



PONDEROSA
ACADEMY

Parent–Student Handbook

“Rooted in Integrity and Growth”

Mission & Vision

Mission:

To cultivate intellectual curiosity, moral character, and genuine human connection through a classically inspired, screen-free education that honors the integrity of learning and the joy of discovery.

Vision:

To be a model hybrid school where timeless ideas meet hands-on learning in a supportive, unplugged environment that empowers students and families to flourish.

Core Values:

- **Integrity:** Do what is right, even when no one is watching.
- **Respect:** Value yourself, others, and the community.
- **Curiosity:** Seek understanding with creativity and courage.
- **Stewardship:** Care for our environment and each other.

General Information

Address: Ponderosa Academy, Helena, MT 59601

Phone: (406) 324 7896

Website: ponderosa-academy.com

Academy Director: Cat Patzen

School Mascot: Copernicus the Hedgehog

School Hours:

- Elementary (K–5): 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Middle/High School (6–12): 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Office Hours: 7:45 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Student Rights & Responsibilities

Every student has the right to:

- Equal educational opportunities regardless of race, religion, gender, or ability.
- A safe learning environment free from discrimination, bullying, or harassment.
- Freedom of expression balanced with respect for the rights of others.
- Privacy of records as protected by FERPA.

Every student is responsible for:

- Behaving respectfully toward peers, staff, and property.
- Attending school regularly and arriving on time.
- Completing assignments with honesty and effort.
- Upholding the integrity and values of Ponderosa Academy.

Attendance Policy

Consistent attendance promotes academic success. Absences must be reported to the office before 9:00 a.m.

- **Excused Absences:** Illness, family emergency, religious observance, or school-sanctioned activity.
- **Unexcused Absences:** Missed days without notice or valid reason.
Students with extended absences may be required to complete a learning recovery plan.

Dress Code

Students are expected to dress neatly and modestly, suitable for a focused learning environment.

- Clothing must cover shoulders, torso, and mid-thigh.
- Slogans endorsing drugs, violence, or hate speech are prohibited.
- Shoes must be worn at all times.
- Hats and hoods are allowed outdoors only.

Technology & Devices

Ponderosa Academy is a device free campus. Personal devices (phones, smartwatches, earbuds) must be silenced and stored during class. Misuse may result in temporary confiscation and parent contact.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating, or unauthorized use of AI in coursework is strictly prohibited.

Disciplinary steps include:

1. Redoing the assignment or receiving a failing grade.
2. Academic probation for repeated offenses.
3. Administrative action for persistence or dishonesty.

Grading & Promotion

Report cards are issued quarterly through the family DreamClass portfolio. Teachers provide narrative feedback to promote growth.

Grade Scale (6–12):

A 90–100 B 80–89 C 70–79 D 60–69 F <60

Students performing below grade-level benchmarks will receive targeted support through tutoring or individualized learning plans.

Behavioral Expectations

Ponderosa Academy uses a **Positive Behavior Framework** modeled after the “Cooperative, Respectful, Achievers” system.

We are:

- **Cooperative:** Follow directions, help others, and work as a team.
- **Respectful:** Practice kindness and honesty in all interactions.
- **Achievers:** Give your best effort in all areas of growth.

Misconduct (defiance, harassment, vandalism, etc.) may result in restorative conferences, suspension, or other appropriate consequences based on severity.

Administrative Rules of Montana require all schools to have policies and procedures addressing bullying behavior in schools, on school buses, at school-sponsored activities, and online.

Definition of Bullying: Covers aggressive, repeated, or severe behavior that involves a power imbalance and creates an intimidating or abusive educational environment. There is a zero-tolerance for bullying.

Ponderosa Academy is committed to providing a safe, productive and positive learning environment at all grade levels. A safe and accepting school environment is conducive to, and necessary for optimal academic achievement. Like other disruptive behaviors, bullying, intimidation and hazing negatively impact the learning environment. Bullying, intimidating and

hazing behaviors will not be tolerated at any grade level. Students and staff are strictly prohibited from taking any action that could be interpreted as bullying, intimidation, hazing, or retaliation for reporting such action.

I. Definitions

A. "Bullying or intimidation " means any threatening, insulting, or demeaning gesture or physical conduct, including any intentional written, verbal, or electronic communication or threat directed against a student regardless of the underlying reason for such conduct that:

- a. causes a student physical or mental harm, damages a student's property or places a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student or the student's property;
- b. substantially interferes with a student's access to educational opportunity or benefit; or
- c. substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school.

B. "Electronic Communication" is defined in 45-8-213, MCA, and includes any communication by any electronic device including but not limited to text messaging, sexting, email, or use of social networking.

C. "Hazing" means an act against a student or coercing a student into behavior that creates risk of harm to a person in order for the student to be initiated into, or affiliated with a student activity, team, club or organization, or for any other purpose.

D. "Retaliation" means an intentional act or communication intended:

- a. as retribution against a person who has reported an incidence of bullying, harassment, or intimidation; or
- b. to improperly influence the reporting, investigation, or discipline that results from an incidence of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

E. "Sexting" means sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones, such as sending a text message with a sexual image.

F. "Staff member" includes but is not limited to teachers, specialists, coaches, administrators, board members, volunteers, custodians, and any others employed or authorized by the school, school board, or district.

