

# **Westmar Early Learning Center Handbook 2025 - 2026**

**16915 Lower Georges Creek RD SW  
Lonaconing, Maryland 21539**



**Phone (301) 463-5751**

**Fax (301) 463-2231**

**Lora Puffenberger, Principal**

Email: [lora.puffenberger@acpsmd.org](mailto:lora.puffenberger@acpsmd.org)

**Neil Kamp, Assistant Principal**

E-mail: [neil.kamp@acpsmd.org](mailto:neil.kamp@acpsmd.org)

**Sheree Glencoe, Guidance Counselor**

E-mail: [lynn.muir@acpsmd.org](mailto:lynn.muir@acpsmd.org)

**Kathy Crosten, Secretary**

E-mail: [kathy.crosten@acpsmd.org](mailto:kathy.crosten@acpsmd.org)

**Connie Leydig, Secretary**

E-mail: [connie.leydig@acpsmd.org](mailto:connie.leydig@acpsmd.org)

This handbook is being provided as a means of communication between the school and home. There are many guidelines, policies, and regulations discussed in these pages.

Hopefully, the handbook will be helpful to you and will promote understanding of procedures at Westmar Early Learning Center. Please read through the handbook and keep it readily available throughout the year.

### **Westmar School Vision**

Our educational vision is to promote in our students the ability to think critically, solve problems, work in teams, use technology, be self-directed, and to demonstrate good citizenship and community service. We are committed to developing a "College & Career Ready Culture" at Westmar to support each student's dreams and future goals.

### **Westmar Early Learning Center Mission**

We aim to create a safe, responsible, and kind environment. Where children will build a foundation for a love of learning.

### **Westmar Core Values**

**W**ellness as a means to enhance an individual's self-image as well as intellectual, social, physical, and emotional growth.

**I**ndividualizing educational experiences that remove barriers to students' success and promote independence.

**L**ifelong learning and professional growth as the basis for outstanding instruction and positive outcomes in student learning.

**D**iversity as our strength and means of promoting civility and appreciation for existing differences in our learning community

**C**reating and maintaining a culture of excellence.

**A**cademic programs focusing on problem-solving, critical thinking, instructional technology, and innovation.

**T**rust, respect, and acceptance of responsibility for actions as the foundation for character development in a democratic society.

**S**hared responsibility for fostering a positive and productive school environment.

### **Contact Information**

Parents must complete and return the contact/emergency information forms provided by the school. Often during the school year, a student or school personnel has the need to contact the parent. ***The school must have updated telephone numbers, addresses, and emergency contact information for your child.*** If you change addresses or phone numbers, please call, email, or send the new information into the school office.

## **Procedures to Promote School Safety**

Learning at Westmar Early Learning Center requires a safe and orderly environment. All Allegany County Public Schools have developed a *Critical Incident Plan*. Our staff is working to proactively help protect our school community from any and all factors that might jeopardize school safety and to be prepared to respond quickly and appropriately in the event of a crisis. We have implemented measures to ensure school security. All doors are kept locked, and video surveillance is set up and running. All visitors must use the intercom system at the main door to gain access, and after visitors gain access, they are to report to the main office and remain until directed by the office staff. Our School Resource Officer and School Safety Officer are on site throughout the day to enhance the safety and security of our school facilities, faculty, staff, and students. We are fortunate to live in a community of good kids and supportive parents, but we must remain alert to anyone or anything that may threaten the safety of our students and staff. We encourage you to cooperate and support our efforts to maximize school safety.

**Please talk with your child about the following:**

- **Never threaten to hurt someone**
- **Never physically hurt someone** (Never hit-kick-push-bite-etc.)
- **Never act or play like you are going to hurt someone, even on the playground**

**Students are responsible for their words and actions.** We will take all threats seriously. Upon referral to the main office, a parent conference will be held to discuss the incident and to consider the most appropriate consequences. Depending upon the circumstances (age of child, intent, history, etc.), the administrator will use his / her discretion to determine the best course of action for promoting a safe and orderly environment. Toy guns and/or pantomime shootings will not be tolerated.

