



Merriam Cherry Street Elementary

Parent and Student Handbook

2025-2026

Merriam Cherry Street Elementary
1125 Cherry Street
Panama City, FL 32401
850-767-1480

J. Phillip Campbell
Principal

Carla Lilja
Assistant Principal

Janice Salares
Administrator on Special Assignment

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MISSION & VISION

Mission: We believe that each student will achieve their full potential as a leader by thriving academically and personally at Merriam Cherry Street Elementary.

Vision: 100% of our students will be at or above grade level in reading and math and grow at least one-grade level each year.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

School

Main Office	850-767-1480
Fax	850-767-1500
Guidance	850-767-1492
Cafeteria	850-767-1495
Bay Base	850-767-1490

District

District Office	850-767-4100
Student Services	850-767-4311
Pre-K Office	850-767-4264
Transportation	850-767-4495
Safety and Security	850-767-4127

IMPORTANT WEBSITES

District:	www.bay.k12.fl.us
School:	https://merriamcherry.bay.k12.fl.us/
Parent Portal:	https://focus.bayschools.net/focus/
Launch Pad:	https://launchpad.classlink.com/bayschools
Facebook:	www.facebook.com/merriamcherrystreetelementary

DAILY SCHEDULE

7:05	Student Supervision Begins
7:25	First Bell Rings
7:30	Tardy Bell Rings
2:00	Student Dismissal

STUDENT ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

School is in session from 7:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Student Drop-Off: Students may **NOT** arrive on campus before **7:05 a.m.** There is NO supervision before this time. Please use the car loop and keep your child in the car until we open the doors at 7:05 a.m. Parents dropping off students must remain in their vehicles. **Only Merriam Cherry Street students are permitted to enter campus during the morning drop-off.** Staff members or trained Safety Patrol students will be available to escort our young students to their morning waiting areas.

To ensure that our drop-off zone is both safe and efficient, please adhere to the following rules:

- ❖ Use only the designated student drop-off area.
- ❖ Pull forward as far as possible to allow the maximum number of cars to unload.
- ❖ Once your vehicle has reached the awning area, your child may exit the vehicle.
- ❖ Have your child prepared to exit on the school side of your vehicle as soon as all cars have pulled through and stopped.
- ❖ Keep the crosswalks clear.
- ❖ Stay in your vehicle.
- ❖ Stay alert. Please refrain from using your cell phone.
- ❖ All students should enter campus utilizing the arrival/dismissal gate near the P.E. pavilion.
- ❖ **ABSOLUTELY NO DROP-OFF OF STUDENTS IN THE PARKING LOT OR ON THE STREET.**

Student Pick-up at 2:00 pm Dismissal: Pick-up procedures are in place to ensure that all students are dismissed safely and efficiently. Please assist us in this endeavor by adhering to the following procedures:

- ❖ Use only the designated student pick-up area.
- ❖ A current-year dismissal tag is required and must be visible.
- ❖ Pull your car forward as far as possible to allow the maximum number of cars to load.
- ❖ Keep the crosswalk clear.
- ❖ Stay in your vehicle.
- ❖ Stay alert. Please refrain from using your cell phone.
- ❖ **All vehicles MUST have a Merriam Cherry Street school-issued Dismissal Pick-up Tag.** Dismissal tags allow staff members to keep the dismissal line moving efficiently. If you do not have the required tag you will be advised to park your vehicle and bring a valid picture ID into the office. You must be listed in the Parent Portal and sign the child out. This procedure is in place for the safety of your child.
- ❖ If you walk to pick up your child, you **MUST** bring your dismissal tag and wait in the assigned area until your child is released.

Checking Out Students: Excessive check-outs are disruptive to the teachers and students. Please try to schedule appointments outside of school hours. Students will only be released to individuals listed in the Parent Portal with permission to pick up and who present a valid picture identification. Students will not be called to the office until an authorized adult with a valid picture ID arrives on campus to check them out.

Students may not check out after 1:30 p.m. Extended Day VPK students may be dismissed from the extended day program after five early check-outs.

