

Independence Nontraditional School

14550 Aden Road, Manassas, VA 20112

571-374-6600 • Fax 571-350-9641 • independence.pwcs.edu

Dr. Robert L. Eichorn, Principal

August 9, 2021

Dear Parents and Students,

I am pleased to welcome you to Independence Nontraditional School, home of the Mighty Wolves, for the 2021-22 school year. Our staff members have been working diligently to prepare for the opening of school on Monday, August 23, 2021. We are very excited to meet and greet our students! This letter will provide you with some basic information intended to help you get ready for the upcoming school year. Please be sure to check the school website (<http://independence.pwcs.edu/>) often for updates.

Independence has an updated automated telephone system. Our hope is this will provide better customer service to you by allowing you to make direct contact with key offices within our building. There are several menu options from which to select, to include High School, Middle School, Center, School Counseling/Student Services, Attendance, Security, and more. Please listen to the entire menu prior to selecting an option. This will allow you to connect with the appropriate office to answer specific questions, for example, calls regarding student enrollment, clarification of student schedules, or student record requests should be directed to the School Counseling/Student Services Office by selecting option 4, or should you wish to speak to your student's administrator, select the appropriate sub-school office, menu options 1-3. Thank you in advance for listening to all menu options as this will ensure you reach the correct person who will process your request in a timely manner. Please reference the chart below to assist you in selecting the appropriate option when contacting Independence.

Office/Department	Menu Option	Reason for Call
High School Office (HS)	1	Speak with HS administrator, contact HS teacher, discipline/behavior, online learning, MS/HS Special Education questions/meetings, etc.
Middle School Office (MS)	2	Speak with MS administrator, contact MS teacher, discipline/behavior, etc.
Center Office	3	All matters pertaining to Center students - grades, attendance, discipline, counseling, etc.
School Counseling/Student Services	4	Enrollment, records requests, testing, questions regarding student schedule, transcript, grades, speak with counselor, etc.
Attendance Office	5	Notify school of student absence, attendance notification letters, etc.
Transportation	6 - for MS/HS 3 - for Center	INS MS/HS Bus route information. If the bus is late to pick up or drop off your student, please contact 571.402.3902 or 571.402.3903.
Clinic/School Nurse	7	Health information and concerns
Security	8	Student parking, discipline, safety and security questions
Cafeteria	9	Questions regarding school meals
All Other Matters	0	To reach the main office, contact principal, contact a teacher, etc.

The new school year is here, and we are looking forward to seeing all of you!



Prince William County

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Providing A World-Class Education

www.pwcs.edu

Independence Nontraditional School

Our administration, administrative support, and counseling teams are here to help your child have a successful school experience.

Administration

Dr. Robert Eichorn, Principal
Mr. Ralph Block, HS Administrator
Ms. Amy Cole, HS Administrator
Ms. Marian Jones-Brooks, HS Administrator
Mr. Brandon Neal, MS Administrator
Ms. Jodi Pankowski, Center Administrator
Mr. Inmar Romero, HS Administrator
Mr. Joseph Bagnerise, Security Director

School Counseling

Ms. Karre Jones, Director
Ms. Michelle Barbetta – Alpha H-O
Ms. Cathy Fermo – Middle School Counselor
Ms. Laura Kehoe – Alpha P-Z
Ms. Keenea Otoo – Alpha A-G
Ms. Lynn Morrow – Career Counselor
Ms. Theresa Mahmood – School Social Worker Ctr. Gr. 9 - 10
Ms. Emily Morgan – School Psychologist Ctr. Grades K - 8
Ms. Dolly Saini – School Psychologist Ctr. Grades 11 – 12
Dr. Michelle Darter – School Psychologist MS/HS
Ms. Shannon Frazier – Social Worker MS/HS

We are fortunate to have flexible and high-performing staff to provide counseling and emotional support for all Independence Nontraditional School students.

Attendance

Research validates that daily attendance has a direct correlation to a student's academic success.

New school reporting and follow-up practices required by the Code of Virginia (Compulsory Attendance Law 22.1-254) make it more important than ever to communicate with schools when students have excused absences. Changes to the law now require that specific school measures be taken when absences are unexcused.