Furthermore, **please do not send your child to school wearing clothes that have *images and/or words that might be interpreted as symbols of violence*** (i.e., professional wrestlers, blood, and guns, etc). Your support is appreciated.

We need to work together as a school community to keep our schools safe. You are encouraged to contact the office or use the anonymous 1-800-TIP-US-Off (Ext. 222) line to discuss issues of threats or violence.

## **School Rules and Policies**

The following rules and policies are implemented with the intent to:

1) promote the safety of our school community, 2) maintain an orderly environment conducive to learning, and 3) encourage all members of our school community to *feel welcome* to visit our school while they contribute to the security of the school. Our staff considers these measures necessary to ensure a safe and orderly environment and will work to implement them fairly and equitably, i.e., everyone who visits the building will be expected to comply. Your cooperation is appreciated, and your compliance is required.

## **Visitors**

Visitors and volunteers are welcome at Westmar Early Learning Center. For the safety of our students and by law, **all** persons who enter the school **must first register in the main office**. Visits to classroom areas must be pre-approved by staff members. School staff will help make all necessary arrangements and/or schedule any requested conferences.

- **Parents/Guardians** who are either 1) bringing a child who is **late to school**, or 2) picking up a child who is **leaving early** will report to the main office and stay there as directed by the Main Office Staff. You are not permitted in the hallways past the lobby.
- **School volunteers/visitors** will complete the visitor sign-in/sign-out procedure. To obtain a visitor sticker to be worn while on the school premises and returned upon sign-out, visitors are required to submit their driver's license into the ACPS RAPTOR system.
- **Anyone who is not a full-time student or a staff member** must wear a visitor sticker to visit any area of the school other than the main office. Anyone without a sticker will be asked to report to the main office to register and obtain one from the secretary. Staff members are trained to look for visitor stickers, request the person go to the office, and follow up by reporting anyone without a sticker to the main office. All visitors will be checked into the RAPTOR system via drivers' license.

### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)**

Westmar Early Childhood Center has three main behavioral expectations for students to know and follow in all classroom and non-classroom settings. The following expectations will be focused on daily: WE are SAFE, WE are RESPONSIBLE, WE are KIND. Rewards for good behavior, as well as consequences for inappropriate behavior, are included in the plan.

### **Student Arrival Procedures**

#### **Pre K 4**

The instructional school day begins at 7:45 a.m. for students. Students who arrive by bus will be supervised in the auditorium lobby. Student drop-off is from 7:30 to 7:40 at the Barton Lobby entrance. The individual dropping the student off is directed to park in a designated parking spot and walk the child to the door. Cars are not permitted to park along the curb at the bus drop-off. Please hold their hand for safety. A staff member will greet your child upon arrival at the door. Only students are permitted to enter the building. Please give your hugs and goodbyes at the door. Breakfast will be provided in classrooms at 7:45 a.m. Students coming after 8:00 will not have time to eat breakfast. The lobby doors are locked at 7:40. Any student arriving after this time will need to be brought into the office via the Main entrance and signed in as tardy by a parent/guardian. The adult will remain in the office with the child until a member of the WELC staff picks up the child to take the classroom.

Pre K 3 Students may be dropped off at the Barton Lobby entrance. Drop off is 7:55-8:00 AM and 11:55-12:00 PM. The individual dropping the student off is directed to park in a designated parking spot and walk the child to the door. Please hold their hand for safety. A staff member will greet your child upon arrival at the door. Only students are permitted to enter the building. Please give your hugs and goodbyes at the door.

## **Dismissal Procedures**

These procedures have been established to help ensure that all children are safe from the time they are dismissed from their classroom until they arrive home.

