



Pre- K Counts  
Student Handbook

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**Mission/Philosophy**

**In collaboration with family and community partners, the Northwest Area School District provides a continuum of services that support ALL students to realize their fullest potential through academically rigorous and relevant programs of study.**

## School Contact Information

- Contact numbers
  - Primary School office: (570)542-4126 extension 3000
  - Pre-K Counts classroom: (570)542-4126 extension 3101 *\*Note: This number may not be answered during the school day when children are present. Please use this number to leave messages that are not urgent in nature.*
- Staff
  - Principal: Mr. Cassidy Shults
  - Administrative Assistant: Mrs. Susan Price
  - Lead Teacher: Mrs. Beth Logsdon
  - Classroom Aide: Mrs. Lynn Sutliff
- Staff Credentials
  - School district lead teachers in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Classrooms: As with all pre-kindergarten classrooms operated by school districts, the standard for a lead teacher in a Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts classroom or any classroom enrolling children who generated Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts per child funding, in possession of a Pennsylvania teaching certificate for early childhood education.
  - Pre-K Counts regulations require the classroom aide to complete 24 hours of Early Childhood training.
    - At a minimum, 24 hours of professional development must be obtained annually with at least 50 percent or 12 hours specific to early childhood education. Professional development hours may include hours facilitated by a Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS)-certified instructor, providing ACT 48 credit or college classes.
- Class size and Student/staff ratios
  - Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts programs must have a student/teacher ratio of no more than 20 students for one teacher and one teacher aide in a classroom, that is, two adults in a classroom for every 20 students.

## School term/length of day

- Programs shall offer a minimum of 180 days of developmentally appropriate instructional practices and activities for students.
- Students enrolled in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts classroom are considered full-time and must attend 5 days per week for a minimum of 180 school days per year for the full length of the day, 5 hours/full day.

- The Northwest Area School District calendar will be followed. Any changes or exceptions will be communicated to families in a timely manner.
- Pre-K Counts full day program is 5 ½ hours. The day begins at 8:40 AM and concludes at 2:10PM.

### **Transportation**

- Parents/guardians are responsible for the transportation of students to and from school.

### **Arrival/Departure Procedure**

- Parking- unattended vehicles
  - When dropping off or picking up students, please park in the paved parking lot or the lot next to the church. Please DO NOT leave your car in the bus loading area.
- Child safety
  - Until your child is signed in, please keep your child with you at all times. Exercise caution when moving to and from your car by holding hands, looking both ways, etc.
- Signing in/out
  - All students must be signed in and out of the program daily.
- Late arrivals
  - Students arriving after 8:50AM will need to be signed in at the Primary School office.
- Early pick- up
  - If your child needs to be picked up earlier than normal dismissal time (2:10 PM), please communicate this to the teacher and school with a note.
  - You will need to enter the building and wait in the office until your child is brought to you. Please do not come to the classroom.
- Late pick-up
  - There is **no** after school care provided by the NWASD for Pre-K students. Please be prompt when picking up your child.
  - If you are late you will need to enter the office to pick up your child and sign him/her out. Please bring a photo ID as the secretary may not know who you are.

### **Attendance Policy**

- Excuse blanks
  - Excuse Blanks will be provided by the Pre-K Counts Classroom teacher. Please request additional form from the classroom teacher or the office secretary.
- Excused/unexcused absences
  - Definitions
    - **Attendance** is, for reporting purposes, defined as those instructional days when

the Northwest Area Pre-K Counts child is attending the classroom.

**Excused absences** are defined as: those absences when a student is prevented from attending for mental, physical or other urgent reasons. These can be further defined as illness, family medical emergency, death of a family member, health or dental appointments, pre-approved educational field trip, religious event, motor vehicle accident, authorized school activity, or other extenuating circumstances deemed as excused by the program.

**Unexcused absences** are any absences that are not included in the above definition of excused absences.

Students **enrolled** in Northwest Area Pre-K Counts classroom are considered full-time and must attend 5 days per week for a minimum of 180 school days per year for the full length of the day.

