

Little Panther Academy

Parent Handbook

Mission Statement

Where the teachers and students give 100% every day and failure is not an option. Panthers Prowling to Proficiency!

Little Panther Academy

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Welcome to Little Panther Academy!!

We are thrilled to have your child join us and look forward to a wonderful journey of growth, discovery, and joyful learning together. At our core, we believe that early childhood education lays the foundation for a lifetime of curiosity, confidence, and a love of learning. These early years are a time of incredible development, and we are honored to partner with you in nurturing your child(ren)'s social, emotional, and academic growth in a safe, caring, and engaging environment.

Our child care policies and procedures are affiliated with the Dawson Springs Independent School District and follow [Parent Guide/Student Handbook](#) and [District's Policy/Procedure Manual](#). In the past our district has offered early childhood services to qualifying 3 and 4-year-old children who are at-risk in the areas of low income or special needs. We begin this new journey as Little Panther Academy and open our four early childhood classrooms for 3 and 4-year-old qualifying students.

Dawson Springs Community Schools Preschool Mission Statement

Children are our most valuable possessions. Our goal is to provide high quality educational experiences, encouraging both individual growth and cooperation with others.

We want each child to remember their pre-school experiences as the first step to life-long learning. Through creative play and a commitment to learning, each child will be prepared for the many exciting years of education that awaits them in our school system.

Thank you for considering Little Panther Academy. If you have any questions, suggestions or issues, please remember that my door is always open!

Kristin Merrill

NON DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT NOTICE

Students, their parents, and employees of the Dawson Springs Independent School System are hereby notified this school district does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, religion, marital status, gender, or handicap in employment, educational programs, or activities as set forth in Title IX, Title VI, and Section 504. Any person having inquiries or wishing to file a grievance concerning Title IX, Title VI, or Section 504 is directed to contact Dawson Springs Independent Schools, 317 Eli Street, Dawson Springs, Kentucky, (270) 797-3811, who has been designated by Dawson Springs Board of Education to coordinate the district's efforts to comply with Title IX, Title VI, and Section 504. Persons who feel they have been discriminated against may obtain the forms for filing a grievance from the School Office.

Enrollment

Children between the ages of **3 and 4 years old** are eligible for enrollment at **Little Panther Academy**.

We offer two program options based on **availability** and **eligibility**:

- **Full Day Option:** Monday through Friday, from **7:55 AM to 2:30 PM**
- **Part Day Option:** Monday through Friday, from **8:00 AM to 11:00 AM**

These options are designed to meet the varying needs of our students and families.

Morning Arrival

To ensure your child receives breakfast and participates in important morning instruction, we ask that students arrive **by 8:15 AM**.

If your child will arrive later than 8:15 AM, please **call the office or your child's teacher** to inform us. This helps ensure your child is included in the **daily meal count**.


Midday Pick-Up

If you need to pick up your child between **11:30 AM and 1:00 PM** for full day services, please **call the Elementary Office in advance** at **(270) 797-3811, EXT: 1005**.

Transportation Changes






All transportation changes must be submitted by **1:00 PM** and in one of the following ways:

- A **handwritten note** placed in your child's folder
- A **note dropped off** at the front office

 **Please note:** Transportation changes **will NOT be accepted via ParentSquare** this year due to the volume of daily communication and scheduling demands.

Required Documents for Enrollment at Little Panther Academy

Before your child may attend Little Panther Academy, the following documents **must be completed and returned**:

-  **Child Enrollment Forms**
-  **Federal Food Program Forms**
-  **State-Issued Immunization Record or medical exemption of immunizations (provided by board of education)**
-  **Birth Certificate (official copy)**
-  **Social Security Card**

Please make sure all forms are submitted **prior to your child's first day** to avoid delays in attendance. **Current immunization certificates** are required for all students prior to attendance at **Dawson Springs Independent Schools**. This policy is in compliance with **KRS 158.035** and the **Dawson Springs Board of Education**.

After enrollment, parents/guardians must submit the following documents in order for your child to continue attending **Little Panther Academy**:

- **Physical Exam Report**
- **Vision Screening Report**
- **Dental Screening Report**

These documents are required to ensure your child's health and well-being while attending the academy.

