

Polaris Expeditionary Learning School



Elementary Student-Parent Handbook 2023-2024

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WHO WE ARE

Mission Statement

The mission of Polaris is to develop 21st century learners through rigorous academic coursework, authentic experiences outside the classroom, character development, and leadership opportunities. (SAC adopted 2/27/2018)

Vision Statement

The school experience encourages creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking, providing opportunities for students to discover and embrace their inner potential and become leaders of their own learning. (SAC adopted 2/27/2018)

About Our School

The Polaris elementary program is a choice school within Poudre School District serving students in grades K – 5. Through the national model of Expeditionary Learning (EL) we strive to nurture student's unique abilities so that they can grow to their fullest potential. Unique to Polaris is the school-wide focus on inquiry-based learning, fieldwork experiences, small class sizes, multi-age classrooms and looping at the Kindergarten / 1st grade level.

Ten Design Principles of Expeditionary Learning

The Ten EL Design Principles best describe the core values of the Expeditionary Learning philosophy. Please refer to the [EL Education](#) website for more detailed information.

- **The Primacy of Self Discovery** - People discover their abilities, values, passions, and responsibilities in situations that offer adventure and the unexpected.
- **The Having of Wonderful Ideas** - Learning situations provide something important to think about, time to experiment, and time to make sense of what is observed.
- **The Responsibility for Learning** - Students become increasingly responsible for directing their own personal and collective learning.
- **Empathy and Caring** - Ideas are respected and mutual trust is fostered in small learning groups. Students feel physically and emotionally safe.
- **Success and Failure** - All students need to experience success to build confidence, but it is also important for students to learn from their failures and to persevere when things are difficult.
- **Collaboration and Competition** - Students work together to achieve more than they could alone. They are encouraged to compete, not against each other, but with their own personal best and with rigorous standards of excellence.
- **Diversity and Inclusion** - Both diversity and inclusion increase the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability, and respect for others.
- **The Natural World** - A direct and respectful relationship with the natural world refreshes the human spirit and teaches students to become stewards of the earth.
- **Solitude and Reflection** - Students and teachers need time alone to explore their own thoughts and create their own ideas.
- **Service and Compassion** - Students and teachers are strengthened by acts of consequential service to others.

Identity, Inquiry, and Interaction

The "Three I's" of the Polaris elementary program empower students to build knowledge of self, knowledge of others, and knowledge for life.

- **Identity** - Individual talents and gifts, confidence, self-esteem, honesty, responsibility, character, and physical fitness
- **Inquiry** - Respect, empathy, communication, and responsible citizenship

- **Interaction** – Zest for learning; the power of acquiring, processing, and using information to build knowledge and solve problems

Expeditionary Learning Core Practices

Our core practices address five key dimensions of life in school.

Real World Curriculum

Our approach to curriculum makes standards come alive for students by connecting learning to real-world issues and needs. Academically rigorous, project-based learning expeditions, case studies, projects, fieldwork, and service learning inspire students to think and work as professionals, contributing high-quality work to authentic audiences beyond the classroom. Our schools ensure that all students have access to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, and regularly analyze that curriculum to align with those standards.

Invigorating Instruction

Our classrooms are alive with discovery, inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. Teachers talk less. Students talk (and think) more. Lessons have explicit purpose, guided by learning targets for which students take ownership and responsibility. Student engagement strategies and activities serve to differentiate instruction and maintain high expectations to bring out the best in all students, cultivating a culture of high achievement.

Respectful Culture

Our schools build cultures of respect, responsibility, courage, and kindness, where students and adults are committed to quality work and citizenship. School structures and traditions—such as crew, community meetings, exhibitions of student work, and service learning—ensure that every student is known and cared for, student leadership is nurtured, and contributions to the school and world are celebrated. Students and staff are supported to do better work and be better people than they thought possible.

Assessing Student Learning

Our leaders, teachers, and students embrace the concept of student-engaged assessment in education. Why? Because it builds student ownership of learning, drives achievement, and focuses students on reaching standards-based learning targets. Students continually conduct learning assessments and improve the quality of their work through models, reflection, critique, rubrics, and expert assistance. And staff members conduct ongoing data inquiry and analysis, examining factors including student work and results of formal educational assessments. Using this approach, we promote educational equity across all schools.

