



2023-2024

WELCOME TO (or Welcome Back to) **PONDEROSA!**

July 31, 2023

Dear Parents,

We hope this letter finds you knee deep in summer fun and excitement with a hint of rest and relaxation. The staff at Ponderosa is excited about the upcoming school year and we anxiously await the arrival of your children. The first day of school is fast approaching, so we put together a collection of answers to the most frequently asked questions pertaining to the start of school. Additional information will be communicated as the school year gets under way. Feel free to call our front office to ask questions as well.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW AS THE SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS?

Start of School

To help students adjust back into the routine of school, the Cherry Creek School District begins the year by staggering the start of school. As such, both intermediate and primary groups of students will attend school one day independent of the other group of students. This will allow each cluster of students a day to acclimate to school without the entire student body in attendance. Kindergarten and Pre-K students will not attend school on the Monday or Tuesday of the first week of school. For kindergarten this is due to beginning of the year (BOY) assessments. Pre-K and Kindergarten students will begin school on **Wednesday, August 16**. The staggered start schedule is detailed below:

- Monday, August 14 – 3rd, 4th and 5th grades **only** – normal dismissal at 2:45 p.m.
- Tuesday, August 15 – 1st and 2nd grades **only** – normal dismissal at 2:45 p.m.
- Wednesday, August 16 – all grades attend, including Pre-K and Kindergarten – **early dismissal at 1:45 p.m.**
- Thursday, August 17 and Friday, August 18 – all grades attend, including Pre – K and Kindergarten – normal dismissal at 2:45 p.m.

Please be advised, students will need to remain at home during their “non-designated” days. We realize the staggered start schedule may be challenging for families with multiple children enrolled in a range of grade levels. I apologize for any inconvenience but ask for parents to only send students on their grade-level designated start-day. Students who come out of sequence will need to be picked up and taken back home.

Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-School)

2023/ 24 is the first year of Pre-K schooling for students aged 3 and 4. As stated above, Pre-K students will not begin school until **Wednesday, August 16**. There will be no care available for Pre-K students on August 14 and 15. The location of the Pre-K classrooms is in a mobile on the northwest side of the main building. Parents will need to use the sidewalk that rounds the building on the northwest side to access the Ponderosa preschool. The preschool student’s school week is Monday – Thursday. On Fridays, preschool students do not have school. Preschool will have a morning session (8:00 am – 10:55 am) and afternoon session (11:50 am – 2:45 pm). Full day programming is available to parents who are interested.

Kindergarten

As stated above, kindergarteners will not begin attending school until **Wednesday, August 16**. On Monday or Tuesday of the first week of school, each kindergarten student will be scheduled to attend a brief one-on-one

assessment with a member of the Kindergarten team at an appointed time during the regular school day. The Kindergarten team will be contacting parents to schedule appointments for kindergarteners to take the BOY assessments. Each family should plan to be at school for 30 – 45 minutes during the scheduled appointment.

Morning Arrival

All children should arrive at school **no earlier than 7:45 a.m.** Doors will **not** open and adult supervision will **not** be available **until 7:45 a.m.** Students will be expected to enter the building through their assigned grade-level wing entrance. **The main entrance will not be available to students or parents 7:45 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.** Students will have the option to eat breakfast, which they will pick up in the cafeteria to take back to the classroom. Our staff will be visible and on hand to help children as they arrive to school.

The first bell will ring at **7:55 a.m.** We hope to have each child in class, ready to start the day at **8:00 a.m.** Children arriving after **8:00 a.m.** will be considered tardy and must enter the building through the main entrance. Parents will not need to sign tardy students in. Our office staff will let tardy students in through the main entrance, sign them in and provide a pass to class.

Dismissal

On Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, school will conclude at **2:45 p.m.** Dismissal will be staggered according to the manner in which students go home from school. Students being picked up by a family member or walking home will be dismissed **through the grade-level entrance at 2:45 p.m.** Students riding the bus will be escorted to the buses at 2:45 p.m. Bus routes and schedules will be communicated to parents by the Cherry Creek School District Transportation telephone messaging system just prior to the first day of school. Students who attend the Panther Club (before and after care program) will be picked up by a Panther Club staff member. Those students who attend an offsite childcare program will wait in the main lobby to be picked up by their childcare provider.

Building Access During Morning Arrival and Dismissal

During morning arrival (7:45 – 8:00) and dismissal (2:30 – 3:00) timeframes, our main entrance will be closed to visitors. Parents coming to the building during these times are encouraged to wait for their child at the child's grade-level entrance.

Early Dismissal – Every Wednesday at 1:45

Continuing this year, Cherry Creek will dismiss elementary students one hour early from school every Wednesday. The purpose behind the early dismissal is to provide teachers with more time to collaborate effectively and to plan and prepare robust and engaging learning experiences for students. Dismissal time, **every Wednesday, will be 1:45 p.m.** Parents will need to have a pick-up plan in place for the early dismissal. Bus pick-up schedules will adjust each Wednesday to align pick-up times with the dismissal times of elementary schools. Additionally, the Ponderosa Panther Club will open early on Wednesdays for parents needing childcare.