- Five unexcused absences, schools must have an attendance conference and initiate an attendance improvement plan.
- Six unexcused absences require a second attendance conference.
- Seven unexcused absences, PWCS is required to report whether legal charges were initiated against the student and/or parent, or whether charges were not initiated because an improvement plan is in place and working.

When students are absent, please send a written note or email to our attendance secretary explaining the reason for the absence as soon as possible. The attendance secretary for middle and high school students is Ms. Corina Sierra. She can be reached at 571-374-6610 or by email at SierraC@pwcs.edu. Attendance notes for The Center students will be processed by Ms. deLongchamp. She can be reached at 571-374-6611 or via email at DelongDJ@pwcs.edu.

Virginia law requires schools to send an autodial voice message to the telephone number parents/guardians identify as their current residential telephone any time their student is absent. We may communicate in other ways as well.

Be sure to contact your school attendance office at 571-374-6600 (Menu option 5) or fax to 571-350-9641 if we can assist you in identifying, avoiding, or correcting attendance concerns.

Driving or Picking Up Your Child to or from School

Parents who plan to drive their children to or from school should:

- Utilize the designated pick-up/drop-off lane in the front of the school.
- Avoid picking up your child during dismissal. It's very difficult to release individual students once dismissal begins. Please help us in helping you to get your child safely to your vehicle by arranging for pickup shortly after our main dismissal.

Student Devices

We have scheduled opportunities for parents to come to Independence to pick up a laptop for student use at home. All students will have a device in every classroom while in the building. The following dates and times are scheduled:

- August 17 – 12 p.m. – 3 p.m.
- August 18 – 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.
- August 19 – 12 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Stay Connected: ParentVUE

ParentVUE is the best resource for parents/guardians to update their student's information and stay connected and engaged in their student's progress. Please use ParentVUE to provide INS with your correct residential address, telephone number, and email address. It is important for us to have correct contact information on file in the event of an emergency or other need should we need to contact you.

Parents and guardians receive instructions on how to set up their ParentVUE account upon student enrollment. If you are unable to access your ParentVUE account or need assistance, please contact our Parent Outreach Secretary, Ms. Berrios at BerrioM@pwcs.edu or Ms. Karen Jack-Habina at JackhaKD@pwcs.edu. Please note only parents/guardians with legal rights to access a student's educational record are able to establish an account. If you are a parent/guardian and did not receive an activation email or deleted it, please contact the above-listed staff.

Bus Information: PLEASE KNOW YOUR CHILD'S BUS NUMBER.

Bus schedules will be available by accessing the "Find My Bus" search tool on the Transportation web page and the link is also posted on the Independence website. Specific questions about bus stop locations and times should be directed to Transportation at 571.402.3940. *Please make sure your child is aware of his/her bus number before leaving for school, especially in cases where students are driven to school in the morning and must ride the bus home in the afternoon.* **Transportation information for the first day is being sent to student and parent email accounts during the week of August 16.**

Additionally, parents are encouraged to sign up for the mobile app, Here Comes the Bus™, from your My PWCS Mobile App. The instructions on how to sign up are as follows:

- 1) Click the Here Comes the Bus button from My PWCS or visit herecomesthebus.com
- 2) Click the Sign-Up button
- 3) Enter school code **76348** and click "Next" followed by "Confirm"
- 4) Complete the "User Profile" box
- 5) Under "My Students," click "Add." Enter your child's last name and student ID number
- 6) Once you confirm your information, you're ready to begin using Here Comes the Bus!

Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

Independence Nontraditional School has a large student membership. Therefore, transition into the building is very important. Each program level is assigned an entry door to the building. Students are expected to enter these doors unless they have an approved exception.

Door 16 – Middle School
Door 17 – Center
Door 18 – High School

Morning Arrival

- Middle and high school students will be released from buses at 7:30 a.m. and go immediately from the bus to the cafeteria for "Grab-n-Go" and then report to class.
- Center students will be released from buses at 7:45 a.m. and report to homeroom and then be escorted to the cafeteria for breakfast. Grades K – 8 will remain in the cafeteria to eat breakfast. Grades 9 - 12 are "Grab-n-Go."

