore films related to their studies. These events provide a fun way to deepen understanding and foster a sense of community.

### **Minecraft Game Nights**

On the first Friday of each month, students will participate in virtual Minecraft Education game nights. These sessions promote teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving skills in a fun, interactive environment.

### **Microsoft Office**

While not a standalone course, proficiency in Microsoft Office applications will be woven into everything we do at MARS. Students will learn essential skills in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and other tools, preparing them for academic and professional success.

As MARS continues to grow, so will our curriculum catalog, with new courses and learning opportunities added in the coming years to meet the evolving needs of our students.

## Hybrid Learning Model

At MARS, our hybrid learning model combines in-person and virtual experiences to provide a flexible and comprehensive educational experience.

- **In-Person Meetings:** Students will meet at DiVRgence in Huntsville, Alabama on Tuesdays for a full educational day. These sessions will include hands-on projects, collaborative learning activities, and direct interaction with instructors and peers.
- **Virtual Collaboration:** For the rest of the week, students will work on projects through collaboration on Microsoft Teams. This platform allows students to communicate, share resources, and work together on assignments from home or other remote locations.
- **Special Events:** We will use the virtual space for our Minecraft Education Game Nights, promoting teamwork and creativity in a fun, interactive environment. High School Movie Nights will be held in person, providing a social and educational experience through film.
- **Field Trips and Social Events:** There will also be planned in-person field trips and social events to enhance the learning experience and foster a sense of community among students.
- **Family Time:** We recognize the importance of family time for our students. While the number of days on campus may increase over the first few years, it will never be five days a week, ensuring that students have ample time to spend with their families.

This hybrid approach ensures that students benefit from both face-to-face interactions and the flexibility of online learning, preparing them for the dynamic and interconnected world while maintaining a balance with family life.

## Integration of VR Environments and AI Tools

At MARS, we harness the power of cutting-edge technology to enhance the learning experience, integrating virtual reality (VR) environments and artificial intelligence (AI) tools across our curriculum.

### Virtual Reality (VR) Environments

- **Immersive Learning:** VR allows students to explore complex concepts and environments in an interactive, immersive way. From conducting virtual biology labs to exploring historical sites, VR transforms abstract ideas into tangible experiences.
- **Enhanced Engagement:** By making learning more engaging and interactive, VR helps to maintain students' interest and motivation. It provides hands-on experiences that would be impossible in a traditional classroom setting.
- **Collaboration and Creativity:** VR enables students to work together in virtual spaces, fostering collaboration and creative problem-solving. Whether designing a virtual ecosystem or coding a VR game, students can collaborate in real-time, regardless of their physical location.

### Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

- **Personalized Learning:** AI tools provide personalized learning experiences by adapting to each student's needs and progress. They can offer tailored feedback, suggest resources, and adjust difficulty levels to ensure optimal learning outcomes.
- **Enhanced Productivity:** AI assists in various educational tasks, from automating administrative work to providing instant support and tutoring. For instance, students in the AI Writers Guild use AI to brainstorm ideas, draft content, and refine their writing.
- **Ethical Use and Transparency:** Students are taught to use AI responsibly and ethically. They learn to be honest about their AI usage and understand the importance of data privacy and security. Discussions on AI ethics are integrated into the curriculum to foster a responsible and informed approach to technology.

By integrating VR and AI into our educational model, MARS provides students with a dynamic, interactive, and personalized learning experience. These technologies prepare students for the future, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

## Entrepreneurialism and Real-World Projects

At MARS, we emphasize real-world projects to prepare students for future challenges and opportunities. Our curriculum fosters creativity, critical thinking, and practical skills through hands-on experiences and innovative projects, integrating entrepreneurial thinking into various activities without treating it as a standalone subject.