DOES PONDEROSA HAVE A BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL CHILDCARE SCHOOL PROGRAM?

We have a fantastic before & after school childcare program, called the Panther Club, for students who attend Ponderosa. **Emily Arredondo** is the director of the Panther Club, and she has many exciting things planned for the 2023/ 24 school year. If you have questions, please feel free to call the program at 720-747-2824 or email Emily at earredondo@cherrycreekschools.org

WHEN IS THE PONDEROSA OPEN HOUSE?

The Ponderosa Open House will occur Thursday, August 10, 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. During the Open House, parents and students will learn who their teachers will be for the school year. Families are encouraged to bring school supplies when they come to the Open House. The format for the evening is informal and will function purely as a “meet and greet.”

Please use the link below to access each grade level's school supply list. You can also access the list by going to the Cherry Creek School District webpage, click on: (1) Our Schools, (2) Ponderosa, (3) Parents (4) School Supply List.

<https://www.cherrycreekschools.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=7584>

WHAT PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE FOR HANDLING VISITORS AT PONDEROSA?

For the 2023/ 24 school year, parents and family members will be permitted to come into the building, join students in class, attend school events, volunteer and eat lunch with students. Access to the classroom and the playground (during recess) is permitted **provided parents check-in with the main office first.**

As we begin the 2023/ 24 school year, we want to remind you of our safety and security procedures. In an effort to provide a safe environment at school, we will continue to have our visitors check-in using the Raptor ID system at Ponderosa. Raptor is a visitor registration system that scans and reads a driver's license and/or valid ID, checking the visitor's information against the National Sex Offender data base. If no match is found, the system will print a visitor's sticker with a picture identifying that individual as an approved visitor. Every visitor, parent and/ or family member will be expected to check in through the Raptor system **every time** they visit the building. **Please have your ID with you each time you come to Ponderosa.** Be advised, the office staff will ask you for your ID every time you enter the school, even if they see you on a regular basis.

*The Raptor system only scans the visitor's name, date of birth and photo for comparison purposes. No other personal identifying information is saved. If the system raises a question about a visitor's background, the school administrator(s) will take the necessary steps to ensure the appropriateness of each individual's visit. Upon your initial visit, the process will take approximately 30 seconds. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

HOW DO I CREATE A LUNCH ACCOUNT OR ADD CREDITS TO AN EXISTING LUNCH ACCOUNT?

Families can create a lunch account or add credit to an existing account through the Titan Parent Portal. Click on family.titank12.com to access the portal and create an account or add money (credit) to an account. For the 2023/ 24, school year lunch and breakfast are **free** for all students. Yes, you read this correctly – **free**. ☺ Additional snack items will require money for purchase.

HOW DO I REGISTER FOR FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH?

Although breakfast and lunch are free, it is still important that all parents fill out the free and reduced lunch forms. This helps make our federal funding information more accurate which is necessary for our school to receive the correct amount of funding from the federal government. The Free and Reduced Lunch application is available on the Food and Nutrition Services Website: www.ccsdcafe.org. Please follow these steps to submit an application:

1. Click on the link above
2. Click on Free & Reduced Meals
3. Select the Meal Application button (to the right) and complete the application

HOW CAN I SIGN UP TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PONDEROSA PTCO?

Members of the Ponderosa PTCO will be reaching out to the Ponderosa community to provide information regarding future meetings. PTCO meetings will happen monthly and any family member is invited to attend. PTCO meetings provide opportunities for parents and adult family members to plan and coordinate fund raising events and to share ideas about enriching the school experience for Ponderosa students. I personally invite you to sign up to help our PTCO support the students and staff at Ponderosa this year.

WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE SCHOOL BEGINS?

It is essential that every parent fill out and complete the online district forms. The Cherry Creek School District requires families to update their student information in Parent Forms **before** attending school. Cherry Creek Schools has launched a Back to School Hub, a one-stop online resource to make it easier for parents and guardians to get the information and complete forms necessary to start the school year. **All families are required to update and complete their Parent Forms each year before their child(ren) can attend school.** This [website is NOW LIVE](#) and Parent Forms are now available as well as helpful guides to admissions requirements, transportation needs, school meals, technology, and more. Should you not have a device or you have difficulty filling out the parent forms, please contact the main office at 720-747-2800 for assistance.

HEALTH CLINIC

Parents, it is also important that we have a copy of your child's immunization records **before** the first day of school. Please schedule your doctor's appointments and then drop off the completed forms at our front office. If your child requires medication during the school day, be sure to bring all pertinent information in to our school nurse, **Stephanie Hankenson**.

Okay, that's a lot of information... always feel free to contact the school if you have questions. Please take this time to enjoy the remaining days of the summer break. The staff at Ponderosa is looking forward to seeing our hallways and classrooms filled with children and the noise and excitement of learning. If we can be of help to you in any way, please contact us in the Ponderosa main office at 720-747-2800.

Sincerely,

Mr. Chad M. Gerity
Principal

Mrs. Sarah Polzin
Assistant Principal