

Wards Creek Elementary Parent Handbook



2026-2027

We are delighted to have you as members of the Wards Creek Elementary family. Our faculty and staff are dedicated to creating an engaging, challenging, and productive learning environment for each student. Our partnership with you is the foundation for helping students maximize their full potential. Thank you for your involvement, commitment, and support. Together, the best is yet to come!

ADDRESS & TELEPHONE NUMBER CHANGE

Please notify our office immediately if there is a change in your address, telephone number, or your emergency contact. The Change of Personal Information form is located on the Registration tab on our website <https://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/student/enrollment/#forms>. This information is very important in case your child becomes ill or injured. In addition, the telephone numbers you provide are the ones we use for school messages and emergencies.

- **Students will not be released to anyone who is not listed on the emergency information card.** If you would like a neighbor or friend to be eligible to pick up your child from school, please list them on your emergency contact card. Please make sure this information is updated whenever necessary.

ARRIVAL/PICK UP PROCEDURES

MORNING DROP OFF: Parents may drop off their child using the parent pick-up side of the building which is the west entrance (closest to SR 13). Parents may drop off students no earlier than 8:05 am. Someone will assist in opening the car door for your child; however, many children are able to exit the vehicle independently and may not need assistance. Cars are not permitted in the bus loop during arrival or dismissal times. It is important that your child arrive at school between 8:05 am and 8:20 am. Please make sure your child arrives at school by 8:20 am so that they can be in their classroom ready to learn by 8:25 am.

AFTERNOON PICK UP: Parents must use the west entrance. Cars are not permitted in the east bus loop during arrival or dismissal times. Cars will line up along the sidewalk near the school, back to the cafeteria loading dock, and then back along the entrance drive. A staff person will assist with helping direct the cars through the parking lot so that all traffic can be stacked off of SR 16. Parent Pickup cars **MUST** have a "Parent Pickup Car Tag" attached to their rearview mirror. If your car does not have a "Parent Pickup Car Tag" (available at Orientation or from the school office), you will be required to park, show appropriate ID, and will have to check your child out at the office. Students will walk out to the designated walkway and then look for their car. Please pull up as far as the adult supervision requests you too. Give yourself a little room so that you may be able to pull out if the car ahead of you is still waiting for their child. Continue to watch for the direction from the adults helping direct traffic. Please write your child's name and grade level on the car tag. We request that you keep this visible until your child is in the car. This helps the adults know which student they are needing to look for to arrive. Please use your turn signal when exiting the campus to assist the PSA directing traffic on SR 16.

ATTENDANCE

The importance of regular attendance cannot be over emphasized. All students should be in school every day that they are physically able. It is extremely difficult to successfully keep up with class work if attendance is irregular. According to Florida Statute 1003.26, patterns of nonattendance will be referred to the principal to determine if the concern should be brought to the Superintendent for possible truancy charges with the Circuit Court of St. Johns County. Parents and/or Guardians will receive state mandated automated attendance notification letters from St. Johns County School District when the student reaches 5, 10 and/or 15 unexcused absences, as well as, when they reach 15 total absences (excused and unexcused).

ABSENCES

If your child is ill and absent for two or more days, please contact your child's teacher to arrange for any missed schoolwork. Parents should submit the Absence Form located under the "**Links**" section in ParentSquare to explain their child's absence. The form must be completed **within 48 hours of the absence** for it to be considered excused. Failure to submit the Absence Form within 48 hours will result in an automatic unexcused absence.

Excused absences include:

Personal illness, family emergency, death in the family, religious holidays of the student's established religious faith, required court or law agency appearances, public and state competitions that are school-sponsored, scheduled doctor or dentist appointments.

Unexcused absences include: shopping trips, pleasure trips, suspension from school, appointments without prior approval except in case of emergency, truancy.

Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for more information.

BUS REGULATIONS

Students are given the privilege of using the transportation services of the St. Johns County School District. Standards of discipline must be maintained at all times in order to satisfy safety requirements. Whenever a driver must direct his/her full attention away from the road, danger exists. A complete list of bus regulations is available in the **SJCSD Code of Conduct Book**.

