



**FernLeaf**  
community charter school

**SCHOOL COMMUNITY HANDBOOK**

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# **ABOUT FERNLEAF**

## **MISSION**

Fernleaf Community Charter School's mission is to foster a rich learning environment that embodies the essence of community, understanding, and the human spirit. Grounded in humble respect for our surroundings, the individual, and the world as a whole, we seek to engage the unique passions and aptitudes of our school community so that in addition to achieving academic fluency, students become thoughtful, compassionate, and engaged.

## **VALUES**

Our school embraces diversity, values creativity and innovation, and respects learning as an organic process. In addition to core academic subjects, we believe that social-emotional learning, arts, service learning and stewardship, environmental education/awareness, sustainable living, outdoor education, entrepreneurship, cultural awareness, and comprehensive health and wellness all contribute to create well-rounded, successful students who become thoughtful, compassionate, and engaged contributors to society.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

FernLeaf is governed by an independent Board of Directors that is responsible for the legal and financial well-being of the school. Board members are not involved in the day to day operations of the school and should not be contacted directly by FernLeaf families. All ideas, questions, or concerns should be directed to the appropriate school staff.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### School Address:

Creek Campus  
58 Howard Gap Rd.  
Fletcher, NC 28732

Phone: (828) 684-3645

Fax: (828) 575-5402

Website: [www.fernleafccs.org](http://www.fernleafccs.org)

Email: [info@fernleafccs.org](mailto:info@fernleafccs.org)

## **FAMILY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

We are thrilled to be a part of your family's life and to partner with you to benefit all the children of FernLeaf. Everyone has something unique and valuable to offer and we believe that active participation in your child's learning community benefits everyone.

In order for FernLeaf to best serve your child, we ask that you/your child:

- Please be respectful of the teachers and other students by making sure students arrive on time and stay for the entire day.
- Support your child in getting to school on-time and avoiding excessive absences.
- Plan vacations around scheduled school breaks.
- Allow for adequate sleep and nutrition.
- Stay informed of current classroom projects and lessons.
- Show interest in what is being learned/completed at school.
- Offer encouragement and positive reinforcement when needed.
- Spend time with your child so that his/her emotional needs are met.
- Work with your child and your child's teacher to develop a plan to best meet your child's individual needs.
- Regularly participate in FernLeaf functions and activities.
- Embrace and adhere to school policies for the benefit of the entire FernLeaf community.

### **VOLUNTEERING AT FERNLEAF**

Because we believe families play an important role in our learning community, we ask that your family volunteer as much as you are able. You can find ways to get involved by helping out in the classroom, helping with indoor and outdoor campus projects, chaperoning fieldwork, etc. Check your FernLeaf emails & newsletters for upcoming volunteer opportunities. Alternatively, email [info@fernleafccs.org](mailto:info@fernleafccs.org) if you'd like to offer a specific skill set as a volunteer or contact your child's teacher for other volunteer opportunities.

## **SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW**

- The school day begins at 8:00am and ends at 3:00pm. Every Friday is an early dismissal at 12:00pm.
- Students may arrive at school at 7:30am. All students who are not enrolled in after school activities must be picked up by 3:30pm Monday - Thursday and by 12:30pm on Fridays.
- To help avoid traffic congestion and delaying the start and end of the school day, families should utilize the established procedures for morning dropoff and afternoon

pickup. Specific pickup and drop-off procedures will be regularly communicated to families and are subject to change.

### **PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES AT SCHOOL**

Cell phones, Smartwatches, and other personal electronic devices are strictly prohibited before, during, or after school unless at the direct request of a teacher for instructional use. The only exception is for Kindles or eReaders which are to be used during designated or otherwise approved reading times. When a device is brought to school with permission, the parent or guardian of the student accepts all responsibility for damaged or lost items. This policy includes all electronic devices such as cell phones, tablets, and handheld game systems. Any devices brought to school without the request of a teacher will be kept in the main office until a parent/guardian picks them up. Repeated instances of violations to this policy will result in disciplinary action.

Special permission for students and families in unique circumstances may be provided with Administrative approval. Please contact the front office for additional guidance.

### **TOYS AT SCHOOL**

Toys from home are not permitted at school unless requested from your child's teacher for a special event. Toys include all non-academic, non-educational materials. As a general rule, please check with your child's teacher before sending in any items from home. Please understand that personal items from home are frequently damaged or lost. Your child's teacher and the school are not able to assume responsibility for personal items brought to school.

### **LUNCH**

FernLeaf students have two options for their healthy lunch option each day. They can bring their lunch and snacks from home each day, or they may order lunch from school through our online ordering platform - [My PaymentsPlus](#). You can see our current school menu and learn more about our lunch program here: <https://www.fernleafccs.org/food> When students order school lunch they will receive their meals during their appointed lunch time. Students who order school lunch will still need to bring a snack from home.

*NOTE: Food for lunches is ordered and paid for in advance after an order has been submitted therefore FernLeaf will not provide refunds for lunches that are missed due to conflicts with fieldwork, absences, or other circumstances resulting in a missed lunch.*

Lunches & snacks brought to school should follow the nutrition guidelines outlined below.

