

Little Panthers Preschool Handbook

2025-2026

Little Panthers Preschool

Bennet Elementary
50 Dogwood Street
Bennet, NE 68317

402-782-3535

www.districtor1.org

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The Little Panthers Preschool is part of District OR-1 Public School. All policies set forth by the District OR-1 Board of Education in the District's Parent Handbook are in effect for Preschool.

The additional guidelines set forth in this Preschool Handbook are solely for Little Panthers Preschool and address issues that only pertain to preschool students.

Preschool Staff

Mr. Jared Haag	Principal
Miss Taylor Black	Preschool Teacher
Miss Brittany Eisenhauer	Preschool Teacher
Mrs. Casandra Hohensee	Preschool Teacher
Mrs. Amy Buchanan	Speech/Language Pathologist
Mrs. Emily Buddenberg	Speech/Language Pathologist
Mrs. Jiree Wilson	Speech/Language Pathologist

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Little Panther Preschool

Our Philosophy

District OR-1 Public Schools, the parent district of Little Panthers Preschool, acknowledges and respects the uniqueness of each child. We also support the belief that a child's strong sense of self esteem comes from experiencing success within an age appropriate environment enhanced by a rich, stimulating curriculum. The curriculum engages children's learning in all developmental areas, while at the same time allowing for individual differences in learning styles and encouraging creativity through a variety of play-based experiences.

Our overall ambition for the children enrolled in Little Panthers Preschool include:

- Children will develop a strong sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Learning experiences with focus on the development of the whole child with emphasis on social/emotional skills and fostering a growing sense of independence.

Our Values and Goals

- Maintain a SAFE, supportive and stimulating environment
- Facilitate learning through PLAY as play is a child's work!
- Respect children's uniqueness; recognize and celebrate individual differences
- Create a trusting and predictable environment
- Emphasis on the "process" rather than the "product"
- Use of positive language
- Modeling of empathy and compassion
- Encourage children to take risks so they can experience new successes
- Help children learn to make choices and develop responsibility for those choices
- Provide a "child-centered program" which comes from a blend of the interests of the children together with a successfully planned and organized facility and the use of our curriculum
- Continually cultivate our curriculum, which is updated and revised to ensure a variety of developmentally appropriate experiences for children

Curriculum

Teaching Strategies GOLD

We will be using the Nebraska Department of Early Childhood Education Teaching Strategies GOLD Curricular Objective and Assessment System. Thirty-eight objectives that guide teaching and learning are the heart of Teaching Strategies GOLD. Based on predictors of school success and state early learning standards, these objectives help teachers focus on what matters most for children's success. Teaching Strategies GOLD is a seamless research-based system proven to be reliable and valid for teaching and assessing children. It is intended for use as a key component with any developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum and program, Teaching Strategies GOLD is inclusive of all children, including English-language learners and children with disabilities.

Get Set For School - Handwriting Without Tears

Get Set For school is a complete, developmentally appropriate Pre-K program that is expert-backed, research-based, and proven to be a success. This program helps children meet important early learning standards through purposeful play and multisensory activities. Get Set for School brings Pre-K to life through active, cross-curricular lessons, specially-designed manipulatives that challenge children's fine and gross motor skills, and developmentally appropriate technology.

Center Based Classroom Approach

Little Panthers Preschool uses a Center Based Classroom approach to implement our curriculum and foster learning that has two important features. 1.) A distinct organizational structure, and 2.) a focus on specific interest areas in the classroom. These eleven interest areas provide the detailed content in the organizational structure and together they both ensure our preschool is meeting the curricular and developmental needs of all our students. The eleven areas are:

1. **Blocks:** props to accompany block play like cars, animals, people, signs, etc.
2. **Dramatic Play:** puppets, props, clothing for careers, housekeeping, tools, etc.
3. **Toys & Games:** classifying, colors, numbers, letters, patterns, counting
4. **Art:** drawing, painting, gluing, cutting, all mediums, group and individual art
5. **Library:** books in all areas, a writing center, a listening center, read aloud
6. **Discovery** science, indoors & outdoors, classroom pets, life sciences, etc.
7. **Sand & Water Play:** indoors and outdoors
8. **Music & Movement:** instruments, online resources, singing, dancing, exercise
9. **Cooking:** preparing snacks, cooking to go with units of study, baking
10. **Technology:** online resources to extend units of study, use of computers
11. **Outdoor Play:** riding toys, climbing, building, bird and squirrel feeding, games

Enrollment Policy

Our enrollment procedure used to determine the preschool class list is based on the following list of criteria in order of priority:

