



Monticello Community School District

2026-27

Panther Academy

Parent Handbook



Notice of Nondiscrimination-Policy #102.0E2

It is the policy of the Monticello Community School District not to discriminate in its educational programs, activities and employment practices on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, sexual orientation, age (for employment), actual or potential parental, family or marital status. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. If you have questions or a grievance related to this policy or for information about the district's grievance procedures please contact the District's Equity Coordinator, Todd Werner, 860 East Oak Street, Monticello, Iowa 52310, 319-465-3000, todd.werner@monticello.k12.ia.us.

Approved: 7/27/2026

Monticello Community School District

Mission Statement:

The Mission of the Monticello Community Schools, a District striving for educational excellence, is to prepare students through challenging experiences, to be caring, productive, creative citizens who will be lifelong learners.

Vision:

Providing rigorous, authentic personalized learning utilizing the local and global communities

Core Values:

Effective Instruction ~ Technology & 21st Century Learning ~ Collaborative Relationships

2026-2027

Monticello Board of Education

Craig Stadtmueller – President

Mandy Norton – Vice President

John Schlarmann

Tony Amsler

Creighton Randolph

Tammy Helgens, Panther Academy Director

Email: tammy.helgens@monticello.k12.ia.us

Shannon Elementary
321 West South Street
Monticello, Iowa 52310
319-465-5425

Welcome to Panther Academy!!

Mission Statement:

The mission of Panther Academy is to provide high quality, developmentally appropriate child care services for school aged children in a safe and educational environment.

Program Locations:

Panther Academy is located in the cafeteria/gym at Shannon Elementary School. Entrance into the program is through the doors located behind the school by the playground. Parking is located in the back of the school.

Hours of Operation:

School days:	6:30 am – Start of School
	After school – 6:00 pm

Summer/no school days:	6:30am – 6:00pm
------------------------	-----------------

Holidays:

Panther Academy will be closed on the following holidays*:

New Year's Day	Thanksgiving
Good Friday	Friday after Thanksgiving
Memorial Day	Christmas Eve
Independence Day	Christmas Day
Labor Day	New Year's Eve

*If the holiday falls on a weekend, this day will be observed on the weekday before the holiday.

*The center will also be closed for two in-service days in August each year and two days after the last day of school for professional development and for cleaning.

Weather Cancellations:

During times of bad weather, it is our intent to remain open. If we decide to close or adjust hours of operation to ensure the safety of our staff, parent notification will occur in the same manner as our school district notification process (via KCRG and KWWL as "Panther Academy," district web page, and district Facebook page, etc.)

Please see our school district website for more information:

<https://www.monticello.k12.ia.us/cancellations-delays/>

Other weather-related notes:

- If school is delayed or cancelled due to extreme cold or fog, Panther Academy will open at the regular time and will serve breakfast.
- If school is delayed or cancelled due to adverse road conditions, Panther Academy will open at the discretion of administration and notification of any change will be posted at the locations listed above.
- Extreme heat situations are determined on a case-by-case basis, depending upon the availability of an alternate location.

- If school is cancelled, your child must bring in his/her own lunch.
- If school is let out early due to bad weather, we will make every effort to continue to stay open.

Enrollment:

Panther Academy follows the licensing criteria set forth by the Department of Health and Human Services for the State of Iowa. Due to available space for the program, Panther Academy is licensed for up to 60 children attending at one time. Staff to child ratio is 1 staff for every 12 children (age 4 and up).

To enroll your child at Panther Academy, the parent/guardian must fill out an enrollment packet which contains the following items. These records must be updated annually to maintain enrollment.

Intake Packet:

1. Emergency contact form: Authorization for emergency medical/dental procedures, parent information, and emergency contacts.
2. Pick-up Permission Form. Please note: When someone new picks up your child, even if they are on the list, please make sure they have appropriate ID.
3. Release information: travel, picture, movie and records.
4. Medication Authorization: sunscreen and antibiotic ointment.
5. School-age health assessment.
6. Enrollment Contract – To show if you child will be regularly scheduled or drop in only (See below for more information)
7. Panther Academy Handbook Acceptance Form – To ensure you have read and understand the terms set forth within this handbook.

