

VIRGINIA L. MURRAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FAMILY-STUDENT HANDBOOK | SCHOOL YEAR 2026–2027

Address: 3251 Morgantown Road, Charlottesville, VA 22903

Phone: 434-977-4599 | **Fax:** 434-979-5416

School Mascot: Mustang | **School Colors:** Green and White

School Leadership

Principal: Wendy Eckerle

Assistant Principal: Leslie Wills-Taylor

Updated 6/29/26

Welcome from the Principal

Dear Families,

Welcome to Murray Elementary School! We are excited about the 2026–2027 school year and happy to have you and your child join us for what we know will be a successful year. We, as the faculty and staff, are committed to partnering with you to help your children reach their full potential. We know that when the lines of communication between school and home are open, students benefit most.

With that in mind, we ask that you take a moment with your child and review this family handbook together. The handbook contains important policies and guidelines for both our school and the Albemarle County School District. Familiarizing yourself and your child with this material will support clarity in expectations and a successful school year.

We will post this handbook on the school's web page for easy access and reference as needed. We can also print hard copies by request.

Please know our doors are always open to you. We ask that you reach out at any time with questions and concerns. In return, we will reach out to you over the course of the year for your assistance and support. It is important that we work collaboratively and that your child recognizes we are all in this together with their best interests at heart. We are here for each of your children and committed to providing them the enriching educational experience they deserve.

In partnership,

Wendy Eckerle, Principal

Leslie Wills-Taylor, Assistant Principal

<u>Murray Elementary Staff Directory</u>

Administration & Office Support

- **Principal:** Wendy Eckerle
- **Assistant Principal:** Leslie Wills-Taylor
- **Office Associates:** Carla Dodson & Jessy Reyes
- **Nurse:** Johanna Bosen

Grade-Level Classrooms

- **Kindergarten:**
  - Heather Hoag (Teaching Assistant: Tatiana Eubanks)
  - Sue Harris (Teaching Assistant: Connie Mangum)
- **1st Grade:**
  - Anne Kirkland (Teaching Assistant: Holly McDonell)
  - Don Healy (Teaching Assistant: Maureen O'Neill)
- **2nd Grade:** Shannon Mueller & Claire LaPlante
- **3rd Grade:** Ellen Patterson & Jeff Vorberger
- **4th Grade:** Heather Solga, Mendy St. Ours, & Camryn Dodson
- **5th Grade:** Sara Haas, Sean Snider, & Jodie Driscoll

<u>Specialist & Resource Faculty</u>

- **Art:** Lexi Terrizzi
- **English Learners (EL):** Melody Cann
- **Instructional Coach:** Ashley Wright
- **Learning Technology Integrator:** Jessa Campbell
- **Media Specialist (Library):** Elizabeth Waterbury
- **Mental Health Specialist**: Ali Harshaw
- **Music:** Kate Wisbey
- **Physical Education (P.E.):** Denny Weston
- **Reading Specialist:** Jordan Buckrop

- **School Counselor:** Cindy Payne
- **School Nurse:** Johanna Bosen
- **Talent Development Resource Teacher (Gifted):** Laura Richardson
- **School-Based Substitute:** Melanie Juhan

Special Education Services

- **Autism Base Team:** Teacher - Allison Telgenhoff
    - TAs - Gabi Johnson, Laura Ehalt, Kim Watson, Nicole Le, & Heather Phelps
- **C-Base / VAAP Team:** Teacher - Holly Jobe
    - TAs - Tyler Dodson, Rebecca Shifflett, Bonnie Beach, & Juwon Lee
- **Generalist SPED:** Sara Hahn
- **Occupational Therapist (OT):** Heather Standish
- **Physical Therapist (PT):** Rachel Dulaney
- **School Psychologist:** Claire Manderfield
- **Speech-Language Pathologist:** Andrea Brewer

School Operations & Support

- **Extended Day Enrichment Program (EDEP):** Sarah Mayo
- **Food Service Manager:** Peggy Newton
- **Lead Bus Driver:** Eric Turner
- **Custodian:** Tony Vernon

ACPS Mission, Vision, and Goals



Learning for All

Vision

Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging, and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic and diverse society.