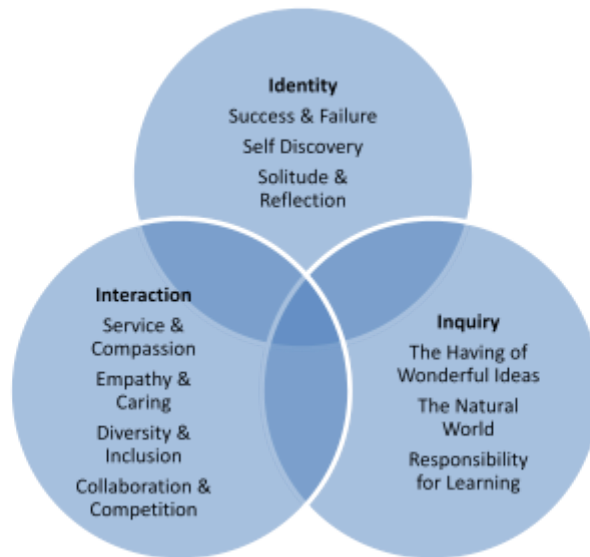
Leadership

Our school leaders build a cohesive school vision focused on student achievement and continuous improvement. And they align all school activities with that vision. Leaders use data wisely, boldly shape school structures to best meet student needs, celebrate joy in learning, and build a school-wide culture of trust and collaboration. Leadership in our schools goes beyond a single person or team; it's a role and expectation for all.

School Norms for Communication

- Remember the children in all decision making.
- Contribute proportionately.
- Have the courage to say what you feel.
- Address the subject of concern with the parties directly involved.
- Be hard on the issue but easy on the person.
- Meetings will begin and end on time.
- We will work toward a “win-win” resolution of conflicts.
- Honor the process by:
 - Listening with respect
 - Responding constructively
 - Recognizing and accepting each individual's feelings
 - Being succinct

IN THE CLASSROOMS:



Presentation of Learning: Elementary students at Polaris develop portfolios and collect artifacts to provide a comprehensive picture of their learning. The process for collecting and presenting artifacts varies by grade level, and may include:

- Reflections of learning
- Self-assessments regarding their learning
- Self portraits
- Examples of accomplished work
- Photos of student engagement
- Writing samples
- Student artwork

Fieldwork: “Isn’t this the same as a field trip?” No, fieldwork is defined by EL as “having a clear purpose that furthers the work of a learning expedition.” So, while a *field trip* may be time outside a classroom for a student, it may not be connected to what they are doing inside the classroom. **Fieldwork** requires there to be a connection. For example, the older students visit Pingree Park for Eco Experience and the younger students take a walking tour of Old Town as part of their geography study. However, the term fieldwork is used to describe not just off campus visits. It can be going outside to take the temperature, as the younger students have done with their teachers at lunch. This real-world work is crucial to teaching and learning at our school. Please ensure your child is able to participate in these exceptional experiences by:

- Signing and returning **monthly** permission slips
- Sending your child with the necessary gear such as sack lunch and backpack
- Dressing your child appropriately for the activity

SCHOOL WIDE:

Community meetings:

Polaris’ elementary students and staff members attend regular school-wide community meetings. During this time, teachers share celebrations about students, students present their learning, and students make announcements to the group. This is an opportunity to build community and make connections both within and across grade levels while simultaneously developing student public speaking skills and increasing their confidence.

Communication:

School Messenger Automated Phone System: PSD and Polaris use the School Messenger System to call parents district-wide or parents at a specific school with emergency information or important upcoming events and opportunities.

Parents can list 2 numbers (home and secondary number) for EACH household (not per parent).

School calls: We call parents personally about attendance/absence issues at the beginning of the day if we don't receive a phone call/message from a parent excusing the absence. Other non-emergency phone calls a school makes go ONLY to the first number listed for the household.

- **Emergency calls:** Only the district can make emergency calls. It calls **BOTH** those phone numbers for each household.
- **How parents update their phone numbers or add the second number:** Parents need to contact the school to update or add their home phone and a second phone number. Having 2 phone numbers on file ensures PSD and/or schools can reach parents in an emergency. These phone numbers are updated DAILY into the calling system.

Attendance Policy:

Refer to district policies "[Student Absences & Excuses](#)" (JH), "[Compulsory Attendance Ages](#)" (JEA), and "[Truancy](#)" (JHB) for further information.

Education is an on-going process, which requires regular attendance. Participation in classroom activities acts as the nucleus of your child's learning process. Your child's success in school depends on interaction with students and teachers. Make-up work cannot substitute for this interaction; therefore, it is critical for each child to attend school every day unless he or she is ill.