The importance of nutrition:

- Nutritious meals are an important factor in a student's ability to be successful. Therefore, we ask that students bring healthy snacks and lunch to school each day.
- Whole foods, foods that are not processed or refined, having zero to no additives, are strongly encouraged.
- Processed foods (foods packaged in boxes, cans, or bags) should be avoided as much as possible.
- Candy and soda are not permitted at school.
- Please provide any necessary utensils, napkins, or other items your child may need to enjoy their lunch.
- Pack it in - Pack it out
  - FernLeaf employs a "pack it in - pack it out" lunch trash policy.
  - Whatever storage or packaging items your child brings in their lunch bag/box will return home with them in the afternoon.
  - Not only is "pack it in pack it out" an important concept for children to learn, it also provides parents with the opportunity to monitor what their children are or are not eating at school.

## **CELEBRATIONS/HOLIDAYS**

FernLeaf does not *celebrate* holidays. Since the exploration of cultures and traditions is a natural part of a child's education, holidays may be acknowledged and discussed in a thoughtful way, but parties and activities surrounding Holidays are not permitted. Classroom community activities recognizing and celebrating a student's birthday are encouraged and are used to promote student connections. Staff are asked to recognize student birthdays in a manner that does not involve special snacks.

## **DRESS GUIDELINES**

FernLeaf embraces hands-on, experiential learning, which means students will be engaged in outdoor physical activity daily, such as field experiences, active play, adventure activities, and more. For this reason, students should dress appropriately for these activities at all times. In addition, please ensure your student is dressed appropriately for current weather conditions each day and that they always have extra clothes, including socks, at school. When a change of clothing is worn home, please replace it the next day. We don't want anyone to be uncomfortable if they get wet or muddy so we really need your help with staying on top of this. If students require a change of clothes and do not have a backup at school, parents/guardians will be contacted to bring additional clothing.

### **Indoor/Outdoor Shoe Policy**

At FernLeaf we work hard to balance the need for children to learn and grow through time outside with the challenges of dealing with the mess this can create. All K-4 Students should



follow these indoor/outdoor shoe guidelines to help support this effort. The use of Indoor and outdoor shoes is optional for students in grades 5 and above. Roller shoes, such as Heelys are not permitted for indoor or outdoor use at school.

- **Indoor footwear:** Students should have a pair of comfortable indoor shoes that are easily taken off and put on. Crocs or slip on tennis shoes work well, no slippers. These will remain at school.
- **Outdoor footwear:** Outdoor footwear will need to be selected each day based upon current weather conditions and the forecast for the day. Hiking shoes/boots, sturdy tennis shoes, and sport sandals work well. During wet weather students must have a pair of waterproof boots (rubber boots work well).

### **Exposure to the Elements**

Outdoor activity and the ability to interact with our environment in all weather conditions is an important part of a child's growth and development. Students may be exposed at any time to current weather conditions and so should come to school prepared with:

- Water bottle
- Sunscreen
- Appropriate outerwear for weather conditions including jackets, hats, gloves, etc.

### **Dress Code Policy**

#### Goals of FernLeaf's Student Dress Code Policy

- Maintain a safe learning environment in classes where protective or supportive clothing is needed such as science laboratory (eye protection), Physical Education (athletic supportive clothing or shoes), etc.
- Allow students to wear clothing of their choice that is comfortable.
- Allow students to wear clothing that expresses their self-identified gender.
- Allow students to wear religious attire without fear of discipline or discrimination.
- Prevent students from wearing clothing with offensive images or language, including profanity, hate speech & pornography.
- Prevent students from wearing clothing with images or language depicting or advocating violence or the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Ensure that all students are treated equitably regardless of gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, body type/size, religion & personal style.

The primary responsibility for a student's attire resides with the student and parents/guardians. FernLeaf holds the responsibility of seeing that student attire does not interfere with the health or safety of any student, and that student attire does not contribute to a hostile or intimidating environment for any student.

Students at FernLeaf are given the most choice possible in how they dress for school. Boundaries & restrictions are necessary to support the overall educational goals of the school and must be explained within the following dress code policy.

1. BASIC PRINCIPLE: CERTAIN BODY PARTS MUST BE COVERED FOR ALL STUDENTS
  - a. Clothing must be worn in a way such that genitals, buttocks and nipples are covered with opaque material. All items listed in the "must wear" and "may wear" categories below must meet this basic principle.
2. STUDENTS MUST WEAR...\*
  - a. Shirt
  - b. Bottom: pants/sweatpants/shorts/skirt/dress/leggings
  - c. Shoes

\*School courses that include attire as part of the curriculum (for example, professionalism, public speaking and job readiness) may include assignment specific dress.