Student Eligibility Qualifications Options

PreK Eligibility	Little Panther Academy (Mon-Fri) 7:55 AM-2:30 PM	As of Aug 19, 2025	
IDEA	3 yrs w/ delay		
CCAP	3 yrs- Parent eligible for Child Care Assistance Program	CCAP Application	Online Application
Tuition	3 yrs- Tuition	\$25 per day	

IDEA	4 yrs w/ delay		
CCAP	4 yrs AT Risk	CCAP Application	Online Application
Tuition	4 yrs= Tuition	\$25 per day	

Child Care Fees

Little Panther Academy offers a **full-day program** to eligible students, following the **Dawson Springs Independent School District** calendar. This ensures your child's spot remains secured during absences. However, please note that regular attendance is crucial for your child's academic success and development.

CCAP eligibility is available, but please note that **parents are responsible for copayments**. If a child does not meet the payment qualifications to be considered a full-day participant in our program, **part-day accommodations** will be available based on your child's needs and the available options.

Tuition & Payment Information

2025-2026 School Year (167 days)

- **Annual Tuition:** \$4,175
- **Daily Rate:** \$25 per day (billed from **September to May**)

Payment Methods

We currently accept the following payment options:

- **Cash**
- **Checks**
- **Money Orders**
- **Brightwheel App (direct payment)**

A **\$25 service fee** will be charged for any **returned checks**.

Late Pickup Fee

A **\$1 fee** will be charged for every **1 minute** after **4:00 PM** for full day students and **11:00** for part day students if your child has not been picked up.

Enrollment & Program Model Cancellation

The **Director** of the center reserves the right to **cancel enrollment** or **adjust the program model** of a child at the discretion of program administration for the following reasons:

1. Non-payment or Excessive Late Payments

- Payments more than **one month behind** will result in **suspension** of services until the balance is paid in full.
- **Three months behind** may result in **termination** of enrollment.

2. Failure to Follow Center Rules

- Not adhering to the rules outlined in the **parent agreement**.

3. Physical or Verbal Abuse

- Any **instances of abuse** (physical or verbal) directed at **staff or other children** by the parent or child may result in the child being **reduced to fewer hours** in the program or **terminated from the program** entirely, at the discretion of the administration.

4. Expired Immunization Records

- Failure to submit **current immunization records**.

5. Difficulty Adapting to Full-Day Schedule

- Children may have their **hours reduced** if they are unable to adjust to the **full-day routine** or display ongoing **behavioral challenges**. This adjustment will be made in the best interest of the child's well-being and ability to succeed in the program.

Family Involvement

At Little Panther Academy, we believe that Family participation plays a vital role in supporting student progress and fostering a strong, collaborative learning environment. We encourage all parents to get involved in a variety of ways that best suit their schedules and interests. Home visits and parent-teacher conferences are essential components of our commitment to building strong relationships with families and ensuring your child's success. Additionally, we host regular Family Nights, where parents can engage in fun, educational activities, and learn valuable strategies to support their child's development at home. These nights also give your child the chance to showcase the skills and knowledge they've been working hard to develop in the classroom. We look forward to partnering with you to create an enriching experience for your child!

Communication

We believe that strong, open communication between families and our preschool staff is key to a successful and supportive learning experience. To help keep you informed and connected, we use the ParentSquare app as our primary communication tool. Through ParentSquare, we'll share important updates, reminders, event details, and any changes to our daily plans or schedule. We strive to keep you as informed as possible and will provide timely updates whenever there is new information to share. Your partnership and engagement are important to us, and we encourage you to use ParentSquare to reach out with any questions, concerns, or feedback throughout the year.

Our preschool program also has a Facebook page where we regularly share photos of classroom activities, special projects, and fun moments from our day. It's a great way to get a glimpse into the joyful learning happening in our classrooms! However, please note that, per state and district policies, Facebook is not an official source of communication for our program. If you have any questions, concerns, or need to discuss anything related to your child, please contact the school directly by phone or reach out to your child's teacher through the ParentSquare app. This ensures your messages are received promptly and handled with the appropriate care and confidentiality.