Mission

Working together as a team, we will end the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities for our children's success through high-quality teaching and learning for all. We seek to build relationships with families and communities to ensure that every student succeeds.

We will know every student.

Values

Equity
We will provide every student with the level of support necessary to thrive.

Excellence
We will mitigate barriers and provide opportunities for every student to be academically successful.

Family and Community
We will engage with and share the responsibility for student success with families and community partners.

Wellness
We will support the physical and emotional health of our students and staff.

Goals

Goal 1: Thriving Students
ACPS will facilitate learning experiences grounded in high expectations, networks of care, and student curiosity to ensure academic and social-emotional development for all students while eliminating opportunity, access and achievement gaps.

Goal 2: Affirming and Empowering Communities
ACPS commits to developing a culturally-responsive environment that respects and champions the diversity of life experiences of all stakeholders and supports the physical and mental health of our students, staff and families so they are actively empowered to engage in our school community.

Goal 3: Equitable, Transformative Resources
ACPS will attract, develop and retain the highest quality staff; develop sustainable and modern facilities, infrastructure and equipment; and distribute all resources in an equitable manner to transform learning experiences and opportunities.

School Hours, Attendance, and Absences

Consistent student attendance is vital to school performance. Direct teacher instruction cannot be replaced by make-up assignments, so we strongly encourage family travel to be planned around the school calendar.

- **School Hours:** 7:55 AM – 2:30 PM
- **Morning Arrival Window:** 7:40 AM – 7:55 AM *(Instruction begins promptly at 7:55 AM).*

Please also refer to this document providing division guidance for families on attendance.

What to Do When Your Child Is Absent

1. **Notify the School:** Call the main office before **8:30 AM** on the day of the absence to explain the reason.
2. **Safety Verification:** If the office has not heard from a parent/guardian by 8:30 AM, staff will call you to confirm your child's safety.
3. **Planned Travel Notification:** If an absence due to travel is unavoidable, parents must notify the principal and classroom teacher in writing ahead of time.
4. **Requesting Homework:** For absences lasting more than 3 days, missed classroom assignments may be compiled and provided upon request.
5. **Physical Education (P.E.) Restrictions:** All students are expected to participate in physical activities. If a medical condition prevents participation, a written note from a physician is required for any extended exclusion.

Tardiness

Arriving late causes a student to miss essential morning instructions and disrupts the classroom.

- Any student arriving after **8:00 AM** is tardy and must be signed in at the front office kiosk before heading to class.
- Chronic tardiness will be monitored closely and addressed directly by the Attendance Team.

Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

Morning Car Drop-Off (7:40 AM – 7:55 AM)

- Enter the school driveway and follow the traffic loop entirely around to the back of the school.

- Pull your vehicle **all the way forward** to the end of the sidewalk to allow multiple cars to unload at once.
- Students must exit safely from the **passenger side** of the vehicle directly onto the sidewalk.
- Parents must remain inside the vehicle to keep traffic flowing safely and efficiently. Do not pass other cars unless instructed by staff.

Afternoon Car Pick-Up (2:30 PM)

- Clearly display your school-issued student/teacher identification card on your vehicle's dashboard.
- Follow the loop around to the designated grade-level pick-up zones.
- Staff will escort students directly to their vehicles.
- Parents must remain in the car. If your child requires assistance securing car seats or boosters, please pull forward past the active loading zone before stopping to assist them.
- **No Parking in the Loop:** The loop is an active fire lane. If you need to enter the building, you must park in a designated parking space in the lot.
- We also kindly ask that families avoid coordinating group pickups as it interferes with the school's carpool/dismissal line.

Mid-Day Student Pick-Up & Early Check-Out

- Any adult picking up a student early or checking them in late must check in through the front office kiosk.
- Students will only be released to parents, legal guardians, or individuals explicitly authorized on the child's emergency form.
- If an adult not listed on the form is picking up your child, advance written or verbal notification from a parent is mandatory. A valid photo ID must be presented.