TRANSPORTATION

Bicycles: Bicycles must be parked in the designated bicycle storage area. Bicycle locks are highly recommended. The school is not responsible for the security of bicycles stored in the bicycle area.

Bus Stops and Procedures: The Bay District School Board provides buses and drivers for the transportation of students. Bus stops are set by the School Board, not by the bus drivers. Permission to ride school buses is granted based on the address listed in Parent Portal. Please discuss the following with your child: (1) arrive at the bus stop five minutes before the bus time, (2) stand off to the side of the roadway while awaiting the bus, and (3) obey the driver at all times. If you have questions or concerns regarding the transportation of your child, please feel free to call transportation at 767-4495.

Car and Bus Transportation Changes: If there is a change in a student's afternoon transportation routine, a parent must send a written note to the teacher stating the change and its duration. Class Dojo is not an acceptable method to communicate transportation changes. Without written communication from the parent, students will be sent home per their normal dismissal procedure. We understand that sometimes there are last-minute changes that cannot be helped, but it is disruptive to the students and teachers when we have to call them regularly about dismissal changes. If an **emergency** arises, please call the school office prior to 1:00 pm so that we have time to get the message to your child's teacher prior to dismissal.

Field Trips: Before a student may participate in a school-sponsored activity away from campus all required documents and fees must be turned in by the due date indicated. Students must be present at school and depart school on the bus with their assigned group to attend a field trip. Students on field trips are subject to all school rules and policies. Money collected for school field trips is non-refundable.

Parent Chaperone procedures must comply with the new Parent Rights Notification rules outlined by the Florida Department of Education. If approved in advance and listed on the field trip permission form, chaperones (who will be responsible for supervising a group of children) for any field trip must be cleared through the fingerprint process with the Safety Office and obtain an official BDS Volunteer Badge.

Please note that not all field trips permit parents and/or chaperones to attend.

VISITING CAMPUS/VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Pets: No pets are allowed on campus.

Visitor's Badge Procedures: In order to ensure the safety of our students, we require all visitors to report to the front office for a visitor's badge prior to reporting to any location on campus. Visitors will be screened upon presenting any of the following forms of identification:

1. A state-issued driver's license or identification card (all 50 states)
2. A United States Military identification card
3. A consular identification card issued by the government of Mexico
4. A United States Permanent Resident Card

School Advisory Council (SAC): The School Advisory Council (SAC) is seeking new members. All parents of students at Merriam Cherry Street, and business and community representatives are eligible for membership. Partnerships with all stakeholders are highly valued and proven to improve student achievement. The SAC is responsible for assisting in the formulation and implementation of the school improvement plan, acting as an advisor to the principal, assisting in the development of the educational program and acting as a liaison between the school and community. If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a member, please call or send your name/phone number to the school's main office.

Elevate Bay Mentoring Program: Elevate Bay is a mentoring initiative by Bay District Schools that focuses on supporting and encouraging at-risk children. Volunteers can serve as classroom mentors, one-on-one mentors or as a lunch buddy for an individual student. For more information, contact Stacey Legg at 850-767-4128 or leggs1@bay.k12.fl.us

Lunch Visitors Guidelines: There is limited seating during each lunch period so visitors will be limited to two adults per student.

- ❖ Siblings' lunch times will not be altered. If a visitor wishes to eat with more than one student, the visitor must do so at each student's assigned time.
- ❖ Arrive on time, sign in at the office with your valid picture ID, wear the Visitor's Badge provided the entire time you are on campus, and meet your child at the cafeteria entrance.
- ❖ Visitors are permitted to sit at the designated outside visitor's table with their child ONLY.
- ❖ Please encourage your child to observe lunch procedures and behavior.
- ❖ We ask that you do not take pictures of children that are not your own or post a picture on social media that has the faces of other children in the background. This can be a safety risk for some of the children.
- ❖ When it is time for dismissal, please encourage your child to clean his/her area, collect his/her belongings, and rejoin the class.
- ❖ Visitors may not remain on campus after their student's lunchtime.
- ❖ Return your Visitor Badge and sign out in the front office.
- ❖ There are times during the academic year, such as testing days, when visits may be disruptive and will not be permitted. These days will be determined by the administration.
- ❖ The administration reserves the right to cancel lunch visitation should unexpected circumstances arise.
- ❖ Please understand that our school's top priority is student academic instruction. We must stay on schedule to meet the state requirements. Thank you for your understanding.
- ❖ Parents and visitors must abide by the District Visitor's Policy, which can be found here: <https://www.bay.k12.fl.us/district-policies>