Below the bullets are highlights of the policy:

- Parents need to call each morning when their child is absent or tardy prior to 8:40 a.m. The attendance line is *always* available at 970-488-8261.
- For the child's safety, parents will be called if the school has not been notified and the child is absent.
- If a student must leave school for an appointment, the parent/guardian must check-out the student at the office.
- Upon returning from the appointment, the parent/guardian must check-in the student at the office.
- Please notify the front office and your child's teacher if you plan on taking time off from school as a family. We understand that situations do arise from time to time. but we would like to ask that vacation times not be taken as a family while school is in session. Make-up work will be assigned at the discretion of the teacher.
- Lateness due to conditions outside the control of the parent or child (late bus, weather, etc.) will not be considered tardy. Any child who arrives in the classroom later than the 8:40 a.m. bell will be considered tardy.

Excused Absences

The following shall be considered excused absences:

- A student whose absence is approved by an authorized school administrator. Prearranged absences shall be approved for appointments or circumstances of a serious nature that cannot be taken care of outside school hours.
- A student who is temporarily ill or injured.
- A student who is absent for an extended period due to physical, mental or emotional disability.

- A student is attending a District-sponsored activity with advance approval of school administration.
- A student who is excused by the parent or guardian for observance of a religious holiday.

The school may require suitable proof regarding the above exceptions, including written statements from medical sources.

Unexcused Absences

An unexcused absence is defined as an absence that is not listed above as an excused absence. Each unexcused absence shall be entered on the student's record. School personnel shall notify each student's parent/guardian of the student's unexcused absences in a timely manner so the parent/guardian can address the problem.

Student Drop Off and Pick Up

Polaris is unique in that we do not provide bussing; therefore, it is a busy place to drop off and pick up on any given day due to the volume of traffic in front of the school. By adhering to the following guidelines we can reduce our chances of an accident or injury. Please adhere to the following:

- Please do not park in the drop off lane for any reason.
- To prevent the need to make a u-turn, please enter Orchard Pl. from the west via Taft Hill Rd. and get in the queuing area.
- Please do not double park in the drop off lane, queuing area or in the bike lane.
- Please move as far forward in the drop off lane as possible. Do not idle towards the front of the line.
- If you are using the drop-off lane, please do not accompany your child into the school.
- If you need to park, there's plenty of space to park across the street or in the east parking lot.
- Please observe the 25 MPH speed limit on Orchard Pl.

Elementary Student Pick-Up

At the end of each day all elementary students will be brought to the south of the school building where they will be supervised by staff. When an elementary parent arrives to campus, they have two options to pick up their child:

1. A parent can remain in their car and make their way towards the front the drop-off/pick-up lane as room becomes available. Once the parent is in the yellow walking lane, a staff member will release the child to the parent's car.
 - o Please safely vacate the pick-up lane as soon as your child is in the car; doing so will allow other parents to move up the line and pick their child up as soon as possible.
2. If a parent prefers to physically greet their child at the end of each day, they may park their car in an available spot on Orchard Pl. or in the school's east parking lot. After parking, they can come to the south of the building to retrieve their child. Before leaving with your child, we'd ask that you communicate with the supervising staff on hand.
 - o After picking up the student the parent can then bring their students(s) over to the playground if they wish to play with peers and interact with other community members. Please note, only children with parent supervision are allowed to go over to the west playground.
 - o If you'd like to give permission to have your child brought to the playground by someone other than the parent, or to have that person bring your child home, please call the front office to alert us of this arrangement. **Any person, other than the parent, who is responsible for supervising or transporting a child from school must be listed as an Emergency Contact person within their school records.**

- o There will NOT be staff supervision on the playground after school; the responsibility of supervision in this area therefore lies with the parent or the person who is being asked to pick the child up. We ask that the parents actively supervise their child(ren) as he/she plays with others on the west playground.

If a parent or child needs to enter the building after school has been dismissed they must use our single point of entry in the front.

At 3:30 a staff member out front will blow the whistle signaling the end of our school's supervision time. At this time the entire area out front will be cleared. Students who have a parent there will be asked to go to that parent. Students who are without parents will be taken to the office for late-student pick-up. This process will help staff identify any student who does not have a parent present.