Other forms that will be needed for summer enrollment:

- Field Trip Permission Form – This form gives your child permission to attend field trips with the Panther Academy program. This would include going on a special trip, as well as going to the library or pool. More information about field trips and costs associated will be provided as they are scheduled.
- Swim Permission Form – For those attending the summer program only

Preschool Age

Panther Academy will accept children beginning at age 4. Panther Academy follows the Monticello School District calendar, and-provides all day care on Wednesdays (*only for Little Panthers Preschool students*) and when Monticello Schools are not in session. See list of Holidays for planned closures.

Attendance:

Each family must fill out an enrollment contract for each session of Panther Academy (school year and summer). This contract will indicate whether your child will be regularly scheduled OR drop-in only. For those with a regular schedule, please fill in the days / times you expect your child to attend. For those who would like drop-in only, you must notify Panther Academy at least 48 hours in advance of when your child will be attending. In both situations you will only be charged for days that your child attends, but this information is needed to plan for staffing and to ensure we are not close to our maximum capacity (60 children).

Please note: for drop in families, we reserve the right to deny your request if our regular scheduled families are in attendance and we are at capacity.

Panther Academy Rates:

Registration Fees:

Registration fees are assessed at the start of each session (beginning of the school year and the start of summer). This fee holds your spot at the Academy and helps to cover costs of supplies, materials and healthy snacks. Registration fees must be turned in by the first day of each session and are non-refundable.

School Year Session: \$40

Summer Session: \$40

Attendance Fees:

School Year – On school days:

Number of Children:	1 st Child in attendance	2 nd Child in attendance	3 rd Child in attendance
Per Hour Fee*	\$6.00	\$5.50	\$5.00

School Year – No school days & Summer Program Rates

Number of Children	1 st Child in attendance	2 nd Child in attendance	3 rd Child in attendance
Full Day (over 5 hours)	\$32.50	\$30.25	\$27.75
Half Day (under 5 hours)*	\$27.00	\$25.00	\$23.00

****Children will be charged a minimum of one hour when attending Panther Academy during the school year. During summer hours children will be charged a minimum of ½ day.***

*****If a child is not picked up by 6pm according to the clock at Panther Academy, staff will contact the parent(s)/guardian. If no one can be reached, staff will then call the emergency contacts. There will be a fee of \$1.00 for each minute the child is at Panther Academy past 6pm. For families on Child Care Assistance, payment of the late pick-up fee will be the responsibility of the family.***

Billing & Payments:

Each family will receive a Panther Academy invoice each week. Charges listed on the invoice are for the previous week's attendance. **Full payment of fees is due within one week, on the following Thursday.**

If payment is not made in a timely manner, we reserve the right to suspend care until payment is made. **Make all checks out to Panther Academy.**

If payment is not made within one week of statement delivery, a verbal reminder will be given for payment. If payment is not made within two weeks of statement delivery, a written warning/payment plan will be delivered for payment. If payment is not received then child can no longer attend until payment is brought up to date. If no payment is received within the month; it will be turned over to a collection agency.

Statements will be placed in your family folder located in the communication/check-in center. Be sure to check that folder regularly for communication.

Withdrawal from the Program:

Please notify the Director of intent to withdraw from the Academy at least two weeks in advance.

Arrival and Departure:

Parents are expected to bring their child into the program and pick them up from the program. This is needed to ensure that the staff is aware of the arrival and departure of each child. It is also an expectation that each parent sign his/her child in and out of the program each day. This is important to ensure attendance is accurately tracked and is utilized in the event of an emergency.

All children must have an authorized pick-up form on file at the academy. Staff will check the photo ID of any unfamiliar person trying to gain access. No child will be released to any person that is not on their authorized pick-up list. In the event that someone who is not on the authorized list would try to pick up the child, the child's parent/guardian will be notified immediately and authorities will be contacted if deemed necessary.

Absences:

Please notify the program as soon as you can if your child will be absent. You may either provide a written note, email, or call the Academy. Staff will contact families if a child does not arrive by their scheduled arrival time. If your child is out with illness, please notify staff so we can monitor for other children displaying the same symptoms. When you contact the school to report an absence that information is not passed on, you *must* also contact Panther Academy staff.

Parental Access Policy:

Parents have unlimited access to their children while attending Panther Academy. Parents are encouraged to visit at any time. Parents may also call to inquire about their child. If parental contact is prohibited, Panther Academy must have a copy of the court order on file.