TARDINESS

School begins at 8:25, but you may drop off your child any time after 8:05. Doors entering the main building will close at 8:25 and adult supervision will report to other duties. **Any student reporting to school after 8:25 must be escorted by a parent to the front office** to receive an admittance slip before going to the classroom. Tardiness is disruptive to the learning environment and has a negative impact on student achievement so please have your student at school by 8:20. They must be in their classroom by 8:25. **Excessive tardiness, 5 or more, will be treated as an absence and addressed by school administration.**

EARLY CHECK OUT

Our academic program runs from bell to bell. It is very important for students to be present for the entire school day. Please schedule appointments after school and make every attempt to have students present for the full day. **If you must pick up your child early, please be aware that children may not be checked out of school between 2:00-2:45 pm (1:00-1:45 on Wednesdays).** If you need to pick up your child early from school, please do so before 2:00 pm (1:00 on Wednesdays). Anyone checking out your child **MUST** be listed on the Student Information Form in our office. You **MUST** also show a picture ID. There are no exceptions. **Excessive early check-outs will be addressed by school administration.**

CAFETERIA INFORMATION

All students will receive a personal identification number (PIN) for their meal account at the start of school. **PLEASE ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO MEMORIZE THIS NUMBER.** They will use it throughout their school career. To add money to your child's lunch account visit www.paypams.com or you may send money in with your child.

If desired, restrictions can be placed on your student's meal account. Some examples: No snacks, 1 snack Friday only, No Sales. If interested, please email Alison Hargus at: Alison.Hargus@stjohns.k12.fl.us If your child has food allergies, please provide the school nurse with a physician's note indicating the allergies and the appropriate substitutions that are recommended by the physician.

Free and Reduced Price Meal Application can be obtained ONLINE at <http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/food/free/>. The approval process can take up to ten (10) days at the beginning of the school year.

Wards Creek Menus and nutrition information can be found at:
<https://schools.mealviewer.com/school/WardsCreekElementary>

CLASSROOM CELEBRATIONS and STUDENT SAFETY

We understand that food items are a common and meaningful part of classroom celebrations and special occasions. We also recognize that students often become especially excited and engaged when they are able to receive a tangible item, treat, or hands-on reward. However, when selecting items for classroom celebrations or rewards, student safety must always be the first priority.

Our school includes students with food allergies and medically documented dietary restrictions, some of which can result in serious or life-threatening reactions. We therefore ask all parents to take these needs very seriously when considering items to send into the classroom. A celebration or reward should never unintentionally place a student at risk or prevent a child from safely participating with their classmates.

Whenever possible, we strongly encourage families to consider non-food alternatives, particularly tangible items that allow all students to participate safely. Small toys, stickers, pencils, bookmarks, craft items, or other age-appropriate items can be just as exciting to students while eliminating many of the health and safety concerns associated with food.

If food is provided for a classroom celebration, the following requirements must be followed:

- All food items must be commercially packaged and store-bought. Homemade food items may not be brought in for classroom celebrations.
- There must be **enough of the item for every student in the homeroom class** so that no student is unintentionally excluded.
- The **original nutritional and ingredient label must remain on the package**. This is essential for students who require carbohydrate counts for insulin administration and for identifying potential allergens.
- Please do **not remove, discard, or separate the nutritional/ingredient label from the food item**. Having complete and accurate labeling available is an important part of protecting the health and safety of our students.
- Parents must **communicate with the homeroom teacher at least two weeks in advance** before sending food for a classroom celebration.
- If your child is able to bring the approved treats to school, that is preferred. If you need to bring the food item yourself, please deliver it **at the beginning of the school day** rather than during instructional time.

Please also be aware that classroom teachers may choose to provide food items as rewards at various times throughout the school year. Parents are encouraged to communicate directly with their child's homeroom teacher regarding specific foods or ingredients that should be avoided.