PBIS AND DISCIPLINE

Discipline: Along with our school-wide Cheetah P.R.I.D.E. expectations, each teacher has established classroom behavior expectations and a discipline plan with rules, consequences, rewards, and parental involvement.

PRIDE Expectations

- ❖ Prepared: I am at school and ready to learn.
- ❖ Respectful: I am polite, kind, and supportive.
- ❖ Independent: I am a leader and a role model.
- ❖ Dependable: I am responsible and you can count on me.
- ❖ Engaged: I am an active participant.

In the event a student is referred to the office, the Bay District Discipline Matrix will be used as a guideline for behavior intervention by the administration. Please refer to [Bay District Schools Code of Student Conduct and Discipline](#) and [School Board Policy 7.203](#) for additional information.

Care of School and Personal Property: We try to instill student pride in the appearance of their school. Students must not mark on school furniture, walls, ceilings, floors, or equipment with pens, pencils, markers, or any other instruments. Students must not tamper with fire alarms, fire extinguishers, plants, trees, or any other electrical system in the school. Anyone who willfully destroys school property through vandalism, arson, or larceny, or who creates a hazard to the safety of our students will be referred to the proper law enforcement agency.

Students are cautioned not to bring large amounts of money, electronic items or cell phones to school. Personal items such as toys, stuffed animals, etc. are not permitted at school unless they are part of a special event or project that has been pre-approved by the classroom teacher. If a student wears glasses or watches, we ask that the student take responsibility for the care of them. If it is necessary to bring more money than needed to pay for lunch, they are responsible for their own money. Students should not leave money or other valuables in their desks. We are not responsible for any damaged or lost items.

Students should have their names labeled on jackets, backpacks, lunch boxes, etc. Items left in lost and found are donated to charity periodically throughout the year.

SCHOOL MEALS

School meals are provided by Chartwells School Dining Services. For information on school meals including prices, menus, payment options and applying for free/reduced meals, visit <http://www.bay.k12.fl.us/parent-lunch>. For the 25-26 school year, all students will receive free breakfast and lunch.

COMMUNICATION

Parent Portal (Focus): Florida School Law requires that we have accurate information on all of our students. **It is the responsibility of the Parent or Guardian to maintain an updated mailing address, residence address, and current emergency phone numbers in Parent Portal.** Any changes and updates throughout

the school year can be made through your Parent Portal account. The office staff cannot make changes to information in Parent Portal. You must come to the front office with a valid picture identification card if you are unable to access Parent Portal. A request to change a student's address will be approved once two proofs of residence are provided to the school office.

Your child's grades, attendance, and discipline records are available for your review at any time on the Bay District Parent Portal System.

BDS Grading Scale

A	90-100 Outstanding Progress	S	Satisfactory
B	80-89 Above Average Progress	N	Needs Improvement
C	70-79 Average Progress	U	Unsatisfactory
D	60-69 Lowest Acceptable Progress		
F	0-59 Failing		

Phone Calls: You may call to speak to your child's teacher before and after school. We do not put calls through to the classroom during the instructional day. Only emergency messages will be relayed to teachers during the school day. If you receive a call from the school, the caller should leave a message. Please listen to your voicemail to see who called prior to calling the school back.

Class Dojo: School-wide and class announcements will be uploaded through Class Dojo. Class Dojo will not be used for one-on-one messaging between staff and parents/guardians. All communication regarding student educational records (grades, attendance, behavior, scheduling meetings, etc.) can be communicated via conferences, emails, and/or Focus messaging.