- 1. Resident three and four-year-old students with disabilities currently receiving IEP services.*
- 2. Resident students who are or will turn four prior to or on July 31st (oldest to youngest by birth month/day/year).*
- 3. Resident students who are or will turn three prior to or on July 31st (oldest to youngest by birth month/day/year).*
- 4. Resident Kindergarten age-eligible* children who will be five or have had little or no preschool experience and/or other extreme extenuating circumstances.*
- 5. If there are still open spots, non-district students will be chosen based on the criteria listed above.*

We do wish we could enroll every child, but being filled to capacity with a waiting list tells us there is certainly a need within the district for the youngest members of our student population. A quality early childhood program keeps the teacher/pupil ratio low and matches enrollment to the physical size of the facility. Those two factors are also a limiting factor in our enrollment numbers and have to be taken into account. These factors also impact AM/PM preferences.

Preschool Time Information

4 Year Old Full Day Preschool Session- 8:00-3:30 Monday-Thursday
No preschool classes on Fridays.

The Little Panthers Full Day session will follow the calendar of District OR-1, Palmyra and Bennet Schools. If not, it will be indicated on the preschool calendar or in a letter sent home to preschool parents. **4 year old full day preschool will be in session until 1:00 pm on early dismissal days.**

3 and 4 year old part day

<u>Morning Preschool Session</u>	<u>Afternoon Preschool Session</u>
8:00-11:30 Monday-Thursday	12:00-3:30 Monday-Thursday
No preschool classes on Fridays.	

The Little Panthers Preschool will follow the calendar of District OR-1, Palmyra and Bennet Schools. If not, it will be indicated on the preschool calendar or in a letter sent home to preschool parents. **Part day preschool sessions are not in session during half days for Elementary.**

Home Visits

Home visits are scheduled prior to the beginning of the school year. You will be asked to schedule other home visits and/or conferences during the school year. These visits are required by the Nebraska Department of Education and have been a wonderful way to begin building that school-home partnership. Families of Little Panthers Preschool will participate in at least two home visits and one parent-teacher conference each school year.

Fee Payment Information

Little Panthers preschool adheres to the Rule 11 guidelines put forth by the Nebraska Department of Education and works in cooperation with the NDE to establish a fee schedule and guidelines for all preschool families. Within that framework, there are certain criteria that families may meet that can waive the fee payment for their preschool student.

If a child does not meet one of the five criteria listed below, there is a \$150 per month fee for part day preschool. During the months of August, December, and May the fee is \$50.

Pay for the entire year is due by August 29th, 2025 in the amount of \$1100.00, your August and May are FREE! Savings of \$100.00.

If a 4 year old who attends the full day session and does not meet one of the five criteria listed below, there is a \$300 per month fee for full day preschool.

Pay for the whole year is due by August 29th, 2025 in the amount of \$2700.00, your May month is FREE! Savings of \$300.00.

All Payments need to be made out to District OR-1 and given to the Elementary secretary by the first of every month.

Students who meet one of the following criteria will not be charged a monthly fee:

- Children identified with a disability and who are receiving early childhood services.
- Children whose family income qualifies them for participation in the federal free and reduced lunch program.
- Children who reside in a home where English is not the primary language for communication.
- Children of parents that are younger than eighteen or have not completed high school.
- Children who were born prematurely or at low birth weight as verified by a physician.

Forms are available for verification and participation in the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program at both the elementary and central offices. Questions about this program should be directed to Lisa Phillips at 780-5327, ext: 2007.

Questions regarding children who meet criteria for not being charged a monthly fee need to be directed to Linde Walter at 780-5327, ext: 3012.

Teacher Contact

If there is anything you need to know about a situation involving your child, the teacher will provide this information to you through a brief conversation at pick-up time, via a phone call, an email, classroom app, or a short note. This would include things like minor injury (more than a band-aid), behavior issues, concerns about a situation, etc. Please don't hesitate to let your child's teacher know of any concerns, questions, or confusion over anything. If you wish to visit with the teacher in depth, it would be best to set up a conference or call when preschool is not in session.

A classroom calendar and newsletter will be sent home for each month with the days the preschool is not in session clearly marked. This newsletter will contain classroom news, upcoming events, student photos, and helpful tips for parents. Please watch for the newsletter in your child's backpack.

Students who are the oldest or only child in their family will also receive a Bennet Elementary newsletter each week. District information is also available on the school website www.districtor1.org.