Late-Day Changes to Dismissal

If your child's regular dismissal routine needs to change, you must notify the main office via a written note, phone call, or email **no later than 1:45 PM**. This ensures office associates can safely deliver the message to the classroom before dismissal routines begin.

> **Dismissal Change Contacts:** Email notifications must be sent to both cdodson2@k12albemarle.org and jreyes@k12albemarle.org.

School Discipline and Behavior Philosophy

Our discipline philosophy focuses on teaching responsibility, self-discipline, and respect using the principles of **Positive Discipline, Restorative Practices,** and the

Responsive Classroom framework. We utilize restorative conversations and problem-solving circles to handle classroom conflicts, emphasizing empathy and community-building.

The Core Values of C.A.R.E.S.

We explicitly teach and reinforce these five core behaviors daily:

- **Cooperation:** Working together constructively to build a supportive community where everyone belongs.
- **Assertion:** Expressing unique ideas and standing up for oneself respectfully without discounting others.
- **Responsibility:** Recognizing how individual choices impact the group, accepting consequences, and learning from mistakes.
- **Empathy:** Valuing others' feelings, building inclusive connections, and ensuring everyone feels safe and welcome.
- **Self-Control:** Making thoughtful, safe choices with words and actions independently.

Logical and Restorative Consequences

When infractions occur, consequences are designed to be related, respectful, and reasonable. Depending on the severity and frequency of the behavior, actions may include:

- Verbal warnings and redirection.
- Reflection time or logical restitution (fixing what was broken or cleaning a mess).
- Loss of specific privileges.
- Direct parent communication.
- Referral to the principal..

Bullying and Harassment Policy

In accordance with School Board Policy JBA, every student has the right to learn in an environment free from harassment, intimidation, or bullying. Bullying includes physical intimidation, taunting, name-calling, and insults. Suspected behaviors will be investigated immediately, and corrective measures will involve families, students, administration and school counseling resources.

Bus Transportation and Conduct Rules

Riding a school bus is a privilege, not a right. Students who endanger themselves or others by violating safety regulations may have their bus privileges suspended.

Rules for Safe Bus Riding

- Remain fully seated facing forward at all times while the bus is moving.
- Keep hands, feet, arms, and objects inside the bus and to yourself.

- Use quiet, conversational voices; shouting or loud noises can dangerously distract the driver.
- **Prohibited Items:** Glass containers, live animals, balloons, oversized athletic equipment, food, and open beverages are not permitted on the bus.

Consequence Process for Bus Misconduct

- **1st :** Driver or administrator issues a formal warning to the student.
- **2nd Offense:** Formal parent notification is issued to address the problem.
- **3rd Offense:** Temporary or permanent suspension from riding the school bus.
- *Note: Immediate suspension may occur without warnings for severe safety violations.*

Bus Routes and Adjustments

Bus routes, stops, and schedules are managed via district computers and sent to families prior to the start of the year. Times may fluctuate during the first two weeks of school as drivers adjust to traffic patterns. Please do not ask drivers to make unauthorized stops. For questions regarding routes or specific stops, contact the Department of Transportation at **434-973-5716**.

Health, Medical, and Emergency Guidelines

When to Keep a Sick Child Home

To maintain a healthy school community, please keep your child home if they display any of the following symptoms:

- **Fever:** Must be completely fever-free for **24 hours** without the assistance of fever-reducing medication.
- **Vomiting or Diarrhea:** Must be symptom-free for a full **24 hours** after the last episode before returning.
- **Skin/Eye Conditions:** Persistent cough, open or draining sores, or swollen, inflamed, or draining eyes/ears (symptoms of Pink Eye).
- **Head Lice:** Please contact the School Nurse.

First Aid and Injuries

The school nurse or office staff administers basic first aid for minor cuts, scrapes, and bruises. In the event of a more significant illness or injury, parents will be contacted immediately. If parents cannot be reached, the emergency contacts listed on the student's file will be called.