**Pre K 4** at 2:35, a WELC staff member will take the students to the Barton Lobby. Parents will physically pick up from 2:35-2:40 p.m. Parents should park in the parking spaces to the left of the auditorium and wait on the sidewalk to retrieve their child. Students will not be permitted to walk to a vehicle alone. This is a busy time of day. Please hold your child's hand to ensure a safe dismissal. Parents arriving after 2:40 will not be permitted to enter the bus loop in front of the building. The first bus wave will board the buses at around 2:45 p.m., and the second wave will board the buses from 3:00-3:15 p.m. A staff member will walk students to the bus.

**Pre K 3** at 3:05 a WELC staff member will take the students to the Barton Lobby. Parents will physically pick up from 3:05-3:10 p.m. Parents should park in the parking spaces to the left of the auditorium and wait on the sidewalk to retrieve their child. Students will not be permitted to walk to a vehicle alone. This is a busy time of day. Please hold your child's hand to ensure a safe dismissal. Parents arriving before 3:00 will not be permitted to enter the bus loop in front of the building.

- **A note or phone call** is required for a student to be dismissed in a manner other than their normal departure/destination. For example: If a student normally rides Bus #110, then that student is to always ride Bus #110, unless the parent sends a note or calls the school (notes are preferred). **Without a note or phone call from the custodial parent, the child will be sent home in the usual and customary manner as indicated on the child's information form.**

- Parents wishing to pick up their child before 2:35 p.m. should report to the main office upon arrival at school. Parents must sign the "early dismissal log". Your child will be sent to the office to meet you. **Parents must remain in the office area. And are not permitted to enter the hallway or classrooms.**

- Some students have different dismissal instructions depending on the day of the week. Parents must write a note specifying the child's dismissal procedure for each day of the week. This weekly schedule will be considered the child's *usual and customary dismissal procedure*; and each day he/she is to be dismissed in another manner, **the parent must write a note**. A note will help ensure that the child is safe and that he or she reaches the proper destination after school.

- No student will be not be dismissed to anyone other than a parent or legal guardian without prior notification from the parent. Please ask the person picking your child up to bring their picture ID into the office with them.

**\*In the case of one student accompanying another child home, we must have a note from the parents of both children so that we are sure the parent receiving the extra child is in agreement.**

**Attendance** (Below are highlights from the Attendance Policy. The policy can be found on the ACPS website)

**Policy Statement:** Regular school attendance is expected of all students in the Allegany County Public Schools. School attendance is directly related to school achievement. In order to maximize academic achievement, there must be a unified effort by all school staff, parents, students, and the community to improve overall school attendance. School administrators, teachers, and support staff are expected to make all

reasonable attempts to assist students and parents in addressing those factors that cause students to be absent from school.

**Tardiness:** Students not in school/classroom by 7:45 a.m. will be marked as tardy. An adult must accompany students arriving tardy to school to the main office. The adult and child will stay in the main office until a member of the WELC staff picks up the child to take to his/ her room. Habitual tardiness will be monitored by the Judy Center and Pupil Service Team.

**Lawful Absence:** Students presently enrolled in public schools are considered lawfully absent from school, including absence for a portion of the day, under the following conditions:

- **Death:** in the immediate family.
- **Illness of the Student:** The principal shall require a physician's certificate from the parent or guardians if a student is absent for more than 12 days.
- **Court Summons.**
- **College Visit**
- **Vacation approved by the school administration**
- **Hazardous Weather Conditions:** This shall be interpreted to mean weather conditions that would endanger the health or safety of the student when in transit to and from school.
- **Work:** Approved or sponsored by the school, the local school system, or the State Department of Education, and accepted by the local superintendent of schools or the school principal or their designees as a reason for excusing students.
- **Observance of a religious holiday**
- **State emergency**
- **Other emergency** or set of circumstances which, in the judgment of the superintendent or designee, constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school.
- **Suspension.**
- **Health Exclusion**
- **Lack of authorized transportation:** This shall not include students denied authorized transportation for disciplinary reasons.