3. STUDENTS MAY WEAR...
  - a. Hats, including religious headwear
  - b. Hoodie sweatshirts
  - c. Midriff baring shirts
  - d. Pajamas
  - e. Ripped Jeans - as long as underwear is not showing
  - f. Tank tops - including halter tops, spaghetti straps and strapless "tube" tops
  - g. Athletic attire
  - h. Clothing with commercial or athletic logos provided they do not violate the goals listed above.
4. STUDENTS CANNOT WEAR...
  - a. Violent language or images.
  - b. Images or language depicting drugs or alcohol (or any illegal item or activity) or the use of the same.
  - c. Hate speech, pornography, profanity.
  - d. Images or language that creates a hostile or intimidating environment based on any protected class.

- e. Visible underwear. Visible waistbands or straps on undergarments worn under other clothing are not a violation.
- f. Bathing suits.
- g. Helmets or headgear that obscures the face (except as a religious observance).

## **BULLYING DEFINITION**

Bullying means different things to different people and with *bully behaviors* being exhibited in a variety of ways, we feel it is helpful to share a common definition for our FernLeaf Community. It is important to understand that many challenging interactions with other students, including meanness, name calling, etc. are a typical part of child development. While challenging for children and parents, these situations often represent an important learning opportunity and do not constitute bullying. FernLeaf does not use the word bullying lightly. All concerning incidents should be reported to your child's teacher immediately.

FernLeaf's definition of bullying at school is an act of repeated verbal or physical aggression which takes place when there is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. In more student friendly terms we would say that bullying happens when someone hurts or scares another person with their words or body on purpose and the person being bullied has a hard time defending themselves. Usually, bullying happens over and over.

## **PARTICIPATION IN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVITIES**

In order to participate in afterschool programs and activities on or off campus, students must be in attendance at school the day of the program and meet the after school program behavior expectations. Additional requirements may vary depending on the program and include, but are not limited to: pre-registration, payment, the completion of a sports physical, etc.

After school program behavior expectations are the same as daily school expectations. These programs include Extended Care, after school class/programs, athletic activities, classes, and games, as well as social events. In order to support the enjoyment and participation of program activities by all attendees, students who repeatedly violate the Code of Conduct or engage in unsafe or disrespectful behaviors will be dismissed from the program for a period of time to be determined based on the nature of the problematic behavior. Refunds will not be offered for students who are dismissed from after school programs due to behavioral challenges.

## **EXTENDED CARE**

FernLeaf offers a fee-based after school program for enrolled students to provide families with a safe and nurturing environment for times when children cannot be picked up at the regular dismissal time.

Hours of operation:

Regular School Days (Mon - Thu):	3:00pm - 6:00pm
Early Dismissal Days (Fri):	12:00pm - 6:00pm

Fees, policies and additional information is available on our [website](#).

*NOTE: The costs of extended care including staffing, snacks, resources, and activities are shared by the enrolled students. As a result, FernLeaf will not provide refunds for extended care days that are missed due to absence, loss of privileges, suspension, opt-out, or other circumstances that result in a student not participating.*

## **FIELDWORK AT FERNLEAF**

We believe in the importance of enriching a student's learning through off-site learning opportunities which FernLeaf calls fieldwork. Students will participate in approximately eight fieldwork experiences each year, typically about once each month. Fieldwork is an integral part of the FernLeaf experience and our educational approach. These trips provide opportunities to build school community, make connections within our greater community, and provide students with access to rich and meaningful experiences that support their education and enrich their lives.

Your child's teaching team will keep you informed of all fieldwork plans. Please be sure to read all fieldwork communications carefully and send your child to school prepared for the day.

It is critical that we provide a safe and productive Fieldwork experience for all students on every trip while also building constructive and enduring relationships with our community partners. Respectful, safe, and cooperative behaviors are necessary to ensure safety and the overall integrity of our fieldwork program. Students who violate the FernLeaf Code of Conduct while on fieldwork or receive a suspension during the school day will not be eligible to participate in their class or grade level's next fieldwork trip.

*NOTE: Fieldwork is an integral part of FernLeaf's instructional programming which has costs that are shared evenly by all students in a class/grade level. As a result, families are expected to pay for fieldwork whether or not the student is in attendance. FernLeaf will not remove fieldwork fees or provide refunds for fieldwork that is missed due to absence, loss of privileges, suspension, opt-out, or other circumstances that result in a student not participating.*

## **SIGNING IN AND OUT**

- Students may not leave the campus at any time during the regular school day unless they are signed out from the office.

- Students who return to campus after being signed out must be signed back in.
- Parents/Guardians should schedule student appointments outside the regular school day as much as possible. Friday after early dismissal is a great time to schedule non-emergency appointments.
- Parents are asked to limit late arrivals and early sign-outs as they cause a disruption to the school day and have a negative impact on the student leaving early, other students in the class, and the overall integrity of the educational program.
- Students are not permitted to be signed out between 2:30 - 3:00 pm Monday - Thursday and 11:30 - 12:00 pm Fridays.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Attendance at school is not only an essential element to a successful school experience; it is also a state law for all students under the age of 16. Every effort should be made to attend school to gain the full benefit of the educational opportunity available. Absences are coded as either "excused," or "unexcused."