Email: Individual, school, and district-wide information is often sent via email. Parents should have a valid email address listed in Parent Portal.

Facebook: School and district announcements, information, and special events are often posted on social media. Parents are encouraged to follow the Bay District Schools and Merriam Cherry Street Facebook Pages.

Parent-Teacher Conferences: If you have questions or concerns about your child's progress, please contact the teacher or school counselor to schedule a conference. Requests for conferences must be made in advance.

Deliveries: Academic instruction will not be interrupted for deliveries. This includes homework, library books, snacks, and **lunches**. Deliveries of flowers, balloons, and gifts are not permitted. No food deliveries unless there is an emergency situation or delivery has been pre-approved by the school principal. Deliveries from services such as Doordash are not permitted - no exceptions.

Parent Resource Guide: The Bay District Schools Parent Resource Guide may be accessed on the school website and at the Bay District Schools website, www.bay.k12.fl.us. Paper copies of the Bay District Schools Parent Resource Guide are available upon request at schools or by calling 850-767-4311. Parents and students should read this guide carefully. Note: The electronic edition of the Parent Resource Guide is the latest edition. It replaces earlier electronic and printed editions.

School Counselor/Guidance: The school counselor is available to (1) answer questions about the programs at the school, (2) review your child's progress, (3) interpret standardized test scores, (4) discuss special

programs, or (5) meet with you about other concerns regarding your child. If you have any questions or concerns, contact the counselor at 767-1480.

MEDICAL NEEDS / ILLNESS

Illness of Students at School: It is extremely important that we have a phone number where you can be reached in case of illness of your child. Please keep the school office personnel informed by updating your parent portal for your child's safety.

Medication: Medication may not be on campus or administered to a student without a completed "Permission to Administer Medication" form. This form must be completed by a parent and physician. The completed form and medication must be delivered to the health room by an adult. Medication must be received, counted, and stored in its original container in the school health room.

Allergies: If your child has food or life-threatening allergies, please provide the office (and cafeteria manager if food allergies) with a signed statement from the physician listing allergies and procedures for emergency treatment.

Head Lice, Bed Bugs and Other Pests: See Bay District Schools Policy 7.302

TEXTBOOKS / TECHNOLOGY

Textbooks and Media/Technology Material: Textbooks, library books, and other school materials are loaned to students by the Bay District School Board. If these articles are lost or damaged, students will be required to pay for them.

Bring Your Own Device: Students may bring their Personal Electronic Mobile Devices to school during specified times according to BDS School Board Policy 7.211. Teachers and administration will determine when/if students may use devices in the classroom. This does not include cell phones.

BYOD Guidelines: (For more detailed information, see BDS policy 7.211.)

- ❖ Devices may not be used in any way that disrupts the educational environment or violates the rights of others. Devices may not be used to cheat, violate school conduct rules, or bully staff or students. Misuse will be subject to disciplinary action.
- ❖ Using any device that permits the recording of voice or image of another person without the direct consent of the other party is PROHIBITED.
- ❖ Cell phones are not permitted. Cell phones must not be visible or in a student's possession during the school day. Cell phone use by students is prohibited during the instructional day from arrival through dismissal.

STUDENTS BRING THEIR DEVICES AT THEIR OWN RISK. THE DISTRICT WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR LOST, DAMAGED, STOLEN, or MISPLACED DEVICES.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES (SCHOOL BOARD POLICY 7.105)

Students are expected to be in school, to be on time and to stay all day unless prohibited by illness or other serious crisis. Florida Law requires children ages 6-16 to be in regular attendance in school and holds parents accountable for meeting this requirement. Your child is in jeopardy of violating these statutes as indicated below:

- ❖ 5 or more absences (excused or unexcused) in a month
- ❖ 10 or more absences (excused or unexcused) in the past 90 days.