### Real-World Projects

- **Self-Publishing a Novel:** Students in the AI Writers Guild write a novel using AI tools and self-publish it on Amazon KDP. This project combines creative writing, technology, and digital marketing skills.
- **Website Creation:** Students learn to create and manage websites, using their skills to present information and tell stories effectively. This project often ties into other subjects, such as US History, where students create websites to narrate historical events.
- **Podcast Creation:** Students produce podcasts, developing skills in research, scripting, recording, and editing. This project provides a modern medium for storytelling and information dissemination, often used in subjects like history and current events.
- **Designing a School MascotBot:** Families collaborate annually to design and build a moving and talking robot mascot. Each year, the MascotBot is upgraded, integrating robotics, coding, and engineering skills, and encouraging ongoing innovation.
- **Speaking Opportunities:** Students are given various speaking opportunities to present their projects, pitch ideas, and share their learning experiences. This helps them develop confidence, public speaking skills, and the ability to communicate their ideas effectively.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Completely student-led, these projects encourage students to engage with their communities, develop leadership skills, and make a positive impact. Volunteer work is integrated into the curriculum to instill a sense of civic responsibility and empathy.
  - **Student-Led Initiatives:** MARS will support any student-led volunteer opportunity they bring to our community. We believe that empowering students to identify and organize volunteer activities helps them develop leadership skills, empathy, and a sense of civic responsibility.
  - **Focused Events:** To maximize our impact and ensure meaningful participation, we will focus on up to three volunteer events per year. These events will be selected based on the interests and initiatives of our students, allowing them to engage deeply with causes they are passionate about.
  - **Group Participation:** By joining these volunteer events as a group, we not only contribute positively to the community but also use these opportunities as social events to build teamwork and camaraderie among students. These shared experiences help to strengthen the bonds within our MARS community and provide valuable team-building opportunities.
  - **Teen Tutors Partnership:** MARS partners with Log Cabin Schoolhouse LLC, which supports teen tutors. These teen tutors volunteer in a class first to develop their communication and rhetorical skills in the subject matter they hope to tutor, enhancing their ability to effectively support their peers.

By incorporating these real-world projects into our curriculum, MARS ensures that students gain practical experience and develop the skills needed to succeed in the modern world. These experiences foster independence, initiative, and a deep understanding of how to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways.

## Academic Expectations

At MARS, we have high academic expectations to ensure that our students achieve their full potential. Our approach to grading and assessment focuses on the completion of meaningful projects, collaboration, and continuous progress.

### Grading and Assessment

- **Project Completion:** Grades are based on the successful completion of projects. Each project has clear objectives and criteria that must be met for students to earn credit.
- **Timeliness:** Students are expected to complete their projects on time. Meeting deadlines is an important part of the learning process and prepares students for real-world responsibilities.
- **Teamwork:** For team projects, students are assessed on their ability to work effectively with their peers. This includes communication, collaboration, and contribution to the group's success.
- **Deliverables:** In every subject area, students will produce tangible deliverables instead of taking traditional tests. These deliverables showcase their understanding and application of the material.
- **Rubrics:** Periodic rubrics will be used to measure students' progress through their projects. Rubrics provide detailed feedback on various aspects of their work, such as creativity, problem-solving, technical skills, and teamwork.

By focusing on these areas, MARS ensures that students are not only mastering the academic content but also developing essential life skills such as time management, collaboration, and the ability to apply knowledge in practical situations. This approach prepares students for future academic pursuits and professional careers, fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

### Homework Policy

At MARS, homework is an integral part of our learning process, designed to reinforce concepts, encourage creativity, and promote continuous engagement with course material.

- **Weekly Deliverables:** Students will have various weekly deliverables, including website posts, podcast episodes, novel chapters or character creation, and biology lab work. These assignments ensure that students regularly apply what they have learned and develop their skills.
- **Submission Formats:** Homework will be delivered through multiple formats to accommodate different learning styles and preferences:
  - **Digital Submissions:** Some assignments will be submitted through Microsoft Teams the night before campus day, allowing for seamless integration with our virtual learning environment.
  - **Verbal Assignments:** Students will engage in dialogues with each other through debates or discussions about their educational content, promoting critical thinking and effective communication.
  - **Paper Submissions:** Traditional paper assignments will also be utilized for specific tasks, promoting handwriting skills and providing a tangible record of student work.

- **Discussion-Based Learning:** Much of our work will be in discussion format, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Book and movie discussions, for example, will allow students to articulate their thoughts, analyze different perspectives, and engage in meaningful dialogue with their peers.

By incorporating these diverse homework methods, MARS ensures that students remain engaged, develop a range of skills, and are well-prepared for both academic and real-world challenges.

## Student Portfolio

At MARS, we emphasize the value of a student portfolio over traditional grades as a comprehensive measure of a student's achievements and growth. While we support grades for our high school students' transcripts, the portfolio is an essential component for building successful adults.

- **Portfolio Benefits:** A portfolio provides a detailed and tangible record of a student's work, skills, and accomplishments. It showcases their ability to apply knowledge, think critically, and create meaningful projects, offering a more holistic view of their capabilities than grades alone.
- **Portfolio Formats:** Students can choose to maintain their portfolio as a big binder or create and manage a personal website. This portfolio serves as a resume of their work during their time at MARS.
- **Portfolio Content:** Submissions to the portfolio may include:
  - **Novel:** Completed through the AI Writers Guild course.
  - **US History Website or Podcast:** Developed in the US History through the Lens of Technology course.
  - **PowerPoint Presentations:** Links to any important presentations created for various projects.
  - **Math Studies:** Samples of their work from the Math Workshop, demonstrating their understanding and application of mathematical concepts.
  - **Games:** Created in the Technology strand, showcasing their coding and game development skills.
  - **Certifications:** Achievements in certifications such as Microsoft Office, PCEP (Python Certified Entry-Level Programmer), CLEP (College Level Examination Program), or AP (Advanced Placement).

