

Independence Nontraditional School
Safe School Letter
2021-22

Welcome to Independence Nontraditional School (INS), where our students can be empowered learners in a small, structured, and supportive environment that encourages optimal learning! We are as excited as you to see your growth and success as you continue your educational journey with us!

Along with academic success, safety is our highest priority. Our staff enjoys working with students and families as we believe keeping our school community safe is most important. We ask you to acknowledge your responsibility and demonstrate your commitment to maintaining our safe school community by making good choices, keeping your emotions under control, and treating peers and staff with respect.

At INS, you do not have to navigate your emotions alone. Our staff is available to help in situations of unease or crisis. We encourage you to reach out to our counselors and staff when you need support. As you go through your time here, keep in mind that while you may make good decisions and follow rules, others may not. If you become aware that a student may have a weapon or prohibited item in his/her possession or if a student has the intention to harm themselves, others, or property, you are asked to report this information to a staff member as soon as possible. Confidentiality is important, your name will not be shared; other students will not know who brought the information to us. Always know that the staff, teachers, counselors, and administrators are here to help you in any way, so please do not hesitate to ask for assistance if you need it.

As a student of Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS), it is expected that you read and understand the “Code of Behavior” and the student developed Code of Expectations. You are required to follow all rules and regulations set forth in the PWCS “Code of Behavior,” and by the state and federal government.

At INS, we have developed the following policies in conjunction with PWCS Policies and Regulations to maintain a welcoming, positive, and safe learning environment for all our students and staff:

Attendance (Regulation 724-1)

- I am expected to come to school on time each day that school is in session.
- My parent/guardian needs to call the school when I will be late or absent and send in a written note to provide an explanation for my absence within five (5) days of my return to school.
- My parent/guardian may only excuse a maximum of ten (10) absences throughout the school year without providing certifying documentation from a medical provider and/or subpoena.
- If I miss the bus, car, or experience car trouble, my tardy or absence will be classified as unexcused.
- If I have five (5) unexcused absences, my parent/guardian and I will meet with my counselor to develop an attendance plan.
- If I have seven (7) unexcused absences, my parent/guardian and I will meet with my administrator to review my attendance plan and discuss further action, including referral to the Attendance Officer, and possible legal charges being filed against myself or my parent/guardian.
- If I have ten (10) cumulative absences (excused and/or unexcused), my parent/guardian will review my attendance plan and discuss further action with the Attendance Officer. I am aware possible legal charges may be filed against myself or my parent/guardian.
- I understand that PWCS defines chronic absenteeism as a minimum of 18 or more cumulative (excused and unexcused) absences.
- If I am participating in a remote learning shift assignment, I must be logged in and working for a minimum of ten (10) hours per week. Failure to log in and complete assignments for the minimum of ten (10) hours may result in being assigned up to three (3) unexcused absences per week.

Bullying (Regulation 733.01-1)

- Bullying is defined as any aggressive and unwanted behavior intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor(s) and victim(s); and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma.
- Taunts, threats, insults, gossip, humiliation, teasing, intimidation, pushing, tripping, and hitting are all considered bullying behaviors and will not be tolerated. Taking into consideration the severity of these actions, disciplinary action may occur, up to and including suspension and referral to law enforcement authorities.
- Cyberbullying is any threat by one student towards another through electronic communications such as texts, private/direct messaging, emails, websites, social networking sites, and blogs that support deliberate, hostile, and/or hurtful messages intended to harm others.
- Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages/images; posting sensitive or private information about another person; and/or pretending to be someone else to make that person look bad; are all considered cyberbullying behaviors and will not be tolerated. Taking into consideration the severity of these actions, disciplinary action may occur up to and including suspension and referral to law enforcement authorities.

Cell Phones/Wireless Communication Devices (Regulation 295-1)