Administering Medication at School

Per Albemarle County Regulation JHCD-E, school staff can only administer medication under strict guidelines:

- **Original Packaging Required:** Both prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications must be brought to school by an adult in their original container,

labeled clearly with the child's name, doctor's name, and exact dosage instructions.
- **Required Approval Form:** A completed **Request for Taking Medicine at School** form, signed by both a parent and a physician, must be on file in the clinic before any medicine is dispensed.
- Staff may store a maximum of a 30-day supply of medication at one time.

Emergency Safety Drills

Murray maintains a dedicated Crisis Team and a comprehensive emergency protocol. To ensure readiness, we practice various safety procedures—including Fire, Tornado, Earthquake, Lockdowns, and ALICE protocols—on a regular, monthly basis throughout the school year. All building occupants must participate in these drills.

Inclement Weather & Emergency Closings

- **Emergency Closing Form:** Parents must complete a separate blue Emergency Closing Form for each child at the start of the year. This form explicitly instructs staff on where your child should go if school dismisses early.
- **Weather Announcements:** Closures, delayed openings, and early dismissals are shared immediately via local TV/radio stations and through email/phone alerts from the Electronic School Notification System (ESNS).
- **Weather Hotline:** You may also check status updates by calling the ACPS Weather Line at **434-296-5886**.
- *Please do not call the school directly during weather emergencies so phone lines remain open for safety communications.*

Technology and Social Media Policies

Responsible Use of School Technology

Access to computers, devices, and the internet at Murray is an educational privilege.

- Students learn healthy digital behaviors through the research-based *Common Sense Education* digital citizenship curriculum.
- Families must review and sign the technology terms and conditions annually within the PowerSchool Parent Portal.
- The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools must strictly adhere to specific teacher directions and county guidelines.
- Students are expected to handle school equipment with care. Intentional damage or loss may result in a repair fee, loss of technology privileges, or disciplinary action.

Personal Cell Phones and Smartwatches

On January 1, 2025, Albemarle County Public Schools began a new division-wide policy to support student learning: **Personal Device-Free Education**.

Research shows that when students use cell phones or personal communication devices during class, their ability to focus and retain information decreases, leading to lower academic performance. Beyond classroom distraction, frequent use of personal devices and social media can have long-term impacts on adolescents' attention, concentration, and mental health.

To create a healthier, more focused learning environment, ACPS has established a device-free school environment. This initiative ensures that all students can engage fully in instruction and school activities without the interference of digital distractions or personal communication devices.

What does that mean for Access to Personal Devices?

1. Students may not use personal communication devices (such as cell phones, Apple Watches, etc.) at any time during the school day, from the first bell to the last bell (Bell-to-Bell).
2. Ideally, personal devices should be left at home. If a student brings one to school, it must stay stored away for the entire day.

Social Media Conduct

We love celebrating our school community! However, to guarantee the privacy, security, and safety of all children, parents and visitors should never publicly post photos or videos of other students taken on school grounds or during school events without explicit parental consent.

Academic Framework and Specialized Programs

General Curriculum

All students participate in a comprehensive curriculum including Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Health, Physical Education, Art, and Music. Instructional targets follow Albemarle County curriculum guides, which are available for parent review anytime online at www.k12albemarle.org.

Resource Classes ("Specials")

- **Art:** Students explore creative mediums weekly from a certified specialist.
- **Music:** Regular weekly music classes help students develop rhythmic, vocal, and collaborative expressions.
- **Physical Education (P.E.):** Students receive weekly P.E. instruction focused on gross motor skills, athletic concepts, and healthy living habits. **Rubber-soled athletic shoes are strictly required** for gym safety and floor preservation.
- **Library & Media Center:** Students visit the library weekly to check out books and learn research skills. Checked-out materials are due the following week. Families will receive an invoice to replace lost or damaged books. The library hosts an annual Book Fair every autumn to generate funds for new inventory.