- Dismissal from program
  - Children who have **10 or more consecutive unexcused absences** or more than 10% unexcused absences over the course of the school year (more than 18 days total) and have not responded to program supports must be dismissed from the Northwest Area Pre-K Counts classroom and replaced with an eligible child from the waiting list or recruited from the community.
- Process to Address High Absence Rates
  - Families must be contacted when children are absent for **3 consecutive** days to learn the nature of the absence and offer support, as appropriate.
  - When children have accumulated **5 absences** the family and Administration will meet to discuss the nature of the absences and create a Student Attendance Improvement Plan. Failure to attend the meeting or follow the agreed upon steps of the plan may result in the child being dismissed from the Northwest Area Pre-K Counts classroom and replaced with an eligible child from the waiting list or recruited from the community.
  - When children have more than **5 consecutive unexcused absences**, the family and Administration, together, must discuss the reasons for the absence, determine ways to support the child's attendance, and create a Student Attendance Improvement Plan. Failure to attend the meeting or follow the agreed upon steps of the plan may result in the child being dismissed from the Northwest Area Pre-K Counts classroom and replaced with an eligible child from the waiting list or recruited from the community.

## Meals/snacks

- Free and Reduced Meal form (required)
  - All students are required to have a Free/Reduced Meal application completed upon enrollment. Families who do not qualify for free/reduced lunches will still receive meals and snacks at no charge.
- What is provided?
  - **Snacks-** Each day, snacks are provided to children during choice time. They may or may not decide to have snacks on any particular day.
    - Items offered include: milk and water (everyday), and snacks such as pretzels, crackers, goldfish, dry cereal, etc.
    - This time is an opportunity for children to serve themselves further strengthening their independence and self-help skills. They are also responsible for the clean-up of their area.
- Meals as a Learning experience: It is the philosophy of the Pre-K Counts program that meals are an important part of a child's development. Students will eat lunch with their peers, as well as the teacher, to develop social and communication skills, develop fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination. This time gives children the opportunity to practice using all these skills after seeing them modeled by adults.
  - Manners- Developmentally appropriate manners are taught and modeled by the teacher during meal times. Children are encouraged to practice using words *please, thank you*, how to ask for more of an item, and how to ask for help.
  - Trying new foods- It is the philosophy of the Northwest Area Pre-K Counts program that children should be encouraged to try new foods. It is understood that some children have sensitivity to textures and tastes, but attempts will be made to encourage them to try. Strategies such as asking a "Taste Buddy", taking an "ant" bite, and touching it to his/her tongue are employed.
- Food Allergies, Dietary Restrictions, etc.-
  - Please inform Pre-K Counts staff if your child has a food allergy/sensitivity or dietary restriction. Arrangements will be made with food service staff to ensure meals and snacks are appropriate and safe for all children.
- Special treats (curriculum enrichment, birthday, etc.)
  - When appropriate, special treats will be offered to children. These may include, but are not limited to:
    - Treats that enrich the curriculum- Examples: gingerbread when the Gingerbread Man is being read, making butter during a study of the farm, following a recipe to develop math and direction following skills, etc.
    - Treats for birthdays- please see the guidelines under "Special Events" for more information regarding birthday treats.

- Treats during special events and holidays- treats given during these special times should comply with the district's Wellness Policy  
*(pre-packaged items, under 200 calories, sugar not the first ingredient)*
- Foods not acceptable- Because the Pre-K Counts program can enroll children under the age of 4, some foods are not safe options. According to various health and children's organizations, some foods present a choking hazard. The list includes (but is not limited to):
  - whole grapes, popcorn, nuts & seeds, raw vegetables, hot dogs

## **Health/Wellness policies**

### NORTHWEST AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT'S WELLNESS POLICY ON NUTRITION:

- The Northwest Area School District will strive to increase participation in Federal Child Nutrition Programs including the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. Meals served through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs will:
  - be appealing and attractive to children; be served in clean and pleasant settings; meet, at a minimum, nutrition requirements established by local, state, and federal statutes and regulations; offer a variety of fruits and vegetables; serve only lower-fat (2%) and fat-free milk and nutritionally-equivalent non-dairy alternatives (to be defined by USDA); and promote whole grains
- Schools should engage students and parents, through taste-tests of new entrees and surveys, in selecting foods sold through the school meal programs in order to identify new, healthful, and appealing food choices. In addition, schools should share information about the nutritional content of meals with parents and students. Such information could be made available on menus, a website, on cafeteria menu boards, placards, or other point-of-purchase materials.
- Breakfast. To ensure that all children have breakfast, either at home or at school, in order to meet their nutritional needs and enhance their ability to learn:
  - NASD Elementary schools will operate the School Breakfast Program.
  - Schools will encourage parents to provide a healthy breakfast for their children through newsletter articles, take-home materials, or other means.
- Free and Reduced-Priced Meals. Schools will make every effort to eliminate any social stigma attached to, and prevent the overt identification of, students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. Toward this end, schools will utilize electronic identification and payment systems in all district campuses.
- The Northwest Area School District contracts with outside vendor, The Nutrition Group, to manage food preparation and delivery in all district campuses.

