

OKALOOSA ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

Student/Parent Handbook

2026-2027



MISSION STATEMENT

**TO CREATE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WHERE STUDENTS ARE
SUPPORTED, VALUED, AND EMPOWERED TO BECOME VISIONARIES FOR
THEMSELVES, THEIR FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES THROUGH EDUCATION.**

Stephanie Duenas, Principal

Patrick Hamilton, Dean of Students

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School Hours

School begins at 8:30 AM and ends at 2:00 PM. Students are expected to attend classes each day that school is in session unless they have a documented excused absence for one of the following reasons:

- Illness or medical care
- Death in the family
- Legal requirements
- Religious holiday
- Absences pre-approved by school administrator
- Insurmountable conditions

Attendance and Truancy

- The accumulation of three (3) unexcused absences within a 30-calendar day period will result in a phone call from the lead teacher to the parent/guardian.
- The accumulation of five (5) unexcused absences will result in a mandatory attendance conference with the parent/guardian and student. The student's lead teacher and/ or attendance officer will then set up an attendance conference. During this conference, the student will be placed on an attendance contract and the school attendance officer will be involved.
- The accumulation of eight (8) unexcused absences will result in continued follow through with the attendance officer and truancy officer.
- The accumulation of ten (10) unexcused absences will result in another mandatory attendance conference with the parent/guardian and student. This meeting will include the attendance officer and district truancy officer, which may result in the student being sent to truancy court.
- The accumulation of fifteen (15) unexcused absences may result in withdrawal from the Okaloosa Academy.
- While telephone notification of an absence is appreciated, written documentation **MUST** be submitted to office staff within 3 days of absence.

Excused Absences

Students may only submit a "parent/guardian signed note" for up to ten (10) excused absences each semester. After the 10th excused absence for the semester, a written notification from a medical professional is required unless pre-approved by administration.

Florida law requires each parent of a child from 5 to 16 to be responsible for the child's school attendance. The continued absence of a child from school will be considered a violation of the law. If a student is under a court order only a doctor's note or pre-approved note will be accepted (any pre-approved notes must be approved by administration). Absences of any student under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Justice will be reported to his or her probation officer or agency contact person.

Tardy Policy

The accumulation of three (3) tardies during the nine-week quarter will result in a phone conference by the Attendance Officer to the parent/guardian.

Three tardies equal one unexcused absence.

The accumulation of five (5) tardies will result in a parent/guardian/student conference.

The accumulation of eight (8) tardies will result in a standard discipline referral submitted to the Dean of Students for appropriate disciplinary action.

When a student arrives on campus after 9:30 the parent/Guardian will need to sign them in.

Student Parking

Students who wish to drive to school and park on campus must complete all required steps to receive a parking decal. This includes submitting a parking application along with a copy of their driver's license, current vehicle registration, and proof of insurance. Once approved, students will be issued a decal to display on their vehicle, indicating they are in compliance with campus parking procedures.

Student Rights and Responsibilities:

- Students have the privilege of parking on campus and are encouraged to take responsibility for safe and respectful driving.
- Vehicles must be parked in designated student parking areas, and the parking decal must be clearly visible while on school grounds.
- Maintaining safe driving habits, arriving on time, and following school rules help ensure continued parking privileges for all students.
- The school cannot be held responsible for any damage or theft that may occur to vehicles on campus.

Parking at school is a convenience that supports student independence and responsibility. We appreciate students working with us to maintain a safe and orderly environment.

Visitor Policy

The safety of our students and staff is a top priority. All visitors, including parents and guardians, must report to the front office upon arrival, present valid identification, and sign in to receive a visitor's badge. Visitors must wear the badge at all times while on campus.

Unscheduled visits to classrooms are not permitted during instructional time to minimize disruptions. Meetings with staff should be arranged in advance.

The school reserves the right to limit or deny access to individuals who do not follow visitor procedures or who pose a disruption to the learning environment.

Visitor Parking

Visitors are asked to park in the Parking Lot on the east side of the school. The circle in the front of the school should be reserved for buses and vans to drop off and pick up students.