G. "Designated Investigator" is the academy director, or a staff member appointed by the principal responsible for receiving and investigating reports of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

II. Prohibitions

A. No school student or staff member will engage in any of the following:

1. Bullying, intimidation or hazing of a student;
2. Retaliation against a student or staff member for reporting an incident of bullying, intimidation or hazing; or
3. Coercion of another person to commit bullying, intimidation, or hazing.

B. Bullying, intimidation and hazing is strictly prohibited:

1. in a classroom or any other location on school premises;
2. during any school sponsored program, activity, or function where the school is responsible for the student, including on a school bus or other school-related vehicle; or
3. through the use of electronic communication as defined in 45-8-213, regardless of when or where it occurs, that substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school or any school-sponsored program, activity, or function where the school is responsible for the student.

Consequences

A. If a student or staff member is found to have committed one of the above-prohibited behaviors, consequences may follow, up to and including expulsion or termination from employment. Such action is meant not only to discipline the offending student or staff member, but also to protect the target from future aggression or retaliation. Consequences may be implemented after reporting, investigation, and determination that a prohibited act has been committed.

B. Depending on the age of the students involved and severity of the infraction, disciplinary and remedial actions for students may include:

1. Parental notification
2. Loss of privilege(s)
3. Parent conference
4. Reassignment of seats

5. Reassignment of classes
6. Reassignment to another mode of transportation
7. Escort of the perpetrator
8. Completion of apology letter and acknowledgement of behavior
9. Referral or appointments with school counselor or other professionals
10. Payment for damaged property
11. Detention
12. Suspension (in-school or out-of-school)
13. Referral to law enforcement
14. Expulsion

Any student disciplined will be afforded due process as required by District policy for action taken by school administration or the Board of Trustees.

Health & Safety

Health records and immunizations must be up to date before attendance.
Parents must notify administration of allergies, medications, or chronic conditions.

Emergency Preparedness:

Fire, lockdown, and severe weather drills are held throughout the year. Students are expected to participate seriously and quietly.

Privacy and FERPA

Educational records are protected under the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**. Parents and eligible students have the right to inspect records and request corrections if inaccurate.

Non-Discrimination Statement

Ponderosa Academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or age in its programs or activities.

Grievance Procedure

Concerns may be brought forward in the following order:

1. Classroom Teacher or Advisor
2. Academy Director
3. Board of Directors

Formal complaints must be written and signed. Resolutions will be confirmed in writing.

Family Partnership

Parents are vital to student success. Families are encouraged to:

- Attend conferences and school events.
- Volunteer in classrooms or activities.
- Support student study habits at home.

A monthly digital newsletter keeps families informed about events, achievements, and announcements.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition and fees are invoiced monthly in advance. Family accounts are to be in good standing in order for students to continue attending classes. Private scholarships received by families will be applied toward the family account and applied to tuition expenses only. Consumable and other purchases may not be paid for with scholarship funds.

Acknowledgment

All students and parents are expected to sign an acknowledgment form stating that they have read and understood this handbook.

Appendix: Forms and Consents

The following forms must be completed and submitted through the **Parent Portal** or to the main office during registration week. Printable versions are also available upon request.

A. Parent–Student Acknowledgment Form

Purpose: To confirm that students and families have reviewed the Ponderosa Academy Parent–Student Handbook.

Signatures Required: Student and at least one parent/guardian.

Text:

We, the undersigned, acknowledge that we have read, discussed, and understand the expectations and policies outlined in the Ponderosa Academy Parent–Student Handbook. We recognize that it is our responsibility to follow these policies and uphold the standards of Ponderosa Academy in all school-related settings.

Student Name Grade Student Signature Date

Parent/Guardian Name Signature Date

B. Media Release Form

Purpose: To allow or deny consent for your student’s photo, video, or name to appear in school communications.

Options:

- I **grant** permission for photographs, video, or audio of my student to be used by Ponderosa Academy for newsletters, social media, or publicity.
- I **do not grant** permission for such use.

Parent/Guardian Name Signature Date

C. Technology Use Agreement

Purpose: To outline appropriate, responsible use of personal technology resources, devices, and networks.

Student Agreement:

I understand that this is a device free campus, and will not use any of my personal devices during school instruction.

I will not access or share inappropriate content, damage digital property, or compromise network security.

I understand that violation of this policy may result in loss of technology privileges or disciplinary action.

Student Name Grade Student Signature Date

Parent/Guardian Name Signature Date

D. Transportation and Field Trip Consent

Purpose: To permit participation in scheduled field trips under school supervision.

Text:

I authorize my child to participate in local, day-long school field trips supervised by Ponderosa Academy faculty and staff. I understand that specific permission slips will be issued for overnight or out-of-state trips.

Parent/Guardian Name Signature Date

E. Health and Emergency Contact Form

Purpose: To ensure immediate and accurate contact in case of illness or emergency.

Information Required:

- Primary guardian contact information
- Authorized emergency contacts
- Known allergies or chronic conditions
- Medications (with physician instructions)
- Health insurance provider and policy number

Parents are responsible for updating this information throughout the year.

F. Volunteer Interest & Background Check

Purpose: To support family engagement while maintaining campus safety.

Volunteers must:

- Complete an interest form listing areas (classroom, lunch support, library, athletics, etc.).
- Undergo a background check (renewed every two years).
- Attend the annual Volunteer Orientation.

G. Handbook Amendments and Communication

Policy updates are communicated electronically. Substantive changes (discipline policy, grading structure, tuition) require Board approval and family notification within 15 school days. Signing below acknowledges understanding that the handbook may be amended as necessary to improve student welfare and educational quality.

Parent/Guardian Signature Date