- Consistent with the Northwest Area School District Wellness Policy which promotes healthy nutritional and dietary choices and lifestyles, NASD elementary school will only allow students to disseminate items for consumption when they conform to the following:
  - *Consumables must be individually wrapped.*
  - *Consumables include packaging which provides nutritional facts and ingredients*
  - *Consumables may not list sugar as the first ingredient.*
  - *In order to maintain the welfare of students with food allergies, homemade food products will not be permitted in the school setting under any circumstance.*
  
- Health screenings: dental, vision
- Immunizations
  - Pennsylvania State Law, 28 Pa. Code §27.77, requires all students attending Pre-K Counts to have required immunizations within 60 days of a child's first day of attendance in the program. The Northwest School District shall obtain a record establishing that the child has received the vaccinations recommended by the American Committee on Immunization Practices. If verification is not received as required, the District shall exclude the child from the child care group setting and not readmit the child until the caregiver receives a verification that meets the requirements of this section.
  
- Emergency cards
  - Parents are requested to complete the emergency card with current contact information at the beginning of each school year or as contact information changes.
  
- Medication policy
  - It is recommended that prescription and non-prescription medicines be administered at home whenever possible. However, the district recognizes that some students would be unable to attend school without receiving medication during the school day. Therefore, the district will permit the administration of prescription and non-prescription medication only under the following conditions.
  - If a student needs to take any medication (prescription or non-prescription) during school hours, it must be delivered to the nurse's office by a parent/guardian or other responsible adult designee, in its original packaging and properly labeled by the pharmacy or physician's office or the manufacturer's original container for over the counter medications. Upon delivery of certain



prescription medications, the medication must be counted with the parent and nurse and the initial quantity documented. Medications must be left in and dispensed from the properly labeled container and maintained with the proper forms and instructions in the health office. No medications, prescription or nonprescription, shall be administered to the student during the school day without the school nurse's approval and the written and dated consent of the student's parent/guardian and legally authorized prescriber.

- By providing parent/guardian authorization for medications to be administered during school hours, the school district, its agents and employees, are released from all liability and claims whatsoever for any side effects when this medication is administered as prescribed by the physician.
- Parent/Guardian and physician's permission must be documented on the school district's Medication Authorization Form, prescription form, or electronic faxed physician order. Medication orders must contain all of the required information. These written consents and/or prescriptions must be on file in the nurse's office of the school building that the child attends. Copies of the Medication Authorization Form may be obtained from the health room and are available on the district website. The district's medication policy is also available for viewing on the district website.
- The consent of the parent/guardian and physician will be valid only for the period specified on the consent form and in no case longer than the current school year. All medications will be administered in accordance with the physician's order and must be taken in the health room in the presence of the school nurse. All information regarding medication administration is confidential.
- Parents/Guardians are responsible for informing the school nurse of any change in the medication needs of a student. When any change occurs, the parent/guardian must provide documentation from the prescribing physician to the nurse's office.
- By requiring written authorization and physician's orders, the school district hereby asserts that it will incur no liability for the use of unauthorized drugs. Students in possession of prescription or nonprescription drugs that have not been registered with the school nurse will be considered to be in violation of the district's drug and alcohol policy and will be subject to any disciplinary action appropriate under the district's discipline code.
- Nurses will keep records of all medications administered. These documentation records will include the student's name and grade, the name of the medication, the dosage, the date, and the time of administration.

- Medications will be stored in a locked, secure cabinet, refrigeration if necessary, with keys secured from general access. Access to medications will be limited to the school nurse or designee in emergency situations.
- Students may be allowed to self-administer and self-carry medications, such as an asthma inhaler/epinephrine auto-injector/insulin pumps, if the procedure is followed according to the self-administration policy. Please contact the school nurse to make these arrangements.
- All medications must be picked up in the nurse's office at the end of the school year or they will be disposed of.