Alternative Transportation Request Policy

To maintain the safety, supervision, and accountability of all students, **requests for alternative transportation arrangements are not permitted**, except in cases of verified emergencies.

Students are expected to ride only their **assigned bus to and from their assigned bus stop** each day. This includes requests to:

- Ride a different bus
- Get off at a different stop
- Ride home with another student
- Be dropped off at an alternate location for non-emergency reasons (e.g., playdates, birthday parties, or changes in parent work schedules)

These types of requests create confusion, pose safety risks, and compromise the accuracy of our transportation records.

Emergency Exceptions

In the event of a **true emergency** (such as a family crisis or sudden illness), parents/guardians may contact the school administration to request a temporary change. These requests will be:

- Evaluated **on a case-by-case basis**
- Subject to **space availability** on the bus
- Considered only with **written documentation and administrator approval**

Unapproved changes or verbal requests made to drivers or students will not be honored.

School Transportation Safety and Discipline Guidelines

The school provides transportation services, including for students with extended travel times. To ensure a safe, respectful, and calm experience for all students, the following expectations apply on the bus, at the bus stop, and during boarding and dismissal:

Behavior at the Bus Stop

- Students must arrive on time and wait in a safe, orderly manner away from the street or traffic.
- Roughhousing, loud behavior, and unsafe actions at the bus stop are prohibited.
- Students must respect private property and avoid disturbing nearby homes or businesses.
- Parents/guardians are responsible for their child's safety and behavior at the bus stop before the bus arrives and after drop-off.

On the Bus

- Students must board and exit the bus in an orderly fashion, without pushing or crowding.
- All students must remain seated, facing forward, with seatbelts fastened if available.
- Voices should be kept low to maintain a quiet and calm environment.
- Students must follow all instructions given by the bus driver or monitor promptly and respectfully.
- Horseplay, shouting, or other disruptive behaviors are not permitted.
- Students must keep **hands, arms, heads, and all personal belongings inside the bus at all times**. Throwing items or extending body parts out of the window is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.
- Aisles must remain clear of backpacks and other items to avoid tripping hazards.

Use of Electronic Devices

- On longer routes, students are encouraged to use electronic devices for quiet entertainment.
- Headphones must be used at all times; sound must not disturb others.
- Devices may not be used to record, take pictures, or view inappropriate content.
- The school is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged devices.

Food, Drinks, and Cleanliness

- Eating and drinking are not permitted on the bus unless medically required and approved by school administration.
- Students must keep their area clean and dispose of trash properly.
- Any item that causes distraction or safety concerns may be confiscated.

Consequences for Misconduct

- Minor infractions may result in assigned seating, verbal warnings, or a report to school staff.
 - Repeated or serious violations may result in a behavior report, parent notification, temporary or permanent suspension from school transportation, or additional school disciplinary action.
 - Any behavior that jeopardizes safety may result in immediate removal from the bus and possible referral to school administration or law enforcement.
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Our goal is to ensure all students experience safe, calm, and respectful transportation experience to and from school each day. We appreciate the support of families in reinforcing these expectations at home.

Dress Code and Grooming Expectations

To promote a safe, respectful, and focused learning environment, our school has established a dress code that reflects our values and expectations. The dress code helps minimize distractions, supports student safety, and prepares students for success both in and out of the classroom. All students are expected to follow these guidelines daily.