Excused Absences, Tardies, or Early Departures: For an absence to be considered as excused, **documentation** must be filed with the principal's office within three (3) days of the absence. Excused absences, Tardies, or Early Departures may be given for the following reasons:

- ❖ 1. Death in the family or other bona fide family emergency.
- ❖ 2. Illness of student. A written statement from a physician that the student is under the supervision of the physician and that the student's condition justifies the number of days absent may be required after a total of **five (5) days** of absences (**absences do not have to be consecutive**).
- ❖ 3. Appointments for medical or dental care (physician's statement required.)
- ❖ 4. Visits to a licensed therapist.
- ❖ 5. Legal reasons.

Unexcused Absences: Unexcused absences are those absences that are not justified according to School Board policy. In addition, truancy, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and/or skipping are considered unexcused absences. Please refer to School Board Policy.

Pre-Approved Family Leave: Students may be granted up to 5 excused absences for family leave per school year. A completed Request for Family Leave Form must be turned in to the school office prior to the student being absent and all School Board Policy criteria must be met for approval.

Makeup Work – Excused Absences: Students are expected to make up all work missed during absences. Full credit will be awarded for the make-up of work missed during excused absences. It is the student's responsibility to contact the teacher within five (5) school days of the first day back to obtain make-up work up. All assignments announced in advance of the student's absence (including tests and exams) must be made up on the day the student returns to school. Teachers may choose to require a student on school or administrative leave to complete work assigned in advance of the leave.

Makeup Work – Unexcused Absences: Students are responsible for making up all work missed, including tests and exams, during an unexcused absence. If the unexcused absence is due to a suspension of one to three (1-3) days, the student must contact his teachers for assignments upon return to class. Make-up work must be completed within five (5) school days. Parents/ guardians of students suspended for more than three (3) days are responsible for contacting the school by the end of the third day of suspension to obtain the missed assignments. All work must be completed and returned to the classroom teacher upon the student's return to school.

Minimum Attendance: A student may be in jeopardy of retention if he/she fails to attend school for at least 160 days in a school year.

SAFETY

Bullying: It is the policy of the Bay District School Board that all students and school employees have an educational setting that is safe, secure, and free from harassment and bullying of any kind. The District will not tolerate bullying and harassment of any type. Conduct that constitutes bullying and harassment is prohibited. The full policy (7.207) is found in Chapter 7 of the [School Board Policy](#).

SAFE Anonymous Reporting Tool: SAFE allows anyone to submit a report to alert the school district of a possible incident of bullying, harassment, violence, or abuse.

Link to report: <https://safe.bayschools.net/>

Link to video for how to use SAFE: <https://vimeo.com/329874931>

FortifyFL Reporting Tool: FortifyFL is a suspicious activity reporting tool that allows you to instantly relay information to appropriate law enforcement agencies and school officials. To submit a tip online, or for more information about FortifyFL, visit <https://getfortifyfl.com/>

DRESS CODE/STUDENT UNIFORM AND GROOMING

Appropriate dress is the primary responsibility of the student and his/her parent or guardian. In order to promote safety, personal hygiene, academic well-being, and moral development, students shall be expected to comply with reasonable requirements relating to dress, grooming and personal appearance. Students are expected to come to school dressed appropriately with proper attention having been given to personal cleanliness, grooming, and neatness of dress.

The dress code policy applies from the time the student arrives on campus until the end of the school day and at all school activities during the school day. Exceptions may be made by the principal for field trips or other special activities (examples: Honors and Awards ceremonies).

The Bay District Schools Dress Code can be viewed on the Bay District Schools website: www.bay.k12.fl.us
Any interpretation of the dress code that is required of this policy shall be the responsibility of the principal of each school. The Superintendent is authorized to make the final decision regarding the interpretation, application, and enforcement of this policy and to make certain that it is uniformly applied and enforced at each of the schools within the District. The Superintendent can add dress code requirements based on the unique needs of the population served at a school.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES AND POLICY AMENDMENTS

As a member of Bay District Schools, Merriam Cherry Street follows the Bay District School Board Policy Manual. The Bay County School Board policies are subject to change at the discretion of the School Board. The complete School Board policies are available at each school, at the District's website www.bay.k12.fl.us, and at the Superintendent's office at 1311 Balboa Avenue.

Merriam Cherry Street specific policies may be changed as deemed necessary by the administration.