**All absences should be reported by parents and guardians through our [online absence reporting form](#) that can be found on the school website. It is helpful to let your child's teacher know when your student will be absent, but the online form is the way we officially record absences in our computer system.**

### **Excused Absences**

- Injury or illness
- Death in the immediate family
- Religious observance
- Approved planned educational leave
- Court or administrative proceedings
- Medical or dental appointments

### **Unexcused Absences**

- Absences due to any reason other than those listed above are "unexcused" with no exceptions.
- State law requires the school to notify parents/guardians the parent in writing students reach certain absence milestones. If a student accumulates 7 unexcused absences, parents will be contacted by the appropriate school staff to discuss the reasons for absences, the history of attendance and make a recommendation to address the problem that they believe to be in the best interest of the child(ren).
- After 10 unexcused absences, state law requires that school officials review the situation and determine if the child is truant. Truancy reporting is to be decided based on circumstances of the absences and history of school attendance. If it is determined that the child is truant, the FernLeaf is legally obligated to make a report to the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Attendance is required for a minimum of 90% of school days per year. A student who is absent 17 days or more may be retained.

Students arriving after 11:30 am or leaving before 11:30 am will be marked absent for the day.

### **Late Arrivals to School**

The school day begins at 8:00 am. It is extremely important that **all students** are in their classrooms and ready to start their day by 8:00 each day. Please understand that this has an impact on other students and staff and sends the message to your own children that timeliness is not important. Students arriving late must be walked into the main office and signed in. Please plan on increased traffic at school beginning at 7:50 am and allow ample time for your student(s) to arrive on time to school daily.

### **ILLNESS**

The health and wellness of the school community should be balanced with the student's educational needs. We understand that balancing work with caring for sick children at home is a challenge, but when students attend school when they are sick it disrupts the educational experience of others and increases the likelihood that the illness will spread throughout the classroom and school. Students should stay home when they have any of the following symptoms:

- Fever (student must be free of any fever over 100° without the use of medication for 24 hours before returning to school)
- Vomiting or diarrhea (24 hours must pass since the last episode of vomiting or diarrhea)
- Unidentified rash
- Chicken Pox
- Strep throat: until treated by a physician
- Conjunctivitis ("pink eye"): until student has been on medication for 24 hours

Classroom teachers, the school nurse, and administration are authorized to send a child home from school if their condition warrants this. The child will be released to parents; if parents are not available, they will be released to an individual designated by parents on the Student Information Form.

### **Head Lice & Active Nits**

- Parents of students with lice and/or nits will be notified and referred for treatment.
- Children may return to school once treatment has occurred and all nits have been removed. The parent is asked to bring the child to the main office and have the child's head checked again for lice/nits.
- If no live lice or nits are present, the child may remain at school. Otherwise, the parent will be asked to take the child home and continue treatment.

## **PROMOTION AND RETENTION**

Promotion to the next grade level at FernLeaf Community Charter School is based on multiple factors including but not limited to:

- School based assessments
- Student work samples
- Progress reports
- Standardized assessments
- Attendance for a minimum of 157 days per school year

When deciding promotion or retention, the Promotion and Retention Committee will review the above components concerning a student's academic, social, and personal growth and development. The School Director will make the final determination for all students' promotion or retention.

When the possibility of retention for any student arises, teachers and/or administrators will communicate with parents or guardians as early as possible and on an ongoing basis through conferences, phone and/or email correspondence. The goal of all communication will be to inform parents and students of the risk of retention and to develop appropriate strategies for determining the best course of action that serves the student's best interest.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

- Parents will be asked to provide FernLeaf with written instructions whenever regular transportation plans change or when a child is to be released to someone other than parents, a legal guardian, or person designated on the Student Information Form.
- During morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up students should only be unloaded in the designated loading area (marked with orange cones) while staff is present.
- FernLeaf offers bus service to student's based on a lottery and waitlist system. If you would like to sign up for school transportation for your child or learn more about our program [please visit the school website for more information.](#)
- If your student is registered for the bus they will be placed on the bus at afternoon dismissal unless the [DO NOT RIDE BUS HOME Form](#) is submitted before 2pm on the day of transportation.

## **INCLEMENT WEATHER PLANS**

The safety of our School Community as a whole is our primary concern when inclement weather presents itself. We understand the inconvenience, stress, and difficulty associated with school closings, delays, and early dismissals. We will always err on the side of caution to protect our students, families, teachers, and the community. FernLeaf does not always follow the inclement weather decisions of the surrounding counties.

When there are changes in FernLeaf's schedule due to inclement weather:

- Announcements will be made on WLOS TV and wlos.com

- The school website and Social Media will be updated
- You will receive a phone call, text, and email message communicating details regarding closure, delay, virtual day, etc.

### **Virtual Day Activities for School Closings Related to Inclement Weather**

When a Virtual Day is called you will receive an email from your child's Home Crew Teacher containing assigned activities, a variety of choice activities, and an online form to confirm that your child has completed the work (used for attendance purposes). These tasks are meant to be meaningful and engaging and are a good way to connect with your child and see what they are learning at school.

### **CONTINUUM OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RELATED SERVICES**

Special education refers to a range of services that can be provided in different ways and in different settings. There's no "one size fits all" approach to special education. Special Education is tailored to meet the individual needs of a student with disabilities.