Remember to communicate in writing any changes in your child's schedule. We must be informed, in writing, regarding any changes in the person picking up your child. You may add or delete names of authorized adults allowed to pick-up your child on the Child Information Record.

The Director **must be** informed of any of the following changes:

- Address and/or phone numbers, or e-mail address
- Health/immunizations updates, or:
- Other pertinent information related to your child.

Drop-off and Pick-up Policies

For the safety and well-being of all our students, parents are expected to accompany their child into the center or participate in a hand-to-hand exchange at drop-off and pick-up times. Our teachers are always happy to assist you and your child during these transitions to ensure a smooth and positive start to the day. At drop-off and pick-up, parents must sign their child in and out using the BrightWheel app. This helps us maintain accurate attendance records and ensures that every child is accounted for. Thank you for your cooperation in following these procedures. For students who use DSIS transportation, parents are required to sign their child in when the bus picks them up in the morning and sign them out at drop-off using the BrightWheel app.

For the safety of all children at Little Panther Academy, only individuals listed on the Child Information Record, or those with written permission from the parent, will be allowed to pick up a child. In cases where permission is granted through a phone call, it must include a clear description of the person picking up the child. To ensure security, staff are required to request a picture I.D. from anyone unfamiliar, including grandparents or other family members. If there is any concern or doubt, the staff at Little Panther Academy reserves the right to deny a person's request to pick up a child. Your child's safety is our top priority, and we appreciate your understanding and cooperation with these procedures.

For **Part-Day Families**:

- **Within City Limits:** The preschool bus can **transport children** to school. However, **parents are responsible for picking up** their child at the designated time.
- **Outside City Limits:** Parents are **responsible for all transportation** to and from the academy.

REGULATIONS FOR PUPILS RIDING SCHOOL BUSES

The Dawson Springs Board of Education has elected to provide transportation for pupils who are enrolled in the public schools. Pupils have the **privilege** of riding a Dawson Springs School bus to and from school provided they comply with the directions of the driver and the Regulations for Pupils Riding School Buses.

The following regulations have been developed in order to provide all pupils with the safest possible transportation. It is the responsibility of pupils to know and follow these regulations in order to maintain their privilege of riding the school bus.

The Dawson Springs Board of Education will be responsible for students when boarding, riding, and unloading from a bus.

AT THE BUS STOP

- Be on time. Do not expect the bus driver to wait on those who are tardy.

- Do not run toward or across the street in front of a bus while it is in motion.
- Always cross the street in front of the bus and at a safe distance ahead of the bus to be seen by the bus driver. (Minimum of 10-12 feet) Cross only on the driver's signal.
- Never stand in the road while waiting for the bus. Wait in an orderly line off the highway or street. Wait until the bus stops, then walk to the door and board bus in an orderly manner. Do not push or shove others.
- Pupils should board the bus and immediately take a seat without disturbing other passengers.

RIDING THE BUS

- The driver is in charge of the bus and students are to follow the directions of the driver. The driver may assign students to specific seats.
- Pupils are to ride their assigned bus.
- No persons other than those assigned to a bus are allowed on the bus.
- Promptly report to the driver any damage to the bus. Persons causing damage shall be required to pay the cost of the damage.
- Pupils are to remain seated while the bus is in motion.
- Pupils should not engage in any activity which might divert the driver's attention away from safely driving the bus. Such activities are:
 1. *Loud talking, laughing or unnecessary confusion*
 2. *Unnecessary conversation with the driver*
 3. *Extending any part of the body out of the bus*
- Pupils shall not engage in any activity which might damage or cause excessive wear to the bus or other property.
- The following activities are **prohibited at all times**:
 1. *Improper behavior including: vulgarity, foul language, disobedience fighting, pushing, shoving and similar offensive acts.*
 2. *Smoking or other use of tobacco*
 3. *Possessing knives, guns or other weapons*