We appreciate your partnership in making classroom celebrations enjoyable and, most importantly, safe for every student. While tangible treats and rewards can create excitement and make students feel special, no celebration or reward is more important than ensuring that every child can participate without being exposed to a preventable health risk. When in doubt, please choose a non-food alternative and consult the classroom teacher in advance.

DRESS CODE

Students should come to school dressed appropriately and respectfully. Parents may be contacted to bring a change of clothes if a student is wearing inappropriate attire. Clothing that disrupts the educational environment is prohibited and may result in consequences outlined in the SJCS Code of Conduct. Students have recess daily, so tennis shoes are strongly recommended.

EXTENDED DAY PROGRAM

All information, including rates, can be found on our website or you can call the Extended Day Coordinator Virginia Hooks at: Virginia.Hooks@stjohns.k12.fl.us or (904) 547-8737

Morning Care: 6:30 AM until school starts.

Afternoon Care: from dismissal until 6:00 PM.

HOME ACCESS

Home Access Center (HAC) allows students and parents to view their child's educational information via a secure, password protected website, Android app, or iPhone app. It is a great way to be "in the know" about your child's ongoing academic progress. Report Cards will be issued electronically on this the Home Access App: <https://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/hac/>. Helpful Hint- you should sign up using the parent name & information (NOT STUDENT NAME & INFO). This will enable you to see all of your children via one account.

ILLNESS

Deciding when to keep your child home from school can be difficult. If your child is ill at home before school, please do not send him/her to school with the understanding that he/she may call home. Sick children do not need to attend school as the ability for learning is impaired and the possibility for transmission to other students is a consideration. If the symptoms are severe that you seek medical attention, and makes a specific diagnosis such as strep throat, conjunctivitis, chicken pox, etc., please let the school staff know. If a student becomes ill while at school, he/she will be sent to the clinic for evaluation by the school nurse and will remain in the clinic if they are to be picked up by a parent/guardian. Students with physician's orders to receive medication during the school day must have a completed Medication Authorization Form on file with the nurse. All medication must be transported to school by the parent/guardian and must be in the original container with the appropriate

prescription label attached. Students are not permitted to carry medication on their person. Parents of students with a health condition must contact the school nurse to ensure the appropriate documentation is obtained.

LOST & FOUND

All personal belongings (jackets, hats, book bags, lunch boxes, etc.) should be permanently labeled with your child's name before being brought to school. Check our lost and found if an item is missing. Items not claimed from the lost and found will be given to charity at the end of each nine-week period.

LUNCH WITH CHILDREN

We often have requests for adults to have lunch with their children. However, we would like for you to consider the following expectations prior to this request:

1. All visitors must be a cleared volunteer. (See School Access)
2. Lunch will be in another location other than the cafeteria.
3. The past few years that alternate location has been the courtyard. However, if the courtyard is being used for an outdoor classroom experience, grade level celebrations, or school assembly, another location will be offered.
4. Keep in mind, if it rains, there is no alternative location inside. Please have an alternative date.
5. Your child will be informed to come get you in the lobby as his/her class is walking to the lunchroom. If your child needs a school lunch, they will get that first and then meet you in the lobby and walk you out to the courtyard.
6. If parents have multiple children, only the child during his/her lunchtime will be permitted.
7. With safety measures, your child will not be allowed to bring a friend with them.
8. Parents are only allowed in the location indicated on the visitor badge. Your child can walk back to class on their own.
9. Safety measures are continuing to be redefined to make it more challenging to accommodate this request.

To help maintain students' routines, we ask that lunch visits be limited to special occasions. Lunch visits may begin the first week of September to allow time for visitor clearance through the Raptor system. All visitors and volunteers must complete the School Access Form and be approved before participating in school activities. Visitors must sign in through the Raptor system in the front office, wear their badge at all times, and present a valid driver's license when signing in.

MISSION STATEMENT

At WCES we ensure Achievement, Learning, and Leadership for ALL. This is recited by our students each morning. It is our reason for the journey. Please ask your child to detail what this means to them.