FernLeaf Community Charter School offers a full continuum of special education and related services to students who have been determined eligible for special education services by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Referral, evaluation, identification, and special education services are provided as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the North Carolina Procedures Governing Programs and Services for Children with Disabilities.

Eligibility is based on meeting specific criteria, through a multi-tiered systems of support as well as individualized assessments and evaluations, for one or more areas of disabilities. The disability must have an adverse effect on the student's educational performance and to the extent that specially designed instruction is needed. The IEP team will determine if a student meets the criteria for eligibility and develop an individualized education program for any eligible student. IEPs are implemented using research-based instructional practices and strategies. Special education teachers work in collaboration with general education teachers and parents to ensure all students with IEPs receive a Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepares them for further education, employment and independent living.

FernLeaf Community Charter School provides services in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate for each student. All decisions regarding the least restrictive environment are determined by the IEP team based on the unique and individual needs of each eligible student.

### **CHILD FIND**

[Child Find](#) is a legal requirement that schools find all children who have disabilities and who may be entitled to special education services. This requirement covers every child from birth through age 21 and mandates that a school must evaluate any child that it knows or suspects may have a disability. Questions regarding Child Find or concerns regarding a student with a disability may be directed to the school EC Director (828-684-3645).



## **SCHOOL COUNSELING SUPPORTS**

Our school counselors are available to help support all students and their families meet their social, emotional and academic goals. As a part of the educational team, the school counselor collaborates with all community stake-holders to address barriers to learning and academic success. School counseling supports are provided to all FernLeaf students through classroom lessons and special programs. Supplemental supports are provided through small group meetings and individual visits.

**Individual counseling services** are accessed by student requests and referrals from teachers, administrators, or parents free of charge. All students have time-limited access to individual counseling with the school counselor unless the student's guardian opts out of this free resource. Guardians wishing to opt out of individual counseling services may email one of our administrative team members. The opt out request must be renewed within the first week of each new school year. Please keep in mind that the school counselor will only break confidentiality if the student poses a risk to self or others.

**Crisis Response** is a reactive measure used to support the well-being of our community in the aftermath of an emergency. In the event of an emergency, our school's administrative team and our school counselor will collaborate with other area charter schools and their mental health teams to best meet the needs of our community.

## **SAFETY AND SUPERVISION**

FernLeaf embraces hands-on, experiential learning. Students will be engaged in physical activity frequently, such as field experiences, active play, adventure activities, and more. During the course of these normal activities for our school, accidents may occur. Supervision of students when they are on campus or when they are participating in a school-related field trip is provided by our faculty, many of whom are trained in basic first-aid techniques and CPR. In the event of an accident or injury our goal is to provide immediate and appropriate care for the student by:

- Preventing further harm to the student or other students (which may include moving the student).
- Providing comfort care and urgent care in situations involving breathing or bleeding.
- Referring immediately to the parent and/or medical professionals.

When an accident happens at school which results in serious injury, school staff will use the provided Emergency Contact Information to contact parents or designated emergency contacts. If necessary, 911 will be called while the school attempts to reach a parent. Every effort will be made to contact parents as soon as possible to involve them in the decision-making process, unless time and urgency dictate otherwise. In the event of a minor injury the supervising staff member will exercise judgment in making a decision to contact the

parent. In most cases, parents will be alerted so they will have the option of viewing the injury themselves. Staff will complete an Injury/Accident report to keep on file.

Families can assist the school in ensuring their child's safety and wellbeing:

- Make sure the FernLeaf office has up-to-date contact information as well as additional emergency contacts. It is imperative that we are able to reach a responsible adult at all times when a student is involved in school activities.
- Please notify your child's teachers and the office if any contact numbers change throughout the year.

### **ASBESTOS STATEMENT AND NOTIFICATION**

The US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) requires all schools to inspect building materials for the presence of asbestos. AHERA excludes schools from the inspection requirement if the school was constructed after October 12, 1988, and has a signed statement from the architect or project engineer responsible for constructing the school stating that no asbestos-containing building materials were specified for use in the construction of the school. Our school has been provided such a statement, and is, therefore, exempt from the requirement to conduct an asbestos inspection.

The EPA requires us to annually notify you that we are aware of the AHERA regulation, and that we are in compliance. The Management Plan is available for you to review at any time during normal school hours.

## **COMMUNICATIONS/PUBLICATIONS**

### **PARENT/GUARDIAN AND TEACHER COMMUNICATION**

Communication with parents is important and a critical piece of the FernLeaf partnership. Regular and ongoing communication will take place throughout the school year and email will be one of the primary communication tools. Teachers will keep parents informed about their curriculum, class meeting topics, group initiatives, accommodations or differentiation used to address the needs of individual children, field trips and special projects, and most importantly, about students' school experience, and academic progress. Parents/guardians and teachers will communicate on a weekly basis through newsletters, emails, progress reports and other means.