### **MEDICATIONS ON FIELD TRIPS**

In the case of field trips, a variety of options could be considered: a parent/guardian attends the field trip so he/she can administer the medication, the medication time may be altered or omitted for that day with parent permission and/or physician permission if necessary, or the nurse attends the field trip. Please refer to the Medication Policy available on the district website. Parents/guardians may delegate medication administration to another adult for the field trip for their child and must inform the building nurse.

### **Curriculum & Assessment**

- Curriculum- The NW Area Pre-K Counts program utilizes the OCDEL approved curriculum "Creative Curriculum for Preschool." This program includes thematic "studies" which incorporate skills in literacy, math, the arts, science and social studies. Embedded in the curriculum are opportunities to develop social, communication, and health/wellness skills.
- Early intervention screenings are conducted in the fall of each year by the Hazleton Area School District. Early Intervention transition meetings for students who are entering kindergarten in the fall are conducted in the spring of each school year.
- Developmental Screenings- Regulations require developmental screenings be performed on each child within 45 days of the child's first day in the program. The NW Area Pre-K Counts program has chosen the OCDEL approved instrument "Ages & Stages" to meet this requirement. Families and staff will complete two screenings:
  - ASQ3- screens for possible delays in physical, cognitive and communication areas
  - ASQ-SE3- screens for possible delays in social and emotional development areas
- Special needs- Children who qualify for special education/early intervention services can receive those services/therapies during the school day and are an integral part of their

education. Pre-K Counts staff will work families, Early Intervention staff and the district to ensure individual needs are met.

### **Inclement Weather Policy**

- In the event of school delays and closings related to inclement weather, the district will attempt to notify all parents/ guardians via several methods to include: Push Notification via the northwest App, Auto Calls, and local news stations.
- The Pre- K Counts program will follow the Northwest Area School District calendar. School Calendars will be provided to each student at the beginning of the school year. Weather emergencies, delay, and closings will be announced on the the local news stations,
- Daily schedule- Daily schedules will be communicated by the Pre-K Counts classroom teacher.

### **Child's Personal Items**

- NEEDS:
  - Please send your child with a backpack or bookbag each day.
  - Keep a seasonal set of extra clothes in your child's backpack (including socks and underwear) in case of spills or accidents.
- Please do not send toys to school with your child. If a toy is allowed to come to school, a note will be sent home by the teacher.

### **Discipline Policy**

- The Northwest Area Primary School implements a School Wide Positive Behavior Program in which students earn "Ranger Tags" for demonstrating expected behaviors. Northwest Area School District also has a progressive discipline policy that is followed when warranted.

### **Expulsion/Suspension Policy**

- Research shows that expulsion and/or suspension of children from early childhood programs has a lasting negative effect on the child and family. The NW Area Pre-K Counts program will make every effort to refrain from expelling and/or suspending Pre-K students by employing the following:
  - Create a positive classroom climate and focus on prevention
  - Develop and communicate clear, appropriate and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors
  - Ensure fairness, equity and continuous improvement

- Utilize district and community resources to intervene and support children and families in improving the child's behavior

### **Parent Involvement/resources**

- Parent Teacher Conferences- Communication between home and the district is essential to ensure the academic success of every child. It is for this reason that parent teacher conferences can be scheduled upon the request of the parent or the teacher. Please contact your classroom teacher to schedule a meeting.
- Volunteering- Parents and Guardians are reminded that clearance paperwork must be on file with the district office prior to volunteering. Parents that submitted all clearance paperwork last year have the ability to volunteer up to five years on the current clearances and are responsible for the renewal of the clearances when the five year deadline has been reached.
- Parents that signed the affidavit must submit their clearances to the district office by January 5, 2019 and are reminded that a second affidavit cannot be signed. Any parents who have not yet received clearances and/or completed an affidavit and wish to volunteer throughout the school year, should visit the Northwest Area website at [www.northwest.k12.pa.us](http://www.northwest.k12.pa.us) where the link for obtaining an affidavit and gaining your clearances can be found.
- The following Documents must be on file with the Northwest District prior to the first day of volunteer service.
  - Report of Criminal History from the Pennsylvania State Police
  - Completed Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
  - Either a Northwest Area School District FBI Clearance Exemption form or a Cogent registration ID (fingerprinting registration number).

*\*If you have been a resident of Pennsylvania for the past ten years and complete an affidavit you do not need to have the fingerprinting.\**

- Clearance Instructions:
  - Affidavit and Agreement-Needed if a quick start date for volunteering is necessary.
  - FBI Clearance Exemption Form: If you have been a resident of Pennsylvania during the entirety of the previous ten-year period AND you are not disqualified

from service by reason of criminal history then you DO NOT need to process the FBI clearance.