**Unlawful Absence:** An absence for any reason other than those cited as lawful is presumed unlawful and may constitute truancy.

### **Emergency Closings**

- Occasionally, weather conditions or other emergencies (temperature, ice, broken water lines, etc.) require delayed opening or early closing of school. You will receive a phone call from the **Blackboard Connect** automated calling system, notifying you of a change in school opening or closing. **Do not call the school or the Board of Education offices, as this will tie up telephone communications, which are vital to the cancellation procedure.**

- In case of an emergency dismissal, the school needs to be aware of a plan for where your child will go if you are not home (to a neighbor, relative, or friend's house). If this plan is not the typical dismissal route, please make sure the alternate plan is included on your child's *emergency information sheet that all students turn in at the beginning of each school year*. Please discuss the plan with your child. Should the arrangements you determine appropriate at the start of the year change during the year, please call the school to notify us of the change. It will be documented on the form.

- When the opening of school has been delayed, students should not arrive at school earlier than the announced opening time (9:35 on a 2-hour delay; 10:35 on a 3-hour delay) since school staff members will also arrive at a later time.

**\*\*\*Breakfast will not be served on delayed opening days.  
WELC is considered to be in the Mt. Ridge District.**

## **Lunch/Breakfast Program**

Your child(ren)'s breakfast and lunch will be provided free of charge for the school year.

### **Breakfast**

This program provides a meal to all students free of charge, thanks to the grant obtained by our school (Breakfast in the Classroom). Breakfast will include milk, juice, or fruit, and an entrée such as a muffin or cereal and graham crackers.

### **Lunch**

A well-balanced meal is provided each day. The main responsibility of this program is to meet the child's nutritional needs.

**Packed Lunches:** All students may participate in our breakfast and lunch programs. If you pack your child's lunch, we ask parents to provide a balanced lunch. Good nutrition is an essential component of a growing mind and body. Glass containers should not be sent. This request is made as a safety precaution.

**\*\*Bringing outside breakfast or lunches (McDonald's etc.) to your child is not permitted.**

## **Medication Policy**

Medicine for minor illnesses should be taken at home; i.e., non-prescription medicines (aspirin, cough drops, cough syrup, etc.). If this is not possible, it is permissible for a parent to come to the school health room to administer it. **However, the school nurse may not administer any medication, even over-the-counter medicines, without the appropriate form being signed by a doctor.**

If it is deemed necessary by a physician that a child receive medication during the school day, either on a daily basis or in case of an emergency, the school must have complete written instructions from the prescribing physician on the form provided for this purpose (forms available upon request from school health nurse) and a procedure established by the principal. If instructions received from the physician are incomplete, he/she will be called to obtain clarification. Medicines will be safeguarded by keeping them in a locked space within a designated area of the school and made available only to authorized school personnel. All medicine containers brought to school must be labeled with the student's name, kind of medicine, amount to be given, and schedule to be followed as directed by the physician and pharmacy. **Students may not transport the medication to school.** The parent or the guardian must bring the medicine to school or arrange for the pharmacy to deliver the prescription to school.

## **Dress Code**

Children should come to school dressed appropriately for the numerous activities that take place throughout the school day. This includes physical education and recess. Slippery-soled shoes, high heels, and flip-flops are not appropriate for most school activities, including daily recess and gym

class. Shoes must contain a back strap to secure the shoe for play. Tennis shoes are required to be worn on physical education day. Any manner of dress, hairstyle, or degree of cleanliness that presents danger to the student's health and safety, interferes with others' right to learn, or creates classroom or school disturbance will be considered as unsuitable for school.

### **Non-School Items**

- Please do not allow children to bring toys, jewelry, or other valuables to school. The school will not be responsible for the theft or loss of any such items. Non-school items that create a disturbance in the classroom may be taken by school staff and left in the office where parents can make arrangements to retrieve them.
- Please put your child's name on the inside of coats, sweaters, umbrellas, lunch boxes, and book bags.
- Cell phones and other electronic devices should not be brought to school.