### **WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNICATION**

#### **1. 'THE FROND & THE FIDDLEHEAD' NEWSLETTER**

Another way communication happens is through a schoolwide newsletter. This newsletter is intended to keep families informed about on and off campus events, school activities and other

interesting things happening in our community. Please be sure to whitelist [info@fernleafccs.org](mailto:info@fernleafccs.org) to ensure you're receiving your school newsletter!

## **2. EVENT CALENDAR**

FernLeaf families can find a live and up to date events calendar on our website here: <https://www.fernleafccs.org/events> This calendar includes staff birthdays, after school activities, whole school events, grade specific events, field trips and all school related activities.

## **3. PHONE, EMAIL, AND TEXT MESSAGES**

FernLeaf utilizes a mass communication system to communicate timely and important information to the entire school community including delays, important reminders, and more. Please contact the school if you are not receiving regular communications this way.

# **ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS**

## **HOMEWORK**

FernLeaf promotes an academically challenging curriculum, but also recognizes that at the elementary level homework can be detrimental to a student's relationship with school and family. We believe time invested in out-of-school interests and time with family are both important for healthy development. Families are encouraged to engage their student(s) in conversation about what is happening at school and to read together each night. At the elementary level, work to be completed at home will only be assigned when it supports a project or when it is used to engage families in a learning experience. As students progress into late elementary and early middle grades homework will be assigned in developmentally appropriate ways to support academic progress, independent work habits, and organizational skills.

## **CONFERENCES**

Teachers will schedule conferences on an as-needed basis and at parents/guardians request. Conference days are scheduled following the end of each reporting period. Your child's teacher will communicate with you about scheduling conferences during this time.

## **FERNLEAF INTERVENTION PROGRAM**

In the event that a FernLeaf Teacher observes that a child's needs over time—whether social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and/or behavioral— require attention and interventions beyond the scope of everyday classroom practices, the FernLeaf Intervention Program (FLIP) will be initiated. This process represents a screening system designed to support the identification of individualized learning needs.

## **ASSESSMENTS, STANDARDIZED TESTING, AND PROGRESS REPORTS**

A variety of teacher-developed assessments and established diagnostic tools are used throughout the school year to assess student learning. These assessment results are used along with observational data to monitor student growth and to guide instructional planning.

FernLeaf progress reports are shared with families and students on a trimesterly basis in the form of a standards based grading review. These reports include feedback related to educational progress in addition to social and emotional skills. They include a narrative section where teachers are able to share additional details related to their observations.

Federal legislation and North Carolina's Accountability Program require all public and charter schools to participate in the state's testing and accountability program. Standardized testing represents one of many measures of student progress. Regularly administered tests include the North Carolina beginning-of-grade test in English Language Arts and Reading in third grade, end-of-grade tests in reading and math given once per year in third through eighth grade, and the end-of-grade science test administered in fifth and eighth grade. High school students are required to take end-of-course tests at the completion of specific courses. Some of FernLeaf's students with identified exceptionalities will take alternative assessments as documented in the student's IEP.

## **ACCEPTABLE USE POLICIES FOR THE INTERNET & TECHNOLOGY**

[FernLeaf Acceptable Use Policies for the Internet and Technology](#)

## **CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE**

### **GENERAL PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH**

Student conduct is guided by a Code of Conduct that is thoughtful, compassionate, and respectful of the entire FernLeaf Community. It preserves the innate curiosity of children and is used as a learning opportunity to assist students in their academic, social, and personal growth and development. Consistent with the school's mission, students are actively engaged and connected to a community of caring adults and peers enabling them to learn and grow while contributing to a positive and healthy school environment. Incorporating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) throughout the curriculum allows children to perform better at school and in life. Aspects of SEL that FernLeaf models, teaches, and integrates include: self awareness, self management, relationship skills, responsible decision making, mindfulness, positive work ethic, etc.

FernLeaf's policies related to student conduct are designed to be clear, logical, fair, and provide opportunities for student growth and learning. Consistent with our mission, principles and policies governing student conduct will be developed and revised on an ongoing basis with strong input from the entire FernLeaf community including students, staff, administration, and the Board of Directors.

### **CODE OF CONDUCT**

The following Code of Conduct applies to all members of the FernLeaf community, including FernLeaf staff, volunteers, students, families, and community members in all matters related to the FernLeaf Community:

As engaged members of the FernLeaf community, we are committed to:

- Treating others with kindness and compassion.
- Demonstrating respect for ourselves, others, and our surroundings in all we do and say.
- Taking responsibility for ourselves.
- Being open to new ideas.
- Seeking out help when we need it.
- Considering the needs of others.
- Conducting ourselves in a safe manner.
- Demonstrating thoughtfulness in all we do and say.
- Actively participating in our learning community.
- Helping and supporting those around us.

If a student is found to have violated one or more of the above listed expectations, he or she may be subject to disciplinary practices. FernLeaf is committed to encouraging students to use healthy and positive problem solving, conflict resolution, and communication skills to resolve conflicts and correct mistakes. This practice will be modeled by all FernLeaf faculty and staff on a daily basis. Staff will always be available to supervise and assist in the process as needed. In addition, these skills and practices will be part of the very foundation of FernLeaf's overall approach to student learning.