- FBI Clearance Registration Website: FBI fingerprinting registration website. Register using Pennsylvania Department of Education Option. Please note that FBI clearances completed through any other option cannot be accepted.

*Once you have registered for your fingerprinting, you will receive a card. Contact the Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18 @ 570-287-9681 or the Bloomsburg University Bookstore @570-3894180. Remember, you must register through Cogent and have a registration card before you can go to the fingerprinting center.*

- Pa Child Abuse History Report Application-Child abuse clearance application.
- State Police PATCH System- Preferred processing method for state police clearance.

*State Police Clearance Form-Only needed if not using the PATCH system.*

- Instructions for returning the Clearances to the District
  - Once you have completed the Affidavit and Agreement (which allows you 30 days to apply for and obtain your clearances)
  - Present the completed Affidavit and Agreement to the Secretary of the Building for which you are going to volunteer.
  - Complete the applications for the required clearances
  - When you receive the clearances, return the original to either the District Office or the Secretary of your Child's School.
  - A copy will be made, scanned, and emailed to the District office where a database will be created and a list of "approved volunteers" will be generated and disseminated to all building in the Northwest Area School District.
- Staff/Parent planning committee - Staff/ Parent planning meeting will be held two times a year to ensure the academic programming is meeting the needs of the students.

### **Special Events**

- Holidays
  - Holidays are as culturally diverse as the world we live in. It is the philosophy of the Northwest Pre-K Counts program that holidays should be a learning experience. Holidays will be studied in a way that teaches the students the cultural aspects, as well as the history, symbols and traditions that accompany them. Holidays studied will *not*

- be limited to the ones celebrated by the majority of the students (*ie.- Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Kwanzaa*) and will include Patriotic holidays (*as per Standard 5.1 PK.F*)
- We welcome families to share the holidays they celebrate and recognize that some families prefer not to celebrate some or all holidays.
- Gift items that the whole class can enjoy are welcome, but not necessary.
- Please convey any concerns there may be with a Pre-K Counts staff member.
- Birthdays
  - Birthdays are an important milestone and celebration within some families. It is the philosophy of the Northwest Pre-K Counts program to recognize these milestones in a way that is developmentally and school appropriate.
  - Special treats for birthdays should be pre-arranged with the Pre-K Counts staff.
  - Treats should follow the Wellness Policy guidelines (*pre-packaged, under 100 calories per serving, sugar NOT the first ingredient*), but are not limited to food.
  - Suggestions for treats are (but limited to): fresh cut fruit (no grapes), Rice Krispie treats, cookies, stickers, pencils, bubbles, etc.
  - Store bought cupcakes (*including ones from the bakery*) that are not individually packaged do not meet the Wellness Policy guideline
- PTO sponsored activities- Whenever possible, students in the Pre-K Counts will participate in PTO sponsored activities. Parent volunteers will follow the guidelines of volunteering as listed in the "Parent Involvement" section of this handbook.

### **Involvement w/ Media**

- Videotaping/ photographing-
  - Students participate in classroom and school sponsored activities during the course of a school year. Certain classes and activities may be photographed, video recorded or posted to the school district website by the news media, district personnel, or other students. Likewise, live images may be relayed via cable or satellite connections to other districts or to other classrooms within our district to allow for live interactions between students and teachers at separate locations. Any media interaction with students must be approved in advance by the administration. Replication and sharing of photographs and/or video recordings of any student created for commercial use or intents are prohibited by NASD. This involvement by students, and the sharing of educational techniques and experiences, is intended to enhance and enrich the educational opportunities of all students and staff. The schools' experiences and involvement in these areas have been positive.
  - Students and parents are advised that students' voices, physical presence, participation in classroom/shop, and other activities may be transmitted to distant learning sites, recorded, photographed and displayed within the school and/or archived in school yearbooks.
  - Parents are provided a **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT WITH MEDIA AUTHORIZATION** form to be completed at the beginning of each school year.

### **Emergency Response Plan**

- In the event of emergencies Northwest Area School District will provide essential information to parents through several different channels to include: push notification over the Northwest App, communication on local News Stations, and district provide auto calls to all students.

### **Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect**

- Mandated reports Act- Northwest Area School District is required to report all suspected abuse/neglect to Luzerne County Children and Youth agencies.