All school personnel are expected to enforce the standards with firmness and fairness in an effort to foster the orderly operation of the school. The standards are as follows:

- All students are required to wear uniform shirts supplied by Okaloosa Academy. (1st shirt is free, additional must be purchased).
- **ID Badge** is part of your uniform and must be worn and visible at all times.
- Hairstyles must not conceal the student's identity, such as **hair covering the eyes**.
- **Leggings, spandex, or similar tight-fitting or see-through** garments are not permitted.
- No tying or rolling shirts to show off midriff.
- Skirts or shorts must be at least mid-thigh.
- Undergarments are required, but must NOT be visible.
- **No Sagging pants**.
- Lounge clothing, pajama pants, and/or slippers/house shoes are not permitted.
- Double layering of clothes is not permitted.
- All headgear to include caps, hats, bandanas, headbands, night caps, bonnets, sweatbands are not permitted.
- Logos that include or reference gangs, drugs, and/or any inappropriate affiliations are not permitted.
- **Pants with rips, holes, or tears are not be permitted.**
- Hoodies are not permitted but may be worn on the bus as long as hood is not covering head while on the bus, thus concealing identity for camera monitoring.

- Smartwatches are not permitted.
- Backpacks and/or bookbags are not permitted. Students will be provided all necessary supplies in the classroom.
- Earbuds are not permitted in the classroom. Earbuds are allowed and encouraged on the bus. They must be turned in with phone during check-in.

Personal Hygiene and Student Well-being

We want all students to feel comfortable, confident, and ready to learn each day. As part of maintaining a healthy and respectful environment, students are expected to come to school clean, in clean clothing, and free of strong body odors.

If your child needs access to hygiene items or clean clothing, please don't hesitate to reach out to a trusted staff member or the school counselor. We are here to support our students and families with care and confidentiality.

Makeup and Face Paint Guidelines

To maintain a school environment that is welcoming and free from distractions, students are asked to keep makeup appropriate for a school setting. Overly dramatic makeup, or face paint that alters a student's appearance in a distracting or non-instructional way is not permitted during the school day.

We appreciate your support in helping us promote a positive and focused atmosphere for all students.

Electronic Devices and Personal Belongings Policy

To promote a safe and distraction-free learning environment

To maintain a safe, and distraction-free learning environment, students are not permitted to bring backpacks, duffle bags, or similar large personal items onto campus. All necessary materials will be provided or stored in designated areas as needed. All electronic devices, including cell phones, smartwatches, and earbuds, must be turned in at check-in and will be returned at dismissal. These items are not permitted during instructional time or while on campus unless authorized by school staff for educational purposes.

The school is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged personal belongings or electronic devices. Students who violate this policy may have items confiscated and returned only to a parent or guardian. Repeated violations may result in disciplinary action.

Personal Belongings – Sharing and Responsibility Policy

To help keep our school community safe, clean, and respectful, students are asked not to share or loan personal items with others. This includes things like clothing, hygiene products, school supplies, food, electronics, and other personal belongings.

We encourage students to take responsibility for their own items and to avoid bringing valuables to school when possible. Sharing items, even with good intentions, can sometimes lead to confusion, misplaced belongings, or health concerns.

Please note that the school cannot be responsible for items that are lost, damaged, or not returned as a result of being shared or loaned. Additionally, the school is unable to manage or guarantee the recovery of such items.

We appreciate your cooperation in helping all students care for their belongings and respect personal boundaries.

Lunch Containers Policy

Students who bring lunch from home must turn in their lunch containers at morning check-in. Lunches will be stored safely and distributed at the appropriate time.

Please note that all lunch containers are subject to search as part of the school's safety procedures. Students should only bring food and items appropriate for a school setting.

The school is not responsible for lost or unclaimed lunch containers. Students are encouraged to clearly label their containers with their name.

Parent Notification and Disruption Policy

Parents and guardians will be notified of any significant incidents involving their child, including behavior concerns, safety issues, or disciplinary actions. The school values open communication and will ensure families are kept informed.

However, frequent or daily disruptions to the learning environment—regardless of the reason—cannot be permitted. Ongoing behavioral concerns will be addressed through appropriate interventions and may lead to further disciplinary action if not resolved.

Our goal is to support every student while maintaining a safe and productive school environment for all.

Student Medication Policy

To ensure student safety, all medications—prescription or over-the-counter—must be brought to the front office by a parent or guardian and accompanied by a completed Medication Authorization Form. Students are not permitted to carry or self-administer any medication on campus without prior written approval from both a licensed physician and the school.