- I am responsible for my wireless communication device including, cell phones, smart phones, tablets, and E-readers if I choose to bring them to school. PWCS is not responsible for the security of my wireless communication device while on school property.
- My wireless communication device must be turned off or set to silent mode during school - no audible sounds are to be heard.
- Speakers and volume must be turned off and earphones should be used for audio content.
- Using or accessing my wireless communication device during a testing situation will be considered cheating and the appropriate disciplinary action will be assigned.
- My wireless communication device may be stored in the provided lock box, my locker, or my cubby until dismissal from school.
- If I choose to carry my wireless communication device on my person throughout the school day and it becomes a distraction or is being used inappropriately, it will be confiscated and will only be returned at the end of the school day.
- I may use my device on a school bus only if it does not distract the driver, compromise safety, or violate other school bus rules and regulations.
- If there is reasonable suspicion that I am using my device improperly or for a conduct or criminal violation, I understand that my wireless communication device may be searched, and I will be expected to unlock a password protected device for this search.
- It is expected that I release my wireless communication device upon request of confiscation.
- If I am found in violation of the rules for wireless communication device three (3) or more times, my device will be confiscated, and my parent/guardian will be required to retrieve the device. I will further be required to release my wireless communication device to security upon my arrival to school each day.
- Frequent violations of the INS cell phone/wireless communication device policy may result in disciplinary action, including being moved to third shift.
- Videotaping, recording, or photographing students/staff, on school grounds or the bus for the purpose of harassment, embarrassment, or harm is strictly prohibited.
- If I engage in any of the following behaviors: cyberbullying; inappropriate messaging; photographing or displaying still images or videotaping or displaying video of a person who is undressed or partially dressed and/or impersonation of someone other than myself, it may result in an investigation by the Prince William County Police Department and my device being confiscated as evidence, only to be returned upon closure of said investigation.

Citizenship, Accountability, Respect, Empathy, Safety (CARES) Behavior Expectations

I will follow the CARES Behavior Expectations throughout my day by:

- Coming to school on-time every day school is in session, bringing in a note from my parent/guardian if I am absent, and making up work missed during an absence.
- Remaining awake and engaged in my classroom activities and not falling asleep, putting my head down, or refusing to participate in classwork.
- Working appropriately and respectfully with staff to problem-solve situations and accepting feedback and help from staff regarding management of my behavior.
- Showing respect for staff, counselors, teachers, administration, and other students.
- Understanding defiance of authority, disrespect, or insubordination towards staff is not tolerated.
- Using appropriate language and mannerisms towards staff or other students.
- Being honest and forthcoming on all occasions and not attempting to hinder the administration's ability to provide a safe learning environment.
- Keeping my emotions under control and using strategies developed for me with staff, teachers, and counselors to assist with this management.

Dress Code (Regulation 734-1)

- My overall appearance must meet basic standards of health, safety, cleanliness, and decency.
- I am not permitted to wear or display items which represent drugs, alcohol or tobacco products, gang membership, or promote violence or hate.
- I am not permitted to wear a long trench coat, gloves, scarves, hats, bandanas, or bulky oversized coats within the school building.
- I am not permitted to wear any "Dickies" brand clothing items.
- The following items are considered improper dress as well as additional items administration deems necessary: skull caps; headbands; visors, non-religious head coverings; sunglasses; beachwear; sleeping apparel; undergarments worn as outer garments; garments which are excessively short; sheer "see-through" garments; clothing with lewd, obscene, patently offensive or sexually suggestive signs, slogans, pictures, or messages; garments which expose the midriff; garments which are too revealing and expose undergarments or excessively tight, form-fitting or which have very low necklines; jewelry or other items which can be used as a weapon; tops with oversized arm openings, strapless tops, tube tops, tops with spaghetti straps, tank tops; bare feet, bedroom slippers, stockings/socks only; cleats; and non-jewelry chains attached to clothing.
- If my appearance/dress/hygiene violates the school standards, I may be asked to remove the offensive items, change into appropriate clothing, or be sent home.

Face Covering and Social Distancing (Regulation 275-2)

I am aware that I am required to wear a face covering and if the face covering doesn't meet these requirements one will be provided to me by the school.

Appropriate face coverings must:

- Cover the nose and mouth area;
- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face;
- Include multiple layers of fabric;
- Allow for breathing without restriction;
- Be clean and in good condition;
- Remain in place without being held by hands;
- Be laundered and machine-dried periodically; and
- Comply with PWCS dress and appearance policies and must be free from potentially inappropriate, offensive, or political language, images, and graphics.

The use of face coverings does not replace the requirement for physical distancing and other prevention measures, such as washing hands and staying home when sick.

I am aware that social distancing is key to preventing the spread of COVID19. I will make every effort to follow CDC guidelines to ensure that I maintain six feet of physical distancing when possible.

I will adhere to the posted expectations and follow direction of all signs/markings throughout the building.

Food and Beverages

- **Middle/High Students** - I understand that I am not permitted to bring any food or beverages into the building. INS provides healthy breakfast, lunch, and dinner options at no cost to students.
- **Center Students Only** - I am only to bring unopened bottles of water or juice to school with my packed lunch or snack. INS provides healthy breakfast, lunch, and dinner options for free if I do not bring food from home.