By maintaining a portfolio, students at MARS can effectively document their learning journey, reflect on their progress, and present their achievements to colleges, employers, or other opportunities. This practice not only prepares them for future academic and professional endeavors but also instills a sense of pride and ownership in their work.

## Parent Teacher Conferences

At MARS, we recognize that homeschooling is a family-first endeavor. We are committed to supporting our families by offering opportunities to meet with MARS leaders at least once a year.

- **Annual Meetings:** We ensure that each family has the chance to discuss their child's progress and educational experience with our leaders at least once a year.

- **Flexible Scheduling:** We make every effort to accommodate families' needs by offering additional meetings as often as required. Whether you need assistance with long-term education planning or want to discuss specific courses, we are here to help.
- **Individualized Support:** We understand that every child is unique and will follow a different path from their peers. Our goal is to support each student's individual journey and help them achieve their fullest potential.
- **Open Communication:** We encourage ongoing communication between families and MARS leaders to ensure that all students are on a path to success. We are happy to discuss any concerns, celebrate achievements, and provide guidance tailored to your child's needs.

By fostering strong partnerships between families and our educational leaders, we aim to create a supportive and enriching environment where every student can thrive.

## Extracurricular Activities

### Clubs and Organizations

MARS supports several local organizations that we encourage our students to join. By participating in these groups, students can build friendships, develop new skills, and enjoy fun activities outside of their academic pursuits.

- **Cyber Patriot:** This is a competitive and fun weekly class that runs from September through January. Led by an industry professional who donates his time to the homeschool community, Cyber Patriot offers students the opportunity to engage in cybersecurity challenges and competitions.
- **Madison Homeschool Hangouts:** Managed by two homeschool moms, this organization arranges a vast array of fun field trips and special events. It provides a great platform for students to explore new places and activities while building strong social connections.
- **Roller Skating Parties:** Held one Friday a month at Insanity in Madison, these parties offer a fun and active way for students to socialize and enjoy themselves.
- **Timeless Homeschool Events:** We encourage our students to attend at least one event a year hosted by this group. Known for their excellent organization and super fun activities, these events are a highlight for many students.

### Internships / Apprenticeships

MARS will be working hard to develop a database of corporations interested in working with our families. We will be looking at potential for them to come speak to our kids, volunteer in our classrooms, and even provide opportunities for internships or apprenticeships. We are already collaborating with Calhoun Community College and looking at working with QuantHub.

By joining these organizations, MARS students can support high-quality, like-minded groups and enjoy getting to know each other in engaging and enjoyable settings. These extracurricular activities complement our academic program, helping to foster a well-rounded and vibrant community.

# Parent Involvement

## Volunteer Opportunities

At MARS, parents will always be invited into the classrooms. We believe parents are the first teacher a child ever has, and in the importance of them always being the primary teacher. Parents are welcome to give back to the community and foster a spirit of volunteerism among our students.

We actively support student-led volunteer opportunities as well and encourage parental involvement in these initiatives as well.

## Monthly Parent Meetings

At MARS, we understand the importance of community and ongoing support for our homeschooling families. To facilitate this, we hold monthly parent meetings where we discuss various topics relevant to homeschooling and provide a platform for shared learning and collaboration.

- **Discussion Topics:** Each meeting will cover a range of topics that are essential for effective homeschooling. These include:
  - **Curriculum Ideas:** Sharing and exploring innovative curriculum options and teaching strategies.
  - **Safe Technology:** Discussing best practices for safe and responsible use of technology in education.
  - **Future Planning:** Guidance on long-term educational planning, including college and career readiness.
  - **Transcript Development:** Tips and strategies for creating comprehensive and effective student transcripts.
  - **Math Path Thoughts:** Discussions on different approaches to math education and pathways for student success.
  - **AI Ethics:** Conversations about the ethical use of AI in education and beyond.
- **Book Talks:** We may also incorporate book talks into our meetings, allowing parents to share and discuss educational books that have influenced their homeschooling journey.
- **Community Suggestions:** We value the input of our community and are open to suggestions for meeting topics. If there is a specific area of interest or need, we encourage parents to bring it to our attention so that we can address it in our meetings.