- 4. Bringing animals on the bus*
- 5. Listening to music*
- 6. Use of cell phone without driver's permission*
- 7. Throwing articles or objects into or from the bus*
- 8. Tampering with mechanical equipment, accessories or controls of the bus*
- 9. Obstructing the aisle in any manner*
- 10. Occupying more space in a seat than is required (all items which are brought aboard the bus should be such that as can be held in the student's lap)*
- 11. Littering the bus*
- 12. No food, drinks, candy, or chewing gum - etc.*

ON THE TRIP HOME

- Pupils are permitted to leave the bus only at the regular designated bus stop. Any change must be with the parent's consent and approved by a school administrator.
- If a parent or assigned person to pick up is not at the designated bus drop off, the driver will radio the office and the student will be returned to school to be picked up by a parent or person designated to pick up the child at the elementary office.

Custody Orders

Until custody has been established by a court action, one parent may not limit the other from picking-up a child in our care. The center must be notified immediately of any changes in custody orders. Certified custody orders must be given to the center director.

Holidays/ School Calendar

Little Panther Academy follows the [Dawson Springs Independent District School Calendar](#).

Unexpected Closings

On rare occasions, our program may need to close due to unforeseen circumstances beyond our control, such as an ice storm, electrical outage, water service interruption, or concerns for the safety of our children and staff. Additionally, we will close if a State of Emergency order is issued. In the event of an emergency closing, we will make every effort to notify parents as quickly as possible. Parents will be contacted directly if we need to close early, and any updates will be shared through the ParentSquare App. Please note that during these closings, payment for your child's slot in the program is still required, as the center remains committed to maintaining its operations and staff during these times. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

Tornado and Disaster Procedure

In the event of a tornado or disaster warning, all children will be immediately escorted to designated safe areas within the center, where they will remain until the "all-clear" signal is given. The safety of your child is our top priority, and we take these procedures very seriously. Each year in September, families will receive detailed information about our emergency preparedness plans, including specific procedures for such situations. To ensure everyone is well-prepared, we conduct practice drills on a quarterly basis. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in helping us maintain a safe environment for all children at Little Panther Academy.

Child Abuse and Neglect

At Little Panther Academy, the safety and well-being of every child is our highest priority. In accordance with state laws, all staff members are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. This means that if any staff member suspects that a child may be experiencing abuse or neglect, they are legally required to report it to the appropriate authorities immediately. Our staff is trained to recognize signs of potential harm and will take prompt action to ensure that your child is protected and supported. We take these responsibilities very seriously and work together to create a safe, nurturing environment for all children in our care.

Photographs and Publicity

Photographs may be taken of the children participating in activities at Little Panther Academy. These photos may be used in various publicity materials such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, or other promotional materials to showcase the exciting learning experiences happening in our program, including our parent square communication app with the families in the program and our LPA Facebook Page. By enrolling your child, you grant permission for their image to be used in these materials without

compensation. If you have any concerns or would prefer your child's photo not be used, please let us know, and we will make accommodations to respect your wishes.

Developmental Screening and Assessment of Child Progress

At Little Panther Academy, we are committed to supporting the unique developmental needs of each child. Within 90 days of enrollment, all children undergo a developmental screening to help us understand their strengths and areas where additional support may be needed. If a referral is necessary, it will be made within 30 days of the screening. Throughout the year, children are assessed both formally and informally to ensure that our curriculum goals and activities align with their individual learning needs. Teachers observe and document each child's development, participation, and progress in their natural play environment.

Our formal assessments take place twice a year—once in October and again in April—and are kept in each child's portfolio. This portfolio follows the child from group to group, providing a comprehensive record of their growth in cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional development, all in alignment with our program's curriculum and philosophy. We believe in partnering with families throughout this process, with regular communication and opportunities for involvement, ensuring that every child's development is supported both at school and at home.

Personal Items and Possessions

During rest time, which is an important part of our daily routine, each child is welcome to bring a blanket to help create a sense of comfort and familiarity while at school. A small pillow or stuffed animal is also permissible. These items will stay at the school for the year and will be washed weekly by our classroom staff. This allows children to have a small piece of home with them during their time here.