Gang Involvement/Affiliation

- Gang activity, recruitment, and expressions of gang membership will not be tolerated. Actions, speech, gestures, special handshakes, clothing, symbols or other signs of gang membership or activity are prohibited at school or school-related activities.
- Administration reserves the right to prohibit any clothing they perceive as being gang related.
- Any student involved in a gang-related fight or assault shall be considered for expulsion.

Harassment (Regulation 738-3)

- Harassment is any conduct or behavior that annoys, threatens, intimidates, or causes a person to fear for his/her safety, as well as unwanted, unwelcomed, and uninvited behavior that demeans, threatens, or offends the victim(s) and causes a hostile environment.
- Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, regardless of sexual orientation, requests for sexual favors, and other inappropriate verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct or communications using cell phones or the internet, of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.
- Words, gestures, symbols, actions, and/or physical contact which offend, intimidate, threaten, or harm others will not be tolerated.
- Engaging in direct or indirect behaviors such as non-physical intimidations, posturing or "stare downs," will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action.

Offenses Off School Grounds

- Actions outside of school, which have a negative impact on the school building, programs, students, or staff will not be tolerated; students have the right to free speech as long as it does not cause a substantial interference in, or disruption of the school's efforts to maintain a cohesive and safe instructional environment.
- If I am to engage in an offense occurring in the community which results in the disruption of school operations and/or the educational process, or impacts the rights, safety or welfare of students, staff or school property, I will be subject to disciplinary action through PWCS.
- If I receive charges relating to weapons, alcohol/drugs, intentional injury to another person or am convicted or found not innocent of charges, my shift or placement may be changed, or I may be subject to long-term suspension or expulsion.

Prohibited Substances (Regulation 735-1, 735-2)

- Alcohol, non-alcoholic brews, alcohol products or containers, illegal drugs and substances, prescription and over-the-counter drugs, inhalant intoxicants or other substances inhaled for the purpose of intoxication, anabolic steroids, look-alikes or placebos of the aforementioned items, and drug or alcohol paraphernalia, are all considered substances and related paraphernalia and are strictly forbidden on school grounds to include buses and bus stops.
- Tobacco, tobacco products, nicotine vapor products, alternative nicotine products, electronic smoking devices, liquid-containing nicotine and any components, accessories, or paraphernalia are strictly forbidden on school grounds to include buses and bus stops.
- The Cannabis Control Act prohibits possession of cannabis on public school property during school hours or during school activities, or to serve/consume it any time on school grounds. It is illegal to use in public, to

sell it, or possess large quantities of it. Those under 21 will face a \$25 fine and will be required to enter a substance abuse and education program; and cannabis is still illegal under federal law.

- If I am in possession of, use, receive or attempt to receive, purchase, or attempt to purchase, distribute, or attempt to distribute, any of the above items on school grounds, school property, school buses, or at a school-related activity, I will be subject to disciplinary action.
- School Resource Officers may administer a breath alcohol test if there is a reasonable suspicion of alcohol consumption.
- If I have reason to believe that there are, or likely to be, prohibited substances or related paraphernalia in school or on school grounds, I am required to notify an administration, counselor, security staff, teacher, or other staff member. If I fail to report the presence or possible presence of prohibited substances, I may be subject to disciplinary action.

Schedules/Shift Placements

- I have been assigned my schedule and/or shift placement based on my academic and/or social/emotional needs.
- I understand my schedule may be modified or shift changed at any time in response to my needs or as a result of a disciplinary action.

Searching (Regulation 737-1)

- If administration has reasonable suspicion that I am in possession of an item in violation of the PWCS “Code of Behavior”, School Board policies and regulations, and/or state or federal laws, a search may occur of my person, locker, personal property, cell phone, electronic devices, or vehicle.
- If I refuse to allow a search when asked by administration and/or security staff, my parent(s)/guardian(s) will be called, informed of the situation, and be requested that they come to the school immediately to conduct a more extensive search by my parent/guardian.

Technology Responsible Use and Internet Safety (Regulation 295-1)

- I must comply with all laws, guidelines, and regulations of the Virginia Department of Education, and School Board policies and regulations when connecting my personal device to the PWCS wireless network.
- There is no expectation of privacy when using school computers or internet services, and PWCS has the right to monitor all computer and internet activity by students.
- Using PWCS electronic equipment to access, send, receive, download, store, view, or print any files or messages, to include text, sound, videos, and/or still or moving graphics that are defined as offensive, lewd, vulgar, pornographic, obscene, or deemed explicit or inappropriate by administration is a violation of the acceptable use policy and may result in disciplinary action and my device privileges will be taken away.
- Invoices will be issued to cover the cost of school-issued devices that are not returned upon completion of school, or in the event of transferring to another school.