All medications will be securely stored and administered by authorized school personnel according to the instructions provided. This includes daily medications, inhalers, EpiPens, and emergency-use items.

Unapproved possession or sharing of medication may result in disciplinary action. The school reserves the right to refuse administration of medication that is not properly documented.

Illegal Contraband Policy

The possession, use, distribution, or sale of illegal substances, weapons, or any other prohibited items on school property or at school-related events is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, firearms, knives, and any item deemed dangerous or unlawful.

Any student found with illegal contraband will face immediate disciplinary action, which may include suspension, expulsion, and referral to law enforcement.

Student Searches

As part of the daily check in process, all students are subject to safety and security protocols. These protocols include, but are not limited to, the use of a walkthrough scanning device and/or handheld metal detectors. When suspicion of contraband is present, a gender-appropriate staff member will intervene. Students refusing to be searched will be subject to possible law enforcement intervention and/or disciplinary action. In addition, all items brought on campus are subject to random searches. Searches may be (though not required) conducted in the presence of the school resource officer. Okaloosa Academy assumes no responsibility for any lost, stolen, or damaged items. Items confiscated by staff may be returned to parents/guardians in person only. All confiscated items are subject to disposal after 10 working days.

Sexual Harassment/Bullying

Sexual harassment and bullying will not be tolerated on the school campus or at any school function. If a student feels he/she has been harassed or bullied, they should report the incident to a staff member immediately. This behavior cannot be addressed unless it is reported.

Release for News/Media

During the school year, students will occasionally participate in activities—such as special events, performances, field trips, and classroom projects - where photos, videos, quotes from students, or interviews may be captured by school staff or approved media representatives. No student images will be used in school publications, websites, newsletters, or social media without explicit parent/guardian consent.

Internet Access Agreement

I hereby grant permission for my child to participate in the usage of the internet for the sole purpose of completing their educational assignments. I fully understand my child can only visit websites approved by the school. Any deviation from the approved websites will result in my child being unable to complete any assignment linked to internet usage. Failure to adhere to the guidelines may result in the suspension or revocation of the offender's privilege of access to the internet.

School-Wide Discipline Policy

Philosophy:

Our school is committed to maintaining a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment that promotes academic success and positive behavior for all students. We believe effective discipline starts in the classroom with proactive strategies, clear expectations, and consistent responses. Discipline is viewed as an opportunity to teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors, not simply to punish.

Tier 1: Classroom-Based Prevention and Intervention

Classroom Management Expectations:

- Each teacher will establish and teach clear behavioral expectations aligned with school-wide rules (e.g., Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe).
- Positive reinforcement strategies (praise, incentives, recognition systems) are regularly used.
- Teachers use consistent routines, posted rules, and daily procedures.
- Minor disruptions are addressed using techniques such as redirection, non-verbal cues, proximity control, and quiet check-ins.

Minor Behavior Infractions:

Examples: Talking out of turn, off-task behavior, refusal to follow directions, minor disrespect.

Teacher Responses:

1. Verbal redirection or warning
 2. Re-teach expectations
 3. Logical consequence (e.g., seat change, time-out, loss of privilege)
 4. Parent/guardian contact (email, call, or note)
 5. Documentation in classroom behavior log
-

Tier 2: Office or Team-Supported Interventions

When a pattern of behavior persists despite classroom interventions, or when behaviors escalate in severity, a referral is made for Tier 2 supports.

Moderate Infractions:

Examples: Repeated defiance, inappropriate language, mild physical contact, disruption that affects others' learning.

Interventions May Include:

- Office referral with documentation of prior interventions
- Behavior reflection or conference with administrator or counselor
- Parent/guardian conference
- Restorative practices (apology, restitution, peer mediation)
- Check-in/check-out systems or behavior contracts

Tier 3: Serious or Repeated Infractions

Major Infractions:

Examples: Fighting, threats, property damage, possession of prohibited items, bullying, harassment, or repeated Tier 2 behaviors.