We kindly ask that all personal toys and belongings such as but not limited to: toys from home, play money, real money, chewing gum, and candy be kept at home. Bringing toys to school can lead to disagreements, items getting lost, or toys being accidentally damaged. Our preschool program provides a variety of educational toys that are designed to encourage learning and interaction with peers, so there is no need for personal toys to be brought in. Thank you for helping us maintain a safe, cooperative, and focused learning environment!

Extra Clothing

Children at LPA engage in active play daily, including running, outdoor activities, water play, and sand play. Additionally, occasional bathroom accidents can happen. For these reasons, it is essential that each

child has a complete extra set of clothing kept at the center at all times. This should include underwear, socks, pants, and a shirt—clearly labeled with your child’s name and placed in a labeled bag. If your child’s spare clothing is used during the day, please send a clean replacement the following morning.

To ensure children remain safe and comfortable while playing outdoors, please dress your child appropriately for the weather. During the day our students engage in 60 minutes of gross motor movement inside and outside and need to be dressed according to current weather. In the fall and spring, this includes a light jacket, cap, and rain boots on damp days. In winter, children should arrive with a heavy jacket, mittens, scarf, hat, and snow boots. An extra sweater or sweatshirt is recommended for unexpected changes in temperature.

We ask that all children come to school dressed in clothing that is comfortable, weather-appropriate, and suitable for active play and learning. Preschool activities often include outdoor play, art, and sensory exploration, so clothing should allow freedom of movement and be items that you don't mind getting a little messy. For safety reasons, we also recommend closed-toe shoes with non-slip soles to avoid injury when running and playing.

For comfort and modesty during active play, we kindly ask that girls who wear skirts or dresses to school also wear shorts or leggings underneath. Preschool activities often involve climbing, running, and sitting on the floor, and wearing shorts helps ensure children can move freely and comfortably throughout the day. Thank you for helping us ensure your child is dressed appropriately for a fun and active day at school.

Diapers and Potty Training

Parents supply all diapers and wipes at Little Panther Academy.

Our teachers are experienced in supporting young children through the potty training process. Open communication between parents and teachers is essential to ensure this important developmental milestone is a positive and successful experience for your child. We recommend that children in training wear “user-friendly” clothing—items that are easy for them to pull up and down on their own. Overalls, zippers, belts, and snaps can be difficult for little hands, especially when time is limited. During this phase, parents are asked to provide an ample supply of thick training underwear, socks, and outer clothing to keep at the center. Your cooperation and consistency at home and school play a key role in your child's success.

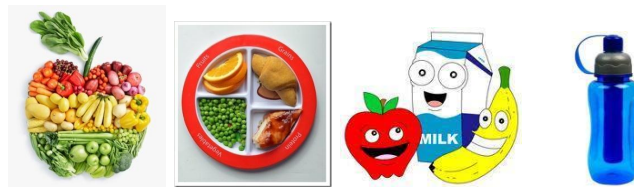
Birthday/ Classroom Celebrations

In the LPA Program, we are committed to providing healthy, nutritious meals and snacks for all children. While we do recognize and celebrate birthdays and special occasions throughout the year, we kindly ask

that any treats brought from home be *store-bought* and *healthy options only*. Please refrain from bringing sweets such as cookies, chocolate, or cupcakes. For the safety of all children, **no items containing peanuts or peanut products** may be brought into the center. Please also reach out to your child's teacher about other potential allergies students in the classroom may have.

If you plan to bring in a treat, please inform your child's teacher in advance so appropriate arrangements can be made.

For birthdays celebrated outside of school, we ask that invitations be mailed *unless the entire class is invited*—in which case, invitations may be placed in children's cubbies. Please note that the center does not provide mailing lists or phone numbers for privacy reasons. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.



Meals

The center provides breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack each day. We participate in the Federal Food Program and follow its guidelines for nutritious meal preparation and portion suggestions. Our goal is to offer healthy, well-balanced, and delicious meals that children enjoy. If you have any questions or concerns about the menu, please speak with the Director.

We also recognize the importance of hydration for young children. For our preschool students, we ask that you provide a labeled bottle for water only. We will encourage regular use throughout the day and make every effort to send it home daily for cleaning and refilling. Thank you for your cooperation in helping us support your child's health and wellness.