Meals

Preschoolers receive breakfast and a snack in the morning session or lunch and a snack during the afternoon session. Breakfast and lunch are included in the full day preschool program. This cost is included in the monthly fee. We serve our meals "Family Style." This means preschoolers will be able to set the table, use child-sized serving utensils to serve themselves food, pass the dish to the classmate sitting next to them and pour their own beverage from a child-sized pitcher. During meal and snack time, preschoolers will have the opportunity to visit with their friends and teachers while also practicing table manners and language skills.

Do not send a meal from home with your child. A meal from home would keep your child from participating in the meal experience. Special accommodations can be made only for students who are on a special diet. If this is the case, you will need to discuss this with your child's teacher.

- Please inform your child's teacher of any food allergies and/or on the student enrollment form.

Birthday Treats and Special Snacks

We will celebrate student birthdays during snack time at preschool. If you would like to send birthday treats to school to celebrate your child's birthday, please let the teacher know in advance. Birthday treats need to be store bought with the ingredients clearly labeled. Families may volunteer to bring a snack for the class during a special party such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day. These special snacks also need to be store bought with the ingredients clearly labeled.

Drop off and Pick Up Procedure

Preschool parents are expected to come to the exterior door of the school building each time they drop off and pick up their child. Preschool students are not allowed to walk through the parking lot or bus lane without an adult.

The arrival routine should be the same each day. These predictable routines will reduce separation anxiety and will allow your child to gain independence and practice responsibility. If your child is having trouble separating from you, signal the teacher and let them take care of it. A quick "good-bye" and exit from the parent is best. Please trust that the teacher will handle your child appropriately in an event such as this.

Each half day session is 3½ hours long. Prompt arrival and pick-up is important to helping us stay on schedule and also for helping your child settle into the daily routine. **Do not arrive before 8:00 or 12:00.** Arriving promptly for pick-up time is very important, especially for the morning session. There is only 30 minutes between the sessions and the teacher will need this time to set up for the afternoon class. **If you arrive after 8:10 or 12:10, please check in at the office before bringing your child to the classroom.**

If your child is going to be absent, please call the Elementary office at 782-3535 or notify the classroom teacher.

You will be required to provide a listing of the people you authorize the school to release your child to. Your child will never be released to someone not on the list unless we receive a note or phone call from you with permission. If the staff does not know the person, he or she will be asked to show identification. **Please notify your child's teacher if there will be any changes made to your child's daily drop-off or pick-up routine.**

Bus Transportation

The district provides limited bus services to Bennet, Palmyra and Douglas daycares, and Palmyra High School. These locations are pre-arranged. If you have questions regarding transportation from a daycare or Palmyra High School please call Cathy Fick at 402-540-2879.

At the High School, it will be the parents' responsibility to wait with their child to be picked up. It is also the parents responsibility to be there when the bus arrives to drop off their child.

There will be two adults on the preschool bus at all times, the driver and a supervisor. The bus will have a detailed list of all the students riding, locations of drop off and pick up and parent or babysitter contact information.

The students riding the bus will be using specialized built in booster seats at all times. In compliance with the district policy regarding bus riding and bus behavior, it is important that the students riding the bus are safe. Therefore, if a student is not able to adhere to the safety standards and rules and if that student becomes a distraction for the driver, or is a danger to the other students, parents will be notified and they will need to make other arrangements for their preschool student's transportation.

Field Trips

We will try to take the preschool students on field trips during the school year. If so, a slip with trip information will be sent home in advance. The purpose of these field trips is to broaden the students' educational experiences. Occasionally, students may be asked to bring money or pay admission to an attraction. Parents will be invited to help with supervision on these trips as needed. It is the policy of Little Panthers Preschool that no younger siblings accompany the parent on a field trip. Your help with the preschool students is needed.

Clothing

Your child will spend a great deal of each day on the floor inside, playing outside, and just being very active. Please dress your child for this type of activity each day. Please label all your child's clothing that can be removed such as: hats, mittens, boots, sweatshirts, coats, etc. We will play outside each day unless there is precipitation falling, or the temperature is dangerously cold. Your child will need snow boots, shoes to change back into, warm clothing, hats, and mittens when winter arrives. We ask that you send some type of jacket each day in the fall and spring so your child is prepared for outside time.

Bathrooming

Your child must be toilet-trained when they begin class. Pull-up pants are not appropriate. The only exception is if a child is receiving district services with an IEP/504 and has been communicated to preschool staff. We know accidents happen. Your child will NOT be made to feel bad if he/she has an accident; a staff member will handle it in a matter of fact fashion. With this in mind, we ask that you include an extra pair of underwear, pants/shorts, and a shirt in your child's backpack at all times. Your child may also need to change clothing if a beverage is spilled during mealtime. Wet clothing will be sent home.