Specialized Learning & Support Services

- **Special Education & Therapeutic Services:** Tailored support is provided for identified students, including specialized classrooms, speech-language therapy, occupational therapy (OT), and physical therapy (PT). Parents who suspect their child may have a learning or physical disability may request an evaluation.
- **English Learners (EL/ESOL):** Language acquisition support is available to qualifying students to help them successfully access grade-level curriculum.
- **Talent Development:**

  Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) is committed to unleashing each student's potential. ACPS seeks to provide each student with challenges and opportunities appropriate for his or her capabilities in order to enhance personal growth. To accomplish this, ACPS follows a talent development framework approach to serve all students (Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik, & Worrell, 2018). Opportunities include by are not limited to:

  - Differentiated instruction;
  - Interest-based enrichment and extension;
  - Opportunities for domain-specific exposure and exploration;
  - Clubs and organizations; and
  - Development of student passions and potential.

  For many advanced learners* these opportunities require differentiated planning and monitoring. Educators work with students and parents to identify and provide a variety of learning opportunities and services that extend and enhance the curriculum in order to challenge advanced learners and address their unique educational needs.

- **School-Based Intervention Team (SBIT):** SBIT is a collaborative group of educators that meets to brainstorm solutions, classroom modifications, and interventions for students struggling academically, behaviorally, socially or emotionally. SBIT focuses on general education adjustments and operates independently of Section 504 or Special Education classifications.

Daily School Logistics and Policies

Homework Guidelines

- **Grades K–2:** Homework is kept to a minimum and is highly experiential, focusing on shared family reading, interactive games, or practical real-world activities.

- **Grades 3–5:** Homework scales up to align with advanced curriculum requirements and is structured to help students build habits of academic independence and personal accountability.

Clothing, Dress Code, and Belongings

Students should arrive dressed comfortably for daily outdoor recess and physical activity.

- **Label Everything:** Please write your child's name clearly on all tags, coats, jackets, lunchboxes, and backpacks. Unlabeled items are placed in the cafeteria Lost and Found area; unclaimed items are donated to local charities at the end of the school year.
- **Weather Readiness:** Students must bring heavy coats or jackets during cold months, as outdoor recess is prioritized daily.

Cafeteria Accounts & School Lunch

Students have a 25-minute lunch period daily. They may pack a lunch from home or purchase a fresh meal.

- **Prohibited Items:** For safety and health reasons, soda (soft drinks) and glass containers are strictly banned from the cafeteria.
- **Pricing and Account Setup:** Nutritional menus, meal pricing, and electronic account payment structures are managed through Child Nutrition Services at **434-295-0566** or via the school website.

Classroom Snack

Classrooms observe a snack break. Families should pack a nutritious snack separate from their child's lunch every day. The main office maintains a small emergency snack inventory funded by family donations for students who accidentally forget theirs.

Private Party Invitations and Gifts

To protect children from hurt feelings, exclusions, and classroom social disruptions, personal party invitations and gifts **may not be distributed or exchanged at school**. Please arrange these distributions outside of school hours.

Party Invitations

No invitations may be distributed at school, including in classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, or backpacks. This policy applies even if an invitation is meant for every student in the class. Handing out invitations at school often leads to lost notices, hurt feelings, or exclusion for students who are not invited. Families should use the school directory, personal email, text, or mail to send party invitations directly to families outside of school hours.

Birthdays

Each grade level teacher team is asked to share ways birthday students are honored in the classroom. For example, a student might get to wear a birthday hat or receive a birthday certificate.

- During birthday celebrations staff will limit sharing of items to only the students in the class, not students in any other class.
- Families may visit and bring treats to share with classmates. They are required to check in through the office before joining the class in the classroom. Please schedule a time with the classroom teacher.
- Students may have allergies and parents may send in alternatives based on the individual student's needs.

School Directory

A voluntary student and family contact directory is compiled and distributed early in the school year to help coordinate playdates, celebrations, and study groups. Your household information will only be published if you provide explicit permission on the directory form.

Student School Pictures

Individual school portraits are photographed in the fall, and classroom group pictures are taken in the spring. Informational ordering and packaging guides are sent home with students in advance.

Nature Trail and Garden Beds

Murray features a beautifully maintained, wooded nature trail developed by community volunteers. It serves as an active outdoor classroom for hands-on studies of native Virginian ecosystems, plants, and wildlife. Classes also maintain designated garden beds to enrich plant science lessons.