### **Party Invitations/ Treats**

- Please do not send party invitations to be distributed unless you intend to invite your child's entire class. This policy is established to keep children from feeling hurt and left out. Teachers will return all private party invitations that do not include the total class.
- Pre-K is the only class in which snacks are permitted to be brought in to celebrate birthdays. If you would like to bring a treat to share with your child's pre-k, you must **first check with the teacher**. For nutritional and health purposes, the school system now has a strict policy on the types of foods that should be given to children during the school day. In addition, **all items must be store-bought**.

### **Field Trips**

Field trips are an extension of classroom learning. If a teacher plans a field trip, he/she will select a field trip that relates best to the curriculum. The opportunity for parents to accompany their children will be determined by the need for supervision, as well as the availability of funds for transportation.

***Reminder: According to the county policy regarding field trips, siblings may not attend school field trips.***

### **Financial Obligations**

It is the parents' responsibility to make sure that all elementary school children's financial obligations are met. This includes lunches, lost books or other school items, field trips, pictures, money collected from fundraisers, etc. In cases where parents' checks have been returned for insufficient funds, it is the parents' responsibility to immediately pay the outstanding bill and bank charges in cash. No further checks will be accepted by the school.

### **Library / Barcode Policy**

All schools have an automated checkout system using barcodes to track the circulation of library materials. In order to use this system, bar codes were placed on the back of each book in the upper right-hand corner. These bar codes must remain on the books for the circulation system to benefit all students! If students remove or deface the bar codes in any way, they will be charged a fee for repairs.

### **Allergies- Food**

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

1. If a student has a food allergy or a disability that requires restrictions, food substitutions, or meal modifications, the parent/guardian must provide written authorization to act to make the necessary



dietary modifications and to treat a reaction to the allergy. In addition, the parent/guardian must provide documentation from a health care provider to the student's principal, school nurse, and to food service personnel. The documentation must clearly and specifically state the nature of the student's food allergy or disability and how this restricts the student's diet or exposure to allergens. The documentation must also authorize the appropriate dissemination of this information to persons who may be in a position to assist the student. The Food and Allergy Sensitivity Form (JLCEB-E) may be used for this purpose. 2. The administration of epinephrine is governed by policy JLCEA. 3. If the student requires an antihistamine and/or an EpiPen, the parent/guardian must provide these medications in a properly labeled container and the correct doses. The antihistamine must be in an unopened package. 4. The parent/guardian will work with the school nurse to develop individualized health care and/or emergency care plans to minimize the risk of exposure and provide detailed procedures to follow in the event of an allergic reaction.

#### Food Services Responsibilities

1. Following receipt of a completed special dietary restriction notification, in compliance with Part A of this policy, each school will develop a list of students with food allergies or who require meal modifications in their school. This information will be distributed to: a. The school health staff in the building and b. The school food services manager c. food services central office d. principal or designee. 2. Food service personnel will properly input special dietary restriction information into the food service management system. 3. ACPS will also follow the guidance for school food service staff described by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service entitled Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Program. C. Food Allergies/Disability – School Health Responsibilities 1. Upon receipt of required documentation, the school nurse will work with the parent/guardian and other appropriate school staff to develop individualized health care and/or emergency care plans to minimize the risk of exposure and provide detailed procedures to follow in the event of an allergic reaction. 2. The school health nurse will inform the cafeteria manager of the individual student's dietary restrictions. FOOD ALLERGY FILE: JLCEB-R2 3. If a student is suspected of or found to have an allergic reaction, the parent will be contacted and staff will follow appropriate emergency procedures. D. Food Allergies/Disability –

#### C. School Responsibilities

1. The principal/designee will collaborate with parents/guardians, staff, and school health services to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to protect the safety of all students with food allergies/disabilities that have been identified. 2. After notification of the food allergy, the principal/designee will disseminate this information to the appropriate school staff.