Center Dismissal: begins at 1:45 p.m.

Car riders will be dismissed through the main entrance. Parents will be parked in designated locations. Please do not leave your car unattended in the drop-off/pick-up lane.

Middle and High School Dismissal

1st Shift dismissal begins at 11 a.m. 2nd Shift dismissal begins at approximately at 2:30 p.m. 3rd Shift dismissal begins at approximately 5:30 p.m. Car riders will be dismissed through the main entrance. Parents will be parked in designated locations. Please do not leave your car unattended in the drop-off/pick-up lane.

Cafeteria Information

Independence Nontraditional School will provide breakfast and/or lunch to each student at no cost. Breakfast is provided to Middle and High School students from 7:30 – 7:45 a.m., and Center students from 7:47 – 8 a.m. We encourage our students to eat a healthy breakfast each day. Students will not have to wait in long lines. They simply grab their breakfast, sit and eat, or go to class and eat based on our schedule. Eating breakfast gives everyone a great start to the day.

Class Schedules/Shift Assignments

Middle and high school students will receive their class schedule on site on the first day of school. Secondary students (middle/high school) will be provided their class schedule prior to picking up their breakfast. Additionally, secondary students will receive only their bus information electronically.

Center students will receive their class schedule on the first day of school. The student's teacher will call parents to provide bus and homeroom information prior to the first day of school.

Athletics & Activities Participation

We are excited to offer athletic and activities programs at Independence. When they begin, we will provide information and concussion training as required.

School Hours & Visitor Check-in Procedures

The secondary school day begins at 7:47 a.m. with the pledge of allegiance, moment of silence, and announcements. The instructional day begins at 7:47 a.m. and concludes at 2:30 p.m. Students will be allowed into the building beginning at 7:30 a.m. and buses will be released at approximately 2:37 p.m.

The high school program offers three shifts to students:

- First shift begins at 7:47 a.m. and ends at 11 a.m.
- Second shift begins at 11:32 a.m. and ends at 2:30 p.m.
- Third shift begins at 2:32 p.m. and ends at 5:30 p.m.
- All day shift begins at 7:47 a.m. and ends at 2:30 p.m.

The middle school program offers two shifts to students:

- All day shift begins at 7:47 a.m. and ends at 2:30 p.m.
- Third shift begins at 2:32 p.m. and ends at 5:30 p.m.

The Center school day begins at 8 a.m. and concludes at 1:45 p.m. Students will be allowed into the building beginning at 7:45 a.m. and buses will be released at approximately 1:45 p.m.

School office hours are 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. In keeping with our ongoing commitment to safety, our school has an entry system requiring all visitors to push a buzzer at the main entrance and identify themselves before being permitted to enter the building. Visitors will then report to the reception/attendance desk and follow check-in procedures, including picture identification collection and scanning and the creation of a visitor's pass. This entry system and procedure is required at all times.

Back-to-School Nights

Our Back-to-School Night program will be held September 30, 2021 from 6 – 8 p.m. This event provides parents the opportunity to meet their child's teachers, counselors, and administrators to answer any questions parents may have.

Special Education and Intervention Team Meeting Days

We have an outstanding team of highly trained teachers, specialists, and administrators to support our families of students receiving special education services. Our meeting days are Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, we will work with parents when possible to support their schedules.

Right to Special Programs/Services

The Prince William County Public Schools Division is required to inform the community of a student's right to a free, appropriate public education and the availability of programs and services, including special education and services for our English Language Learners. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) are federal laws that give the School Division certain responsibilities with respect to providing such educational programs to students with disabilities. Under the IDEA and Section 504, the School Division has the responsibility to actively and continuously identify, locate, and evaluate those children, infant to age 21, living in Prince William County who may be in need of special education and/or related services, or adaptations or accommodations to regular education services. These laws also require the School Division to:

- Refer for possible evaluation any student of school age living in the School Division who a school staff member suspects may be disabled.
- Provide appropriate educational and school-related opportunities to students with disabilities in an inclusive setting to the maximum extent appropriate.
- Provide notice of the availability of services and types and location of services to nearby private schools, pediatricians, and the Health Department.
- Provide parents/guardians of students with disabilities with notice of their rights annually, and prior to their student's evaluation and placement, or any significant change in their student's placement.
- Develop and implement procedural safeguards with respect to actions regarding the identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities.
- Provide written notice of the School Division's procedural safeguards to parents or guardians.