For instances in which an individual's actions present a risk of harm to themselves or others FernLeaf has a team of individuals who are certified through the [Crisis Prevention Institute](#) (CPI) to respond in a manner that focuses on de-escalation.

### **PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION (PDA) GUIDELINES**

FernLeaf is committed to creating a respectful and comfortable school environment for all students, staff, and visitors. Public Displays of Affection, including seemingly innocent acts, often represent a distraction for the students engaging in the practice as well as others who witness them. Due to the personal nature of these expressions of feelings, Public Displays of Affection can also create an environment that is uncomfortable for others. Consistent with FernLeaf's Mission and in order to maintain a comfortable learning environment that is free

from unnecessary distractions, simple displays of personal connection such as a hug or hand holding are permitted, but all other Public Displays of Affection are not permitted at school, on school grounds, or during school sponsored activities.

## **DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES**

FernLeaf Community Charter School adheres to clearly defined discipline procedures based on respect, equality, and the right to due process. Violation of the Code of Conduct in school, on school grounds, or at any school sponsored event or activity, may result in consequences designed to prevent the behavior from recurring. These consequences may include but are not limited to:

- Respectful and informal reminder of FernLeaf expectations.
- Student/teacher dialog.
- Loss of classroom, fieldwork and/or school privileges.
- Conflict resolution and mediation strategies for those involved.
- Communication with parents/guardians.
- Parent/guardian conferences.
- Student meeting with the School Director.
- Behavior agreements.
- Suspension.
- Expulsion.

### **Prohibited Disciplinary Practices**

The following disciplinary procedures are not acceptable at FernLeaf Community Charter School and staff members are prohibited from employing them:

- Any form of corporal punishment.
- Physical restraint except in accordance with G.S. 115C-391.1.
- Seclusion except as allowed in G.S. 115C-391.1.

Staff may employ reasonable force to control behavior or remove a person from the scene in those situations when necessary as allowed in G.S. 115C-390.3.

### **Repeated Violations of Student Code of Conduct**

When a student repeatedly violates the FernLeaf Community Charter School Code of Conduct, a growth plan may be developed by the student, parents/guardians, relevant teachers, and the School Director. Ongoing assessment of growth plans, student records, and classroom performance will be used to consider further disciplinary action which may include suspension or expulsion.

## **GROUNDS FOR SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION**

Any student, including a student with a disability, may be subject to mandatory or discretionary suspension or expulsion when it is determined that he/she caused, attempted to cause, or participated in infractions such as:

- Unlawfully possessing, using, selling or otherwise furnishing or being under the influence of any controlled substance, alcoholic beverage or intoxicant of any kind.
- Stealing or attempting to steal either school or private property, or knowingly receiving stolen school or private property.
- Possessing or using tobacco or tobacco products on school premises.
- Committing an obscene act or engaging in habitual profanity or vulgarity.
- Causing, attempting to cause, or threatening to cause physical injury to another person or themselves.
- Causing, attempting to cause, or participating in an act of hate, violence or bullying.
- Disrupting school activities or otherwise defying the valid authority of supervisors, teachers or other school personnel.
- Willfully damaging or vandalizing either school or private property.
- Bringing a weapon as defined in G.S. 14-269.2[b] (i.e. - a gun, rifle, pistol, or other firearm of any kind) or any dynamite cartridge, bomb, grenade, mine or powerful explosive as defined in G.S. 14-284.1 including a BB gun, air rifle or air pistol.

Depending upon the nature of the offense, and in accordance with board policy and applicable law, a student may be suspended or expelled for misconduct not listed above. Students may be suspended for a first time offense if the School Director deems the student presents a danger to persons or property.

### **PROCEDURES FOR SHORT TERM SUSPENSIONS**

A short term suspension is a removal from the school for a period of less than ten (10) days. The School Director may impose a short-term suspension when a student willfully engages in conduct that violates a provision of the FernLeaf Code of Conduct. Pursuant to G.S. 115C-390.6, short-term suspensions are not entitled to appeal nor are they subjected to judicial review.

Pursuant to G.S. 115C-390.6, short term suspensions will be imposed by the School Director following an informal hearing. The student will be notified verbally or in writing of the charges as soon as possible following the violation and the informal hearing may be held immediately after the notice is given. The student will meet with the School Director and will be informed of the charges and the basis for the accusations, and the student has the right to make statements in defense or mitigation of the charges. If the presence of the student creates a direct and immediate threat to the safety of other students or staff, or substantially disrupts the education of other students or the maintenance of discipline at the school, the hearing may be postponed until it is practical.

The School Director will provide the student's parent or guardian with a notice of the short term suspension which includes the reason for the suspension and description of the student's behavior which led to the suspension. The notice may be given by telephone, e-mail, fax, or certified mail and should be given by the end of the workday of the suspension, if possible, but no later than two days after the suspension is imposed.

A student subject to short-term suspension will be provided the following:

- The opportunity to take textbooks home for the duration of the suspension.