By participating in these monthly parent meetings, families can stay informed, share experiences, and gain valuable insights into the various aspects of homeschooling. These meetings help to build a strong, supportive community and ensure that our students receive the best possible education.

## MARS Board of Directors

The MARS Board of Directors plays a crucial role in shaping the future of our educational journey. This dedicated group of individuals works together to guide the mission and vision of MARS, ensuring that we continue to provide innovative and effective education for our students.

- **Parent Involvement:** Parents are welcome to join the Board of Directors and have a direct say in the direction and development of MARS. Your input and perspective are invaluable in creating an educational environment that meets the needs of our community.
- **Board Roles:** The Board of Directors will consist of the following roles:
  - **President:** Leads the board, facilitates meetings, and ensures that the board's decisions align with the mission and goals of MARS.
  - **Vice-President:** Supports the Chairperson and steps in when the Chairperson is unavailable, helping to maintain continuity and leadership.
  - **Secretary:** Keeps accurate records of meetings, decisions, and actions, ensuring that board activities are well-documented and transparent.
  - **Treasurer:** Manages the financial aspects of MARS, including budgeting, fundraising, and financial reporting, to ensure fiscal responsibility and sustainability.
  - **Director of Policies and Procedures:** Develops the documents that will spell out what our program does and how we proceed to get tasks done. This person will also be developing the manual that will be given to new campuses to help them get incorporated and rolling with ease.

By joining the MARS Board of Directors, parents and community members can actively participate in the decision-making process, helping to design and refine our educational programs and initiatives. Together, we can build a strong, forward-thinking educational community that supports the success of every student.

## Subject Matter Experts

At MARS, we are committed to providing the highest quality education by leveraging the expertise of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). Each SME is dedicated to guiding best practices within their specific subject area, ensuring our curriculum remains cutting-edge and effective.

- **Role of SMEs:** Each SME will provide insights, guidance, and support to ensure that the educational content and teaching methods are of the highest standard. They will stay updated with the latest developments in their field and help integrate new knowledge and techniques into our curriculum.
- **Strands and SMEs:**
  - **English:** The English SME will focus on developing literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills. They will guide the integration of literature, writing, and language arts across the curriculum.

- **Math:** The Math SME will ensure that our math curriculum is robust and comprehensive, covering foundational concepts through advanced topics. They will help incorporate innovative teaching methods and real-world applications.
- **Science:** The Science SME will oversee the integration of scientific principles and hands-on experimentation. They will guide the use of VR and other technologies to enhance the learning experience.
- **History:** The History SME will provide expertise on historical content and methodologies. They will help students connect past events to present-day contexts through engaging projects like podcasts and website creation.
- **Technology:** The Technology SME will lead the integration of coding, AI, and other tech skills into the curriculum. They will ensure students are equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to thrive in a digital world.
- **Career and Industry Liaison:** This SME will be responsible for scheduling one person or corporation each week on Tuesday, when the students are on campus together. They will bring special guests to inform students about career, job, and industry opportunities.
- **Electives Integration:** Many electives will be woven into these strands, and over time, the domains of our SMEs may be adjusted to accommodate new subjects and interdisciplinary approaches.

By having dedicated Subject Matter Experts for each strand, MARS ensures that our educational programs are continuously evolving and that students receive the most relevant and high-quality education possible.

## Communication Channels

At MARS, we prioritize clear and consistent communication with our families and community. We utilize various channels to ensure that everyone stays informed and engaged.

- **MARS Families Facebook Group:** A private group for MARS families to share updates, ask questions, and connect with each other.
- **MARS Public Facebook Group:** A public group to share news and events with the broader community, showcasing what MARS has to offer.
- **MARS LinkedIn Page:** A professional platform for sharing updates, achievements, and networking with industry professionals and educators.
- **Weekly Email:** During the school year, we send out a weekly email with important announcements, upcoming events, and other relevant information.
- **BOD Meeting Minutes:** Minutes from the Board of Directors meetings are made available to keep everyone informed about decisions and discussions affecting MARS.
- **Parents Monthly Meetings:** Regular meetings for parents to discuss various topics related to homeschooling and the MARS community.

## MARS Parent Handbook

- **MARS Website:** Our website serves as a central hub for information about our programs, events, and resources.
- **Microsoft Teams:** Used for virtual calls and regular chat discussions among students, facilitating collaboration and communication.
- **Parent's School Connection App:** We are aiming to set up this app so parents can view their student's educational content through their external email address. The app will also allow us to set up various MS Teams for projects our parents are working on to benefit the program.