Theft

- Taking or attempting to take personal or school property without permission is strictly prohibited. Doing so will result in disciplinary action and may result in referral to law enforcement.

Threats/Intimidation (Regulation 777-1)

- A threat is defined as a concerning spoken, written or gestured communication as well as behavior that suggests a person may harm someone else. A threat may be directly observed or communicated to the target or by a third party.
- A threat involving stalking of any person on a school bus, school property or at a school-sponsored activity; bombing, burning, killing, or harming school personnel; or threats of death or bodily injury to a person or members of his or her family, and /or threats to commit serious bodily harm will be immediately reported to law enforcement.
- The threat of verbal or physical attack and the use of force upon a person is strictly prohibited.

- Any expression of intent to cause harm, injury, or property damage to school property or to other persons on or off school property is strictly prohibited and will be referred to the threat assessment team for investigation.

Trespassing

- Students placed at INS through OSMAP must have written permission from administration to attend any function, activity, dance, or sporting event at another school.
- Forms may be requested from my counselor or my sub-school office and must be turned in with a minimum of seven (7) days prior to the event taking place.
- If I am on a PWCS property without this permission, I will be considered trespassing.
- If I have been placed at Independence Nontraditional School due to an OSMAP decision, I am prohibited from being on any other PWCS property at any time.

Vandalism (Regulation 405.02-1)

- Any malicious or willful damage, defacement or destruction of school property or personal belongings of others, including graffiti, computer, and electronic vandalism, is strictly prohibited.
- Virginia law authorizes the School Board to take legal action to recover the cost of such damage from the parents of students who committed acts of vandalism.

Vehicles on School Property (Regulation 737-1)

- To drive to school and park on school grounds, I must possess a legal driver's license, proof of insurance, parking pass from Security, and only park in the space I have been assigned.
- When I receive a parking pass from Security, I will no longer have a regularly assigned bus route.
- Selling, trading, giving away, or lending my parking pass to another student is strictly prohibited.
- If I need to drive a vehicle that is different than what is registered with the school, I will notify Security upon my arrival to school for permission to park on school grounds.
- I understand that when my vehicle is parked on school property, it is subject to be searched when reasonable suspicion of prohibited items exists.
- If I violate any of the above rules, my vehicle is subject to being towed at my expense, my driving privileges may be suspended, and it may result in legal and/or disciplinary action.

Violent Behavior

- The School Board and school staff have a position of "Zero Tolerance" on the assault and battery of any School Division employee, including substitutes.
- Engaging in any violent behavior or participating in a group assault, defined as two or more students, against other students, staff, community members or property is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.
- Behavior that promotes violence, encourages violence, carries messages, or rumors that result in acts of violence are strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.
- If I feel threatened by another student, I will inform a counselor or administration instead of engaging in a fight or bringing a weapon to school.

Weapons (Regulation 775-1)

- Weapons such as firearms, destructive devices, firearm mufflers, firearm silencers, pneumatic guns and other prohibited objects including look-alike weapons, bombs and look-alike bombs, objects used or attempted to use as a weapon, or which are perceived as a weapon are strictly forbidden on school grounds to include buses and bus stops.
- Any object brandished or held in a threatening manner, with the intent of threatening, intimidating, or harming others or property may be classified as a weapon when determining disciplinary action.
- If I am in possession of, use, receive or attempt to receive, purchase, or attempt to purchase, distribute, or attempt to distribute, any of the above items on school grounds, school property, school buses, or at a school-related activity, I will be subject to disciplinary action.

- If I have reason to believe that there are, or likely to be, weapons or objects to be used as weapons, in school or on school grounds, I am required to notify an administrator, counselor, security staff, teacher, or other staff member. If I fail to report the presence or possible presence of weapons or objects to be used as weapons, I may be subject to disciplinary action.
- In accordance with the federal Gun-Free Schools Act and Virginia law, the School Board must expel from school attendance for not less than one year (365 days) any student who is determined to have possessed a firearm, destructive device, firearm muffler, firearm silencer, or pneumatic gun on any school property, on a school bus, or at any school-related activity.

Lastly, it is required for all parents/guardians and students to complete the New Year Packet Information and Acknowledgments, which includes the Safe School Letter, INS Health Form, and Photograph/Video Consent. Please [click here](#) to access these documents.