Parental Involvement

Show your Wolf pride! We welcome you as educational partners. Please join our PTSO and attend school events often. If you own a business and you are willing to sponsor one of our many clubs, we need you! We are also looking for participation on our School Advisory Council to the principal. This is a great way to support the strategic planning of Independence Nontraditional School. Please contact Jan Smith at 571-374-6600 if you are interested in these wonderful opportunities to serve.

I hope this letter has been helpful in your efforts to prepare for school. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to visit our website at <http://independence.pwcs.edu> for additional information. I am honored to work with all of you and look forward to a fantastic year at Independence Nontraditional School.

Pandemic Protocols

Student and Staff Face Coverings: Wearing a properly fitted face covering (over mouth and nose) is mandatory for all students, staff, and visitors. This is non-negotiable. There will be times, in certain circumstances, where teachers can allow a face-mask break when more than adequate spacing is present. Students may wear a face shield in addition to a face mask, but face shields alone are not an allowable substitute for a face mask. Students are expected to wear their own properly fitted mask from the time they are at the bus stop until the time they arrive home.

Transportation Safety: PWCS school buses will be running at standard capacity. All PWCS bus drivers will wear masks while on their bus, whether students are on board or not. Students are to wear a properly fitted face mask with their mouth and nose covered. Students are required to keep their face mask on the entire time they are on the bus.

Sanitization: Our school building will be thoroughly sanitized each day and receive a deep-clean during the evening in high touch areas. Staff will sanitize student desks and high-touch surface areas between classes. Custodial staff have been trained on enhanced cleaning procedures in response to a positive or presumptive case of COVID-19. The cleaning scope will be implemented based on the risk of potential contamination as determined by Student Health Services, in coordination with the impacted school and/or department. Custodial staff will close off the affected area(s) and open any outside doors/windows to increase air circulation as quickly as possible. Custodial staff will clean and disinfect with a backpack sprayer or an electrostatic sprayer when necessary to ensure adequate coverage.

Restrooms: Students will not be allowed entry into the restrooms during class change. During class, with permission from their teacher, students will be given individual access to the restroom. Bathrooms will be cleaned frequently by staff.

Hallways: Students will move through the hallways using social distance whenever and wherever possible and will be strongly encouraged to maintain safe distance from others.

Backpacks: Students are not allowed to bring backpacks to school. If extenuating circumstances prevail and a student is required to bring a backpack to school, it will be placed in a lockbox upon arrival at school.

Clinic Visits:

- Visits to the clinic will be restricted to serious injury, illness or scheduled “well visits.”
- “Well Visits” consist of things such as taking medication, checking blood-sugar, etc. and will be scheduled at a specific time for each student with the need, and take place in the clinic. Students must strictly adhere to their scheduled time.
- “Sick Visits” consist of treating students who are currently ill. The School Nurse, with strict adherence to VDH guidelines, will consult with all ill students. Any student showing symptoms associated with COVID-19 will be treated in an isolation room, until they are picked-up by a parent. Please do not send your child to school knowing that he/she has a symptom of COVID-19.
- “Serious Injuries” consist of accidents resulting in injury and will be treated at the location of the injury (if unable to move) or in the Clinic.

If you have any questions, concerns, or need to notify the school of a possible COVID-19 infection or exposure involving your student, please feel free to reach out to the following staff members for assistance:

- Ms. Ladelle Tilitsky, School Nurse; tilitsla@pwcs.edu; 571-374-6608
- Ms. Heather Wisnieski, School Nurse; wisniehr@pwcs.edu; 571-374-6627

Student health and safety are of the utmost importance and your efforts are crucial to the success of our school year. Moreover, your partnership to ensure the safety and wellness of your student and all stakeholders at Independence is critical.

We understand this is a large volume of information and our staff is available to answer any questions you have as we prepare for the school year. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your student’s administrator, counselor, or me.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Eichorn, Ed.D.
Principal

RLE/js

Enclosures