- Upon request, the right to receive all missed assignments, and to the extent practical, the materials distributed to students in connection with the assignments.
- The opportunity to take any quarterly, semester, or grading period tests or exams missed during the suspension period.

### **PROCEDURES FOR LONG TERM SUSPENSIONS**

A long term suspension is a removal from school for a period of 10 days or more. If the suspension occurs before the last quarter of the year, the suspension may not be for more than the remainder of the school year. If the suspension occurs during the final quarter of the year, the suspension may include a period up to the end of the first semester of the next year. As outlined in G.S. 115C-390.8 the School Director will provide the parent with a written notice by the end of the workday of the suspension, if possible, or as soon as practicable thereafter. The written notice may be provided by certified mail, fax, e-mail or other written method. The notice will contain information outlined in G. S. 115C-390.8. All procedures for long term suspension of a student will be pursuant to G.S. 115C-390.7.

The School Director will recommend a long term suspension to the Board of Directors if the incident or ongoing behavior of the student warrants exclusion to ensure the safety of other students, staff or school visitors, or to prohibit disruption to the educational environment. Only the Board of Directors, or a sub-committee of the Board of Directors has the authority to impose a long term suspension. The Board of Directors may appoint a committee of not less than three members (not to include the School Director or any staff member under the supervision of the School Director) to conduct a hearing about the recommendation for long term suspension and to make the decision to impose a long term suspension. The hearing by the Board of Directors must be scheduled within 10 days from the first day of suspension. If a parent has requested a hearing to contest the recommendation, the Board of Directors, or its sub-committee will include the parent in the hearing and the School Director will notify the parent at least five (5) calendar days prior to the hearing date. This notice will include:

- The date, place, and time of the hearing.
- A statement of the specific facts, charges, and offenses upon which the proposed suspension is based.
- A copy of FernLeaf Community Charter School's disciplinary rules related to the alleged violation.

If the student and/or parent attend the hearing, they may present a written statement and may be allowed ten (10) minutes to make oral comments. Additionally the student or the student's parents/guardians has the right to:

- Be represented at the hearing by counsel or, in the discretion of the Board, a non-attorney advocate.
- Be present at the hearing, accompanied by his or her parents.



- Review, before the hearing, any audio or video recordings of the incident and, consistent with federal and state student records laws and regulations, the information supporting the suspension that may be presented as evidence at the hearing including statements made by witnesses related to the charges consistent with subsection (h) of G.S. 115C-390.8. This right also applies to any legal counsel representing the student or his/her parent or guardian.
- Question witnesses appearing at the hearing.
- Present evidence on his or her behalf, which may include written statements or oral testimony, relating to the incident leading to the suspension, as well as any of the factors listed in G.S. 115C-390.2(g).
- Have a record made of the hearing.
- Make his or her own audio recording of the hearing.

If neither the student nor parent appears for the scheduled hearing, the parent and student are deemed to have waived the right to a hearing and the recommendation will be made without a hearing.

The Board of Directors or its committee will review all information provided by the student or parent and the School Director regarding the recommendation for long term suspension and will make a decision to uphold or deny the School Director's recommendation. The Board Chairperson will notify the student's parent(s), or other legal guardian of the Board's decision in a letter within three days following the day of the hearing containing the following information:

- The basis for the decision, including a reference to any policy or rule that the student is determined to have violated.
- Notice of what information will be included in the student's official record pursuant to G.S. 115C-402.
- Statement that the decision of the Board is final.

## **EXPULSIONS**

Expulsion is the indefinite exclusion of a student from school enrollment for disciplinary purposes. Pursuant to GS 115C-390.11, only students ages 14 or older may be recommended for expulsion if the School Director confirms, due to the nature of the violation, the presence of the student causes a continuing danger to the physical safety of the student or others. A student recommended for expulsion will be given the same due process as long-term suspensions. The hearing will be presided over by the Board of Directors of FernLeaf Community Charter School. In the event of a decision to expel a student from FernLeaf Community Charter School, the School Director will work cooperatively with the district of residence to assist with the appropriate placement of the student.

## **JUDICIAL REVIEW OF LONG-TERM SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION**

All long-term suspension and expulsion decisions made by the FernLeaf Community Charter School Board of Directors are final, subject only to judicial review in accordance with Article 4 of Chapter 150b of the North Carolina General Statutes.

## **SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

### **Suspension of Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are subject to suspension on the same grounds as general education students provided that suspension is not considered a change of placement as determined by the student's IEP. A student with disabilities may be suspended if he/she poses an immediate threat to the safety of himself/herself or others. These students will still be provided with academic and behavioral services as outlined in their IEP. Suspension will be imposed only when other means of correction fail to bring about proper conduct.

If suspensions total more than ten (10) days in one school year, a hearing will be held by the School Director and the IEP team to determine if the behavior is a result of the disability (Manifestation Determination). The student's educational services will also be reviewed.

### **Expulsion of Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are subject to expulsion only if all of the following conditions are met:

- The IEP team determines that the misconduct was not caused by, or was not a direct manifestation of, the student's identified disability.
- The team determines that the student had been appropriately placed at the time the misconduct occurred and services were fully in place.