By utilizing these diverse communication channels, we aim to keep our community well-informed, connected, and actively engaged in the educational journey at MARS.

# Enrollment and Tuition

## Enrollment Process

At MARS, we strive to make the enrollment process as straightforward and transparent as possible. Here's how it works:

- **Determining Availability:** Each January, the Board of Directors will determine the number of seats available and the specific grades for the upcoming school year.
- **Open Houses:** In the spring, we will host a series of open houses where new families can come and see MARS in action. These events provide an opportunity to meet our staff, learn about our programs, and see the unique learning environment we offer.
- **Priority Registration for Returning Families:** In February, registration paperwork will be made available to our current families. This allows them to reserve their child's seat for the next school year before we open enrollment to the public.
- **Public Enrollment:** Enrollment opens to the public in March. Interested families can apply through our application process, which includes:
  - **Application Submission:** Families submit an application detailing their child's educational background and interests.
  - **Family Interview:** After reviewing applications, we conduct a family interview to get to know the student and their parents, discuss educational goals, and ensure MARS is a good fit.
  - **Registration:** Successful applicants will then complete the registration process to secure their spot.
- **Program Start Date:** The first day of our program is currently the Tuesday after Labor Day, aligning with our commitment to a balanced academic calendar.

By following this enrollment process, MARS ensures a fair and organized approach to admitting new students and maintaining a vibrant, engaged learning community.

## Tuition and Registration Fees

At MARS, we aim to provide a transparent and straightforward tuition and fee structure. Below are the details for tuition, payment options, and registration fees.

### Tuition

- **Annual Tuition:** \$1,800
- **Payment Options:** Families can choose to pay the full amount at once or opt for a 10-payment plan, with monthly payments due from August through May.

### Refund Agreement

- **No Refunds:** No refunds are available after the first day of classes.

- **75% Refund:** If you drop before the first day of class, a 75% refund is available.

## Registration Fees

At the time of registration, the following fees are due to reserve your student's seat:

### 1. Code Combat License - \$75

- **Code Combat License:** For middle and high schoolers to access their coding class, valid for the school year through our partnership with Code Combat and Log Cabin Schoolhouse.

### 2. Material Fee - \$100

- Covers the cost of essential materials needed to run the microschool, from microscopes to printers to pens and paper.
- The microschool will be organized as a non-profit, with a board that will manage the budget and ensure funds are spent on students registered during the school year. Some items, like microscopes, will be long-term assets, while others will be consumables. The board will publish detailed expenditure reports.

### 3. Registration Fee - \$100

- Covers start-up costs such as insurance, non-profit registration, rent to DiVRgence, and website development.
- This fee will help establish our new, cutting-edge microschool. The board of directors will determine fund allocation, and all information will be publicly available to our families. Everyone is invited to attend board meetings and participate in this exciting venture.

By providing a clear outline of our tuition and fees, we ensure that families are well-informed and can plan accordingly for their investment in their child's education at MARS.

## Grants and Fundraising

At MARS, we are committed to securing additional funding through grants and fundraising efforts to enhance our educational programs and provide the best possible resources for our students.

- **Grant Applications:** We will work diligently to obtain grants from corporations and organizations that share our mission. These funds will help us expand our programs, acquire new technologies, and support our students' learning experiences.
- **Letter Writing Campaigns:** We will organize letter writing campaigns to local companies that our families do business with, seeking their support and sponsorship. This grassroots approach helps build community ties and generate financial backing.
- **Technology and Device Drives:** To ensure our students have access to the latest tools, we will conduct technology and device drives. These drives will gather the essential equipment and devices needed for our STEM-focused curriculum.

- **Parent Involvement in Grant Writing:** We will provide training for any parents interested in learning about grant writing. By empowering parents with new skills, we increase our capacity to secure funding and, ultimately, enhance the educational experience for our students.

Through these efforts, MARS aims to secure the financial resources necessary to support our innovative programs and ensure our students have the tools they need to succeed. By involving our community in these initiatives, we strengthen our collective ability to provide a top-tier education.

## Contacts

### School Address

DiVRgence  
3015 Governors Dr SW  
Huntsville, AL 35805

### Phone Numbers

757-227-5152  
Jennifer Wolverton - Founder and Executive Director

### Email Address

Jennifer@LogCabinSchoolhouse.com

### Social Media Links

Jennifer's LinkTree: <https://linktr.ee/logcabinschoolhouse>

This LinkTree will be updated as we develop the social media platforms for MARS.

For any inquiries or further information, please feel free to reach out using the contact details provided. We look forward to connecting with you!