MTSS-MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS

During the year, we carefully monitor all students to see which students are meeting grade level standards and which students need additional support. Our school provides daily intervention and enrichment to all students. For students needing more support, our school-based team uses a problem-solving process to plan interventions and monitor progress. Parents will be notified if their child is in need of support. For more information, you may contact our MTSS Facilitator, Robie Hagan via email at: Robie.Hagan@stjohns.k12.fl.us

PARENTSQUARE

ParentSquare is the district's two-way communications platform that provides instant translations in 100+ languages. It is used for items such as school newsletters, emergency notifications, direction messages, group chats, calendars, volunteer sign-ups, and more. ParentSquare is also used for districtwide newsletters and announcements along with two-way communication.

While it is not required, we highly suggest all parents/caregivers: 1) download the ParentSquare app from the Google Play Store or Apple Store, and 2) register your ParentSquare account with the email address that is connected to your student in Home Access Center (HAC).

PBIS SYSTEM

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. PBIS creates schools where all students succeed. By providing a common language for behavioral expectations, students develop an understanding of what the “Wards Creek Way” looks like. Detailed information is located in the PBIS Parent Handbook.

PTO

The purpose of the Wards Creek Elementary Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is to encourage and enhance the education of all students, while strengthening and developing the relationships between our parents, school, and community. They are a 501(c)(3) organization. PTO Executive Board meetings are held monthly. All members are invited. We hope you will join us! You can find them on Facebook or here:

<https://www.wardscreekpto.com/>

SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL (SAC)

SAC is also one way that parents can be a part of the important decision making at WCES. By Florida law, SAC is constructed to represent all segments of a school’s community – parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, business people, and other interested community members. SAC meets once per quarter. Find information here: <https://www-wce.stjohns.k12.fl.us/sac/>

SCHOOL ACCESS

Prior to having access to any activities happening on school grounds, during the school hours, all individuals must be complete the [School Access Form](#). After you have been cleared then you are free to make arrangements with your child’s teacher to schedule a time and activity for you to help with. All volunteers/visitors must sign in through the Raptor system in the front office and have the volunteer badge visible at all times. Please note that a driver’s license is required in order to sign in.

SCHOOL HOURS

Morning drop off begins at 8:05 a.m. School begins at 8:25 a.m. and ends at 2:45 p.m. (Wednesday at 1:45 p.m.)

SCHOOL PAYMENTS

Parents use SchoolPay to pay school fees, field trips, extended day, school lunch, or miscellaneous fees online. Just go to www.schoolpay.com.

STUDENT CELL PHONES

Florida has recently enacted legislation restricting student cell phone use in schools, primarily aimed at improving focus and safety. For elementary students, the new law generally prohibits cell phone use from "bell to bell" during the school day, expanding on the previous restriction of use during instructional time. Students may have cell phones on campus, however they must be turned off and in their backpack during school hours.

TRANSPORTATION CHANGES

Children appreciate consistency in procedures. With safety in mind, students going home the same way each day is best for routines. However, if a change in dismissal is needed, these need to be submitted before 2:00 pm (1:00 pm on Wednesdays). Our front office staff becomes the dispatching office and must be aware of all changes. We also recommend you email your child’s teacher. **Changes must be made to the [Pikmykid Online App](#).** We cannot accept phone calls for those changes. If you do not have access to the app, we will permit parents to submit a handwritten note a day in advance. Changes in afternoon transportation should only be for **emergency** situations.

TRANSPORTATION WAIVER SERVICES

Schools are not authorized to issue bus passes or instruct bus operators regarding bus ridership or stops. The Transportation Department may issue provisional waivers for a specific period of time due to extenuating circumstances. Parents may apply for this waiver via the St. Johns County School District webpage. Waivers will not be available from individual schools.

VISION STATEMENT

To build and sustain a culture that provides a safe environment where all stake holders collaborate to ensure growth and achievement for ALL.