Administrative Responses:

- Immediate referral to administration
- Thorough investigation and documentation
- Parent/guardian meeting
- Suspension (in-school or out-of-school) or alternative placement as warranted
- Referral to student support team for additional services (e.g., MTSS, counseling, behavior intervention plan)

Documentation and Communication

- All referrals and interventions are documented in the student information system.
- Parents/guardians are notified of referrals and major incidents in a timely manner.
- Discipline data is reviewed regularly by school leadership to identify trends and adjust interventions.

Support and Equity

- Staff will receive professional development in classroom management, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practices, and PBIS.
- Discipline decisions will be made with fairness and equity, taking into account individual student needs, circumstances, and previous interventions.
- The school will strive to use restorative practices and alternatives to suspension whenever appropriate.

Conclusion

This policy ensures a consistent, fair, and supportive approach to discipline, beginning with the teacher's role in prevention and classroom-level intervention, and expanding to a system of supports for students who require additional help. Our ultimate goal is to teach appropriate behavior, maintain a safe environment, and ensure every student is able to learn and thrive.

Serious Offenses Requiring Law Enforcement and Potential Dismissal

The school is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and supportive learning environment for all students and staff. Certain serious offenses violate school policy and the law, and therefore require immediate referral to law enforcement. These offenses may also result in disciplinary action up to and including **dismissal from the school**, following a due process review.

Examples of Serious Offenses Include (but are not limited to):

- Physical assault or battery
- Possession or use of a weapon or dangerous object
- Possession, distribution, or use of illegal drugs or controlled substances
- Sexual harassment, misconduct, or assault
- Credible threats or acts of violence
- Vandalism causing significant property damage
- Theft or criminal mischief
- Gang-related activity or intimidation
- Criminal misuse of technology, including threats made online or via devices

Response and Disciplinary Action

1. Law enforcement will be contacted immediately.
2. Parents/guardians will be notified without delay.
3. The student may be suspended from school during the investigation.
4. A **due process hearing** will be conducted, during which the student will have the opportunity to present their account.
5. Based on the outcome of the investigation and hearing, the student may be dismissed from the school.

This policy exists to protect the safety and well-being of the entire school community and to ensure that serious misconduct is addressed promptly and appropriately.

****Special Note Regarding Suspensions/Dismissal/Pending Due Process Hearings***

Any Okaloosa Academy student who is suspended or dismissed from school and school functions shall be prohibited from entering upon the premises or grounds of Okaloosa Academy and all Okaloosa County School District functions during the school day or when a school activity is being held.

School Climate and Culture

Statement on Positive School Culture and Zero Tolerance for Derogatory Language

Our goal is to cultivate a positive school culture where all students feel safe, respected, and supported. We believe that every individual has the right to learn and grow in an environment free from harassment, discrimination, and harmful language.

Derogatory terms—including racial slurs and any language targeting a student or group based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or any other protected class—will not be tolerated under any circumstances. These behaviors are harmful, divisive, and have no place in our school community.

A collective culture allows every student to reach their highest potential without being forced to accept inappropriate behavior as a social norm. We are committed to upholding standards that reflect dignity, equity, and respect for *all* students, particularly those belonging to historically marginalized or protected groups. Every student deserves a school environment that values who they are and supports who they are becoming.

Parent and Family Engagement

We believe that our school can only reach its full potential when families and schools form a true partnership. Every parent and all caregivers provide essential knowledge, perspective, and support that shapes student engagement and success—now and in the long run. By building trust and inviting families into the core of our educational mission, we ensure that **each student is supported, seen, and empowered** through a collaborative, caring educational journey.

Okaloosa Academy Charter School

Student/Parent Handbook – 2025-2026

Acknowledgement Form

By signing below, I certify that the Student/Parent Handbook has been explained to me and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions.

In signing, I also certify that I have received a copy of the Student Code of Conduct Handbook.

My signature indicates that I have read and understand the rules of Okaloosa Academy.

My signature as a student on this form also indicates that I agree to accept and comply with these rules and the direction of staff at all times.

Student Printed Name: _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____