Food & Nutrition:

Panther Academy follows the recommended guidelines of the Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). During our school program, Panther Academy provides a daily snack. For non-school days and in the summer, Panther Academy will provide breakfast and one snack. A menu will be posted so that you are aware of the food being offered. Exceptions to the menu are made due to allergies, medical conditions, religion, etc. Parents must notify us of exceptions in writing. All menus are subject to change.

Breakfast is served at 8:15am-8:45am

Snack is served from 3:00pm-3:30pm

During the summer months and on no school days, a sack lunch is needed. In order to meet recommended nutritional guidelines, please try to ensure your child's lunch contains one serving of dairy, one serving of grain, one serving of protein and one fruit or vegetable. Please note, due to the CACFP guidelines, Panther Academy will supplement food brought from home to ensure nutrition standards are met for any children who have not yet started Kindergarten. If supplementing is needed, an extra charge may apply.

Due to limited refrigeration space we ask that you provide an ice pack in your child's lunchbox for any items needing to stay cold. In addition we are not able to microwave any meals to ensure we are meeting the proper child-staff ratio.

Here are some examples of lunch items meeting the CACFP guidelines:

Dairy: Milk, Cheese, Yogurt

Protein: Cold Meat, Peanut Butter

Grain: Bread, Crackers

Fruit/Vegetable: Carrots, Celery, Fresh Fruit, Fruit cups

Snacks for special occasions: If you choose to bring a treat to celebrate a special event, we will serve the treat in addition to our snack item. If item is not pre-packaged, please provide a list of ingredients used so we screen for any food allergies that may be present.

Health & Wellness:

It is our goal at Panther Academy to provide a safe and healthy environment. We ask that parents use good judgement when sending their children to the academy if the child shows signs of illness. As a general rule, children with the following symptoms should be kept at home.

- Fever in excess of 100 degrees
- Vomiting in the past 24 hours
- 2 or more instances of diarrhea within the past 24 hours
- Illness that interferes with the ability to care for other children and/or limits the participation of the child in daily activities

If your child should present any of the above symptoms while at Panther Academy, the parents will be notified immediately and will be asked to pick up the child. In addition, parents will be notified via the information board of any communicable diseases to which the children have been exposed.

If you determine after the fact your child was at the center with a communicable disease, please let staff know so that we can post it appropriately.

Medication:

All medication requires authorization by the parent. Prescription medications must be in the original container with the child's name located on it. The container must also have a label with the physician's name, direction and the name of the pharmacy. A Panther Academy Medication Form must be signed at the site.

Sunscreen:

During the summer months, sunscreen will be applied before any outdoor activity and throughout the day. We ask that 2 bottles of SPF 50 spray sunscreen are brought in at the beginning of the summer. This sunscreen will be community sunscreen and will be used by all. If your child has a sunscreen allergy or sensitivity issue, please let the staff know and provide a bottle of appropriate sunscreen with your child's name labeled on it.

Staff Training:

All staff is required to complete training each year. Every staff member is trained in CPR, First Aid, Bloodborne Pathogens/Universal Precautions and to be a Mandatory Reporter of abuse. Additionally, staff takes continuing education training as a way to continually improve the quality of care the center has to offer.

Hand Washing:

Panther Academy staff and children will demonstrate healthy personal hygiene to prevent and minimize the transmission of disease and illness.

Staff is required to wash their hands at the following times throughout the day:

- Upon arrival at the academy
- Immediately before and after eating or participating in any food service
- Before leaving the restroom either with a child or by themselves
- After handling or cleaning garbage
- Before and after giving medication
- After administering any kind of first aid

Children's hands are washed at the following times during the day:

- Immediately before and after any meal
- After using the restroom
- Immediately before and after participating in any food service activity
- After playing in the water that is used by more than one child

Facility Cleaning & Sanitation Policy:

Regular and thorough cleaning is done to maintain a clean and sanitized environment. All surfaces, furnishings and equipment that are contaminated by bodily fluids are taken out of service until they are cleaned and sanitized effectively to prevent the transmission of any disease. All employees have been trained in and practice Bloodborne pathogens/Universal Precautions.

Incidents/Accidents/Medical Emergencies:

In case of an accident or emergency at the program, every effort will be made to notify the parents immediately. If a parent cannot be reached, Panther Academy will be in contact with one of the emergency contacts.

Staff members are trained in CPR and First Aid. Panther Academy maintains two stocked first aid kits that are accessible to the employees and stored out the reach of children. Kits will be checked after each use and monthly.