Schedule:

- Breakfast starts at 8:30 am
- Lunch starts at 11:00 am and ends after the last class eats
- Snack starts at 1:30 pm and ends after the last class eats

*Meals and snack times are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances.

Immunizations and Physicals

Immunization certificate: Except as otherwise provided in KRS 214.036, no child shall be

eligible to enroll as a student in any public or private elementary or secondary school without first presenting a certificate from a duly licensed medical or osteopathic physician stating that the child has been immunized against diphtheria, tetanus, poliomyelitis, rubella, and rubella in accordance with the provisions of this section and KRS.214.010, 214.020, 214.032 to 214.036 and 214.990 and the regulations of the secretary for human resources. The governing body of private and public schools shall enforce the provisions of this section.

Medical Examinations are required by Kentucky law and will be required of all students entering the Dawson Springs Independent Schools for the first time. All students entering grade 6 must have a second physical including an MMR vaccination. Our School Based Health Clinic is able to conduct these examinations during school hours during the spring semester of the student's fifth grade year. For more information concerning health needs, call our School Based Clinic at 270-797-3811 (ext. 1210)

Illness Policy at Little Panther Academy

As the best judge of your child's health, we trust you will not send a sick child to the center. However, if your child becomes ill or shows an unknown rash while in our care, the teacher will consult with the Director, and you may be contacted to pick up your child.

When you are called, we ask that you (or an alternate emergency contact) come immediately. This is to protect the health of your child and their classmates, and your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

If your child is too ill to play outside with their class, they are too ill to attend the center.

Criteria for Sending a Child Home:

- Unknown Rash
- Fever of 100.4° or higher
- Highly Contagious Conditions, such as:

- Head lice (No-nit policy)
- Chickenpox
- Strep throat
- Pinworms
- Mumps
- Impetigo
- Ringworm
- Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)
- Diarrhea (2 or more loose or watery stools) or vomiting
 - Must be 24 hours symptom-free before returning to school
 - Consideration will be given for allergies or medications.

When Your Child Can Return:

- Fever-free for 24 hours without medication
- Chickenpox: Return when all lesions are scabbed over
- Head Lice: Return after appropriate treatment (such as Kwell or RID) and after being checked by the nurse on the first morning of return
- Contagious Illnesses: Must be on antibiotics for 24 hours before returning

If you have any questions about your child's condition or appropriateness of their return to the center, the final decision will be made by the Center Director or Assistant Director.

Medicine

Parents of students who take medication while at school must follow the following guidelines:

- Parents of students who are taking medication must deliver the medication to school in person.
- The medication must be in the original container bearing the pharmacy label which includes the directions from the physician, the physician's name, the name of the medication, the date and the student's name. The school reserves the right to call the parents, the doctors and the pharmacies to confirm medication.
- The parent must sign an authorization form in the office for the administering of medication by school personnel.
- The parent is encouraged to send or bring limited amounts of medication to school and to schedule times of administration so that a minimum number of doses will be given during

the school day. Parents should ask the providing pharmacist to accommodate medicine to be brought to the school.

• Students can not bring their own medication of any kind to the school.

- Medicine given on a short-term basis (antibodies, cough syrup, etc.) will be given by the clinic.

Injury

Every effort is made to ensure the safety and well-being of your child while in our care. In the event of an injury, parents will be notified through the Parent Square app. We kindly ask that you acknowledge the report within **2 hours**. If no response is received, a Minor Incident Report will be completed and placed in your child's cubby for review.

If an injury appears to require immediate medical attention, a parent or guardian will be contacted right away. In the case of a serious medical emergency or accident, the Director will call **911** first. Your child will be transported to the hospital listed on the Child Information Record, or to the nearest hospital if necessary. The parent or guardian will be notified immediately after emergency services are contacted.

Changes in Policy

The fees, procedures, and policies stated in this handbook are subject to change at the discretion of the Center Director.

I have read the Little Panther Academy Parent Handbook and agree to abide by all the policies and procedures therein.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Thank you for selecting Little Panther Academy as your child care provider.