Outdoor Learning and Play

With our wonderful outdoor classroom, your child will get dirty. You may want to keep that in mind when dressing for preschool. Appropriate clothing for hot and cold weather is very important. We will be outside each day unless there is active precipitation or an uncomfortable wind chill factor.

We encourage you to apply sunscreen in the warmer months. Please do this before your child comes to school. Students will be encouraged to drink plenty of water during warm weather.

Pictures and Video

Pictures and video of our students, activities, and classroom will be taken and used for various learning opportunities. These same pictures are positive additions to articles posted on the district website, in the classroom newsletter, or submitted to the local paper.

There is a permission form allowing your child's picture to be taken and to be used as a part of an article either online, in the local paper, or within the classroom for class books and other activities. Please return this form to your child's teacher with the rest of the enrollment paperwork.

Weather Related Information and Cancellations

The Superintendent of schools is authorized by the Board of Education to close public schools in case of severe weather. Representatives of the Superintendent's staff will notify local news media when inclement weather warrants such action. The information is broadcast regularly by radio and television stations. Parents and Patrons will also be alerted via phone call by our automated calling system. Please make sure that you are a part of the calling database in order to receive calls via this system. Contact school if you are not sure or have changed your phone numbers since last year.

A decision to close school is made when forecasts by the weather service and civil defense officials indicate that it would be unwise for students to go to school. If possible, a decision about the next school day will be made by 9 p.m. for announcement during the 10 p.m. news. An early decision is not always possible because of uncertain weather conditions. School officials will make periodic assessments of conditions during the night and will decide early in the morning (by 6 a.m. if possible). In any case, an announcement will be made to the news media when schools will be closed. In some instances, schools will be open, but certain services may be canceled (bus transportation, kindergarten, student activities). Announcements about other Nebraska school closings are included in Lincoln radio and television broadcasts. Students and parents will want to pay special attention to which public school district is being closed.

Every attempt will be made to avoid closing school once classes are in session. In some instances closing school during the day is inevitable if children are to safely return home before the brunt of a major storm hits. In these cases as much advance notice as possible will be given to parents. If school is closed during the day the notice will be broadcast by the media and parents should have a plan in place to accommodate these circumstances. **If inclement weather forces an early dismissal, afternoon half day preschool will not take place. If inclement weather forces a late start, morning preschool will not take place. Full day four year olds will begin at 10:00 on late start days.**

Parents may decide to keep their children at home in inclement weather because of personal circumstances. Students absent because of severe weather when school is in session will be marked absent. The absence will be treated like any other absence for legitimate causes provided parents properly notify the school of their decision. Parents may pick up their children in inclement weather at any time during the school day. Students will not normally be dismissed from school during severe weather on the basis of a telephone request.

Immunizations

State laws require that students ages 2 through 5 years enrolled in a school based program not licensed as child care provider have the following immunizations prior to attending:

- 4 does of Dtap, DTP, or DT vaccine,
- 3 does of Polio vaccine,
- 3 doses of Hib vaccine or 1 dose of Hib given at or after 15 months of age,
- 3 doses of pediatric Hepatitis B vaccine,
- 1 dose of MMR or MMRV given on or after 12 months of age,
- 1 dose of varicella (chickenpox) or MMRV given on or after 12 months of age.
- 4 doses of pneumococcal or 1 dose of pneumococcal given on or after 15 months of age.

You must show proof of immunizations upon enrollment in school. Any student who does not comply with the immunization requirements will not be allowed to continue in school. Students with medical conditions or personal beliefs that do not allow immunizations may complete a waiver statement which is held in the elementary school office.

Asthma/Anaphylaxis Protocol

Information on this topic is available if your child has been diagnosed with one or both of these conditions. Please inquire with your child's teacher or elementary office if this applies to your child.

When Should You Keep Your Child Home?

Please do not send your child to school if they appear to be sick. Please do not send your child to school for 24 hours after he/she has had a fever. If they return to school too soon, they may still be contagious, and their defenses will be down. Keep students home if they have any of the following:

- Temperature greater than 100 degrees F
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Unexplained rashes
- Discharge from eyes and/or ears or severe nasal drainage
- Sore throat and/or severe cough
- Head lice

In the case of a contagious disease, please contact the school. If your child contracts, any of the following notification is necessary: strep throat, influenza, COVID, or any easily transmitted childhood sickness. If your child is injured, all we can do at school is to clean and bandage scrapes or apply ice packs to bruises and sprains. If the injury requires further medical attention, you will be called. If your child is well enough to return to school, he or she is well enough to participate in all activities-indoors and outdoors.