When an immediate response is required, the following procedures will be used:

1. Staff will assess the situation and provide necessary first aid
2. If the situation is serious, staff will call 911 and notify parents/guardian (or emergency contact if parent/guardian can't be reached)

The staff is required to fill out an Incident Report for all incidents/accidents/medical emergencies that occur at Panther Academy. Both the staff member and parent will sign the report. The report will be kept in the child's file and is treated as confidential.

Dental Emergency:

The licensed oral health professional that has been designated by the parent/guardian for emergencies will be contacted for advice on the emergency situation. If the situation warrants immediate care, the parent/guardian will be notified immediately. If we are unable to contact the parent/guardian, the emergency contact will be notified.

Program Information:

Curriculum & Activities:

Panther Academy provides activities that support children's natural desire to explore and create. Curriculum opportunities include four main areas of development: Social and Emotional, Language, Physical and Cognitive. We provide curriculum and activities that enable each child to develop new skills at their own pace. Our main goal is to provide a safe, supportive and healthy environment for children.

Fieldtrips:

Field trips play a major role in our summer program. In order for your child to partake in the field trip, a permission slip is required. Panther Academy uses Monticello School District buses as the means of transportation. Please note additional fees may apply for field trips.

Clothing:

Children are asked to wear (or have available) tennis shoes and play clothes. Children are able to partake in many more activities if they are wearing sturdy shoes and comfortable clothes. We ask that each child dress each day in clothing that is seasonally appropriate. In the winter we will go outside and winter clothing should include coat/hat/mittens/gloves/snow pants/boots. Please ensure to label all articles of clothing with your child's name.

Items Brought from Home:

The program contains many games and activities for the children to participate in; therefore, we do not allow games/toys to be brought from home. If items are brought in, we will ask that they remain in the schoolbag. Panther Academy will not be held responsible for any lost or stolen items.

Non-Center/Extracurricular Activity:

If your child will be leaving during the time they are scheduled to be at Panther Academy in order to take part in another activity, a non-center activity form must be completed. This form releases the child from our care.

Behavior Management:

Panther Academy follows a proactive, positive approach to behavior management. This aligns with the Monticello School District's commitment to Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS).

The foundation of PBIS is ensuring that all children *know* and *understand* behavior expectations. It is our intent to consistently teach expectations for behavior in a variety of ways (discussion, verbal cues, visual cues). All of the rules within Panther Academy relate to the PBIS expectations of "Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe."

When a non-violent inappropriate behavior occurs that requires staff intervention, the following steps are followed:

1. Staff states the expected behavior in the situation ("The safe way to put the crayons away is to set them gently in the tub.")
2. Staff will model the appropriate behavior and reteach the expectation.
3. Staff will redirect the child to a different activity. Staff will provide choices to the child when appropriate.
4. If the behavior continues after staff intervention, the child will be asked to move away from the group to take a break. The child will return to the group when they feel they are ready to participate appropriately.
5. Staff will consistently provide positive reinforcement to children showing appropriate behaviors and following expectations.

When a physically violent/aggressive behavior occurs, the staff will intervene immediately and follow these steps:

1. Address the child or object that is targeted, ensuring their safety. Provide emotional support and treat injury if needed.
2. Address the child displaying the unsafe behavior. Move away from the problem situation, or move others away from that child to ensure safety.
3. State the expected behavior in that situation. Ask the child to explain the situation, and problem solve how that behavior could be handled differently the next time it occurs.
4. The staff may ask the child to move away from the group or take a break. The child will return to the group when they are ready to participate appropriately.
5. Staff will write a behavior report explaining the situation. Notification will be given to the parent of the child displaying the aggressive behavior and to the parent of the child that was targeted.

For ongoing inappropriate behavior, the Director will request a meeting with the child, their parents, and the program Supervisor. The group will work to create a behavior plan that addresses the specific needs of that child.

Biting:

Biting normally occurs in children from birth to age 3. Every biting incident is unique and needs to be handled with care for both children involved. Biting can occur for many reasons and it is our goal at the academy to prevent the triggers that lead to biting.

If an incident does occur, the child who receives the bite will immediately receive care, compassion and first aid as needed. The child that bit will also receive care and first aid as needed and be reprimanded in a positive but firm manner (Example: Teeth are for eating and not biting others – biting hurts). In the instance of the child that bites repeatedly staff may consult the parent/guardian to work on a plan of action to address the behavior.