Emergency Clothes Closet

The front office keeps a small collection of emergency clothing (including t-shirts, sweatpants, socks, and underwear) for students who may need them. Donations of clean, gently used children's apparel are always appreciated.

New ACPS Policy Implementation 26-27

Policy AG Professional Boundaries and Sexual Misconduct and Abuse 16 July 2026.pdf

- All staff are trained on this specific policy.

Home-School Communication and Community

Open communication is essential to a great school year! If you ever have questions or concerns about your child's academic or emotional well-being, please contact their classroom teacher directly as your first step. If you need additional support, our front office is always available to help you connect or schedule a meeting with the principal so we can work through it together.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Formal conferences are hosted twice a year (once in the fall and once in the spring). If you would like to arrange an additional conference with a teacher or administrator at any other point, please phone or email to set up a time.

Staff Contact Guidelines

- **Email Address Format:** Staff emails utilize a standard convention: the employee's first initial, followed by their last name, ending in **@k12albemarle.org** (e.g., Wendy Eckerle is weckerle@k12albemarle.org).
- **Response Times:** Because teachers prioritize active student instruction, they do not read emails during class hours.
- **Urgent Inquiries:** For time-sensitive matters or immediate mid-day changes, always call the main office directly at **434-977-4599** instead of emailing.

Protecting Instructional Time

To preserve focused teaching blocks, classrooms will not be interrupted during the day for non-emergency messages or deliveries. If you drop off a forgotten lunch, water bottle, or folder, please leave it with the front office associates labeled with your child's name. Staff will ensure the student receives it during a natural instructional transition.

Keeping Student Records Accurate

Please notify the front office immediately of any changes to your address, phone numbers, email addresses, or designated emergency contacts.

- **Moving Boundaries:** If you move outside of the Murray boundary lines, you must re-register your student within their new home school district.
- **School Withdrawals:** For domestic moves, your child's new school will formally request records, but please notify our office of their final day. For international relocations, please provide at least one week's advance notice so staff can compile structural records packets for you.

Scholastic Records Access Policy

In accordance with the State Board of Education, parents and legal guardians retain the right to review their child's official school folder in the presence of the principal or a school designee. Student records and school information cannot be withheld from a non-custodial parent unless the front office has a certified, legally binding court order or custody decree on file that explicitly revokes this right.

Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)

The Murray PTO is a highly active organization of parents, guardians, and educators dedicated to funding student enrichments, sourcing classroom materials, and organizing community events. General and Executive Board meetings occur monthly. Meeting calendars, volunteer opportunities, and updates are posted in Murray Matters We invite all families to participate.

Grade Promotion, Retention, and Acceleration

Decisions regarding a student's grade-level placement, retention, or academic acceleration are determined carefully at the building level. The school utilizes a comprehensive evaluation process to ensure the path selected serves the child's complete educational development.

Key Assessment Categories

The principal and instructional team evaluate four fundamental areas before making a placement decision:

1. **Academic Achievement:** Tracked through daily performance, teacher records, localized benchmark assessments, student portfolios, and standardized Standards of Learning (SOL) tests.
2. **Social and Emotional Maturity:** Assessed via peer interactions, classroom independence, personal motivation, and general behavioral development.
3. **Physical Development:** Considerations including chronological age, physical stature, energy levels, and medical history.
4. **General Aptitude:** Measured through standardized ability screenings alongside systemic factors like attendance consistency, family transience history, and available home learning supports.

Administrative Process

If grade retention is a potential recommendation for a student, school leadership will notify the family in writing well before the conclusion of the academic year. The final placement outcome is reached through collaborative meetings involving the classroom teacher, parents, and school specialists, with the principal holding final decision-making authority. When a student is retained, the school engineers a

targeted, individualized academic support plan to maximize their success in the upcoming year.

Thank you for taking the time to read the VLM Family Handbook! If you have any questions, please call the school office at 434-977-4599. We are always here to help you. Thank you for your continued support and partnership!