Late Elementary Pick-Up

As mentioned above, students who are not picked up by 3:30 will be brought to the office area to wait for their parent or guardian. We know, and understand, that there are times when unforeseen circumstances may arise and prevent one from arriving on time, and at the same time we'd like to avoid a pattern of children being picked up late. To prevent late pick-ups from becoming a pattern we'd ask that you **plan to arrive each day as close to 3:15 as possible.**

If a pattern of late pick-ups does arise, we will notify the parent of the concern and request that they enroll the student into AlphaBest. This will allow for proper supervision after the 3:30 pick-up time. After the fifth late pick-up, parents will be required to register for AlphaBest where their child will be taken if they have not been picked up by 3:30.

Checking Students In and Out of School

If a student needs to be checked in late or taken out early from school, an AUTHORIZED adult will need to be present in the office to sign the student in and out. We will not release a student to an unauthorized adult.

School Visitors

Parent, family, and community members are welcome and encouraged to visit anytime. A note or call to the teacher in advance is expected. Please check in at the office when you arrive. You will be asked to sign in, scan a form of identification through the Raptor system, and wear a visitor's nametag. This district policy allows us to maintain security for your children. If you are at school to pick your child up early, you must checkout through the main office, again for security purposes. Parents waiting for their child's dismissal should wait outside the building in the designated dismissal areas. This reduces confusions and congestion in the hallways.

The school does reserve the right to ask any visitor to leave the school grounds if behaviors exhibited are a disruption to the educational setting.

Medications at School

Refer to district policy "[Administering Medicines to Students](#)" (JLCD/JLCD-R) for further information.

Long term, short term, or over-the-counter medication (i.e. cough drops, Tylenol, etc.) must be in the original bottle and accompanied by written permission from the physician and the parent/guardian. Appropriate forms are available in the office. All medications must be kept in a locked cabinet in the office. Bring medication to the office and the school nurse, health technician, or office staff will administer the medication. Students may not keep or transport medication nor are they allowed to administer the medications to themselves.

Valuables/Lost & Found

Students are asked not to bring valuables, toys, electronic equipment, sports equipment, jewelry, or other personal things to school unless such items have been approved by their class teacher. If students do choose to bring items from home, we cannot accept responsibility of the loss or damage of these items. Clothing that goes unclaimed will be kept in our school's Lost and Found areas. Any electronic devices or other "valuables" will remain in the front office if they get turned in by another student.

Discovery Model

The Discovery Model is used throughout Polaris as a means to increase our consistency with communication, classroom expectations, and overall school culture. The underlying thread within Discovery is to treat all people within the Lab School community with dignity and respect. All Polaris students are exposed to the Discovery curriculum to learn about communication skills, team work, problem solving, and anger management. The Lab staff members have all been through Discovery in one form or another and are expected to model the Discovery skills for students on a consistent basis.

Discovery in the Classroom and Establishing Clear Behavioral Expectations

In order to help students learn the expected behavioral expectations within each classroom teachers use the Refocus Protocols. The process helps build rapport, establish clear expectations, and practice effective problem solving.

- **1st Refocus**
This is a gentle reminder to the student during class that his/her behaviors are not in line with building or classroom expectations.
- **2nd Refocus**
During this step teachers will approach the student and identify their off-task behavior then ask if the student needs any additional support in order stay on task for the remainder of the class.
- **3rd Refocus / Hall Conference**
During the third Refocus students will be asked by the teacher to join them in the hallway to discuss the off-task behavior(s), the process should go as follows:
 - Teacher names the behavior(s)
 - Teacher asks if there is anything going on outside of class that is preventing the student from staying on task
 - Teacher gets feedback from the student
 - Teacher ends the conversation with an encouraging statement
- **Problem Solving Reflection**
A Problem Solving Reflection Form may be issued under a two circumstances.
 - Student asks for some time to reflect during the hall conference
 - The student's "off task" behavior(s) persist after the hall conference

The purpose of the Problem Solving Reflection Form is help the student understand why their behaviors are not allowed within the classroom, and to identify possible solutions to the problem. When a contract is issued a parent should expect a copy of the contract from the teacher that issued the contract.

- **Teacher's Rights**
There are circumstances where the behaviors exhibited by a student may call for the teacher to bypass the Refocus Process because it is considered a serious discipline issue. In these cases a call will be made home by an administrator and appropriate discipline actions will be taken with student Due Process Rights being followed as outlined in the [PSD Code of Conduct](#).

The Six P's

The Six Ps are our school-wide expectations for student behavior.

- Prompt
- Prepared
- Polite
- Produce
- PMA (Positive Mental Attitude)
- Participate