When children bite, their parents are informed personally and privately the same day. All information is confidential and the names of the children involved in the incident are not shared between parents. In addition, biting is always documented on our standard incident form which is completed and signed by teacher, parents and an administrator is notified. One copy is given to the parent and one copy is kept in a locked file cabinet in office.

Discharge:

We reserve the right to terminate enrollment if we feel a child is here at his/her or other children's detriment or if policies are breached. This could include, but is not limited to:

1. Not providing updated information to Panther Academy as needed to maintain a current file.
2. Paying the bills in a timely manner or using the payment plan set up by the director.
3. Child is a threat to other children, self or staff.
4. Three behavior reports in one session (Fall, Spring or Summer).

Access Policy:

Our center has a lock on the outside door. The door remains locked at all times and unauthorized individuals are not allowed to enter Panther Academy. Those who wish to enter will ring the buzzer and a staff member will assist them and determine if they are authorized to enter. We are responsible for ensuring the safety of children at Panther Academy and preventing harm by being proactive and diligent in supervising not only the children, but other people who are at the facility.

The only people who have "Unrestricted Access" to a child at Panther Academy are staff members and substitutes who have had background checks and approval to be involved in child care. All other individuals entering the Academy will have "Restricted Access" (and will not be left alone with any child other than their own).

Staff will supervise parents/guardians/visitors while on our property. If the staff has conflict arise with any individual, they will move all children to a safe area and contact the proper authorities.

Emergency Procedures

Fire/Tornado:

Fire and tornado drills are conducted monthly. Panther Academy has emergency procedures posted.

In the event of a fire, children/staff will be evacuated from the building. Headcount will be conducted once outside from a safe distance. If we are unable to re-enter the building at Shannon, we will be relocated to Carpenter Elementary using school district means of transportation. Parents/guardians will be notified immediately via phone calls and in the same manner as our school district notification process (via news media outlets, Facebook, School District web page, School Messenger, etc.)

In the event of a tornado, the designated shelter area is located in the Panther Academy office. All staff and children will remain in the shelter until an 'all clear' is called.

Environmental or Health Hazard, Chemical Spills, Bomb Threat, Power Failure & Structural Damage:

In the event of any emergency listed above, Panther Academy will be relocated to a safe area within the building OR to Carpenter School if deemed necessary. If children are removed from the premises, school district transportation will be used and parents/guardians will be notified immediately via phone calls and in the same manner as our school district notification process (via news media outlets, Facebook, School District web page, Iowa School Alerts, etc.) If the building is found to be unsafe for reentry Panther Academy will operate at Carpenter Elementary at 615 N Gill Street, Monticello.

Intruders in the Center:

Panther Academy has a secure locked door. All visitors are to ring the buzzer in order to enter. Any unfamiliar persons will be asked for identification. In the event that someone enters the Academy that is deemed a safety risk to staff or children, the authorities will be alerted and the children will be moved into the office for safety reasons. Children will never be released to anyone other than those listed on the authorized pick-up list or those who have been temporarily been granted permission by the parent/guardian (via phone call or written note).

Intoxicated Parents:

In the event a staff member suspects a parent/guardian (or designated pick-up person) is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the staff will state their suspicion and request that the parent/guardian contact an alternate pick up from the child's emergency contact list. In the event that this person protests a request for a second pick up person and chooses to leave with the child, staff will gather descriptive information about the vehicle and immediately call the police.

Lost or Abducted Child:

In an event where a child is suspected lost or missing, all children at Panther Academy will be accounted for. The staff will confirm that the child has not been picked up and a thorough search for the child will be made throughout the entire building and grounds. If the child is still missing, local authorities and parent/guardian will be contacted immediately. All other children will be accounted for.

Acknowledgement of Receipt of the Handbook

The content of this parent handbook may be modified, revoked, suspended, terminated or changed at any time by the academy.

Parents Acknowledgement – By signing the below I acknowledge that I have read and understand the policies contained herein. I have received my copy of this handbook and I understand it is my responsibility to read and comply with the polies and guidelines contained in this handbook and any revisions to it.

Received this _____ Day of _____, 20____

Parent/Guardian Signature_____

Parent/Guardian Signature_____

We thank you for the opportunity to care for your child!

