

Ritta Elementary School
6228 Washington Pike
Knoxville, TN 37918
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Shawnda Ernst, Principal
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Ritta Rangers – Responsible Individuals Today, Tomorrow and Always!

Parent-Student Handbook 2025-2026

WELCOME

This Parent-Student Handbook has been prepared to assist you in meeting the school's expectations. It outlines activities and procedures at the school and is based on regulations and policies set forth by the Knox County School System. This handbook is viewed as due notice of the procedures and practices to which those in attendance are expected to follow.

Please review this handbook carefully with your student and keep it for future reference. The complete list of all Knox County School Board Policies and Procedures are located online at www.knoxschools.org. Please reach out to our front office if you need help locating any policy or procedure.

SCHOOL ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

Requirements for school entrance:

1. Children must be five years of age by August 15th in order to be eligible for Kindergarten.
2. Children must be six years of age by August 15th in order to be eligible for First Grade and must have completed an accredited Kindergarten.
3. The Tennessee Certification of Immunization (including dates for all shots) must be provided before the first day of school. **A physical exam must also be completed within the past year (12-month period) prior to entering school.**
4. A document verifying date of birth must be shown at the time of registration (official birth certificate or passport).
5. Proof of residency within the school zone must be provided.

MORNING ARRIVAL / AFTERNOON DISMISSAL

K – 5 students may begin arriving at school at 7:05 a.m. Car riders are to be dropped off at the side car-rider loop by 7:40 in order to get to class by 7:45. Bus riders will use the front doors. Upon arrival, students will report to the cafeteria for breakfast. If they do not need breakfast, students will report to the gym, where school staff will provide supervision. Breakfast is served from 7:05-7:35 for students who wish to eat at school. Please note that students are not to be dropped off before 7:05 a.m. – we do not have adult supervision until then. *Pre K students are to be dropped off at the back parking lot at 7:45.

Parents may walk their student(s) to class the first day of school. We encourage all students to enter the building without an adult. If parents need to bring a child into the building, the front office is where this should occur. Kindergarten parents may bring their child into school during their staggered days and on their first full day of Kindergarten.

Students in grades K-5 are dismissed from school at 2:45 p.m., either to their buses or in our car rider line. Each car rider family will receive “Car Rider Tags” at the beginning of the year to use throughout the school year for pick up. If you do not have your proper tag, you will need to come into the front office to sign out your child. *Pre K dismisses at 1:45 at the back entrance of the building.

TARDIES & DAILY ATTENDANCE

Instruction begins at 7:45, so students must be in their classrooms by that time. If they arrive at 7:45 or later, they must report to the office to receive a tardy slip. **Children must be accompanied by an adult to sign them in.** According to Knox County Policy, all students are expected to be on time for school. Students will not be eligible for perfect attendance for a grading period if 5 or more tardies are accumulated during that time. Tennessee state law requires children to be in class for a minimum of three hours and fifteen minutes per day to be counted present for the day.

ABSENCES/ EXCESSIVE ABSENCES/CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The Knox County Board of Education recognizes that good attendance at school is basic to student learning and that attendance is a key factor in student achievement. **Knox County policy requires written excuses for student absences to be submitted to the child’s teacher within five (5) days of the student’s return to school.** Acceptable documentation includes notes from physicians, as well as notes prepared, signed and dated by the parent or legal guardian. Failure to provide such documentation or failure to provide it within 5 days will result in an unexcused absence. State law excuses absences caused by student illness, death in the family, recognized religious holidays and verifiable family emergencies. ***Knox County does not excuse absences caused by early or extended vacations or weekend trips.*** Teachers will provide opportunities for students to make-up work once the child is back at school – ***please do not ask teachers to gather work before an absence.*** Please note that although illness is an excused absence, KCS guidelines only allow for ten (10) days to be covered by parent/guardian notes per school year. Therefore, after the tenth (10th) day, medical documentation must be provided in order to excuse an absence.

If a student accumulates five (5) unexcused absences, the parent or legal guardian, along with the school’s Social Worker will receive written notification. The parent will be asked to attend a meeting to discuss attendance. The same process will occur if a student accumulates ten (10) unexcused absences. In addition, once a student accumulates ten (10) unexcused absences, the student and guardian’s information will be given to the Knox County Juvenile Court Judge for further investigation. Excessive absences, both excused and unexcused, will be referred to the school’s Social Worker. A student is considered Chronically Absent if he/she misses 10% of the school year – this includes excused and unexcused absences.

CHANGES IN TRANSPORTATION

Please note that changes in afternoon transportation must be in writing. **If your student is going home with another student, both parties must provide written documentation.** ParentSquare is not an acceptable notification tool for these changes, as our staff may not see the messages until the end of the day. Keep in mind that changing transportation often confuses the students, other parents/guardians involved in the change, as well as the school staff. Please limit these changes as much as possible. **Any changes that need to be made have to be made by 11:15, in order to make sure everyone is aware of changes before dismissal.**

STUDENT DISMISSAL DURING SCHOOL HOURS

All persons must check in at the office to pick up a student for early dismissal. We exercise extreme care and caution when releasing children from school. **ANYONE PICKING UP A STUDENT WILL BE ASKED FOR IDENTIFICATION. IN ADDITION, ONLY ADULTS LISTED ON THE STUDENT'S EMERGENCY CARD WILL BE ALLOWED TO PICK UP.** The office gets very busy at the end of the day, so students leaving early **MUST** be signed out in the office no later than 2:15. **We ask for your help in allowing your student to stay at school until regular dismissal at 2:45. Our instructional time is very important, and when students leave early, it disrupts the whole class.**

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM

Breakfast and lunch are offered daily. Ritta is part of the Community Eligibility Program again this year, so all students will receive free breakfast and lunch. Children may also bring lunch from home, but if packing a lunch, we encourage parents/guardians to send a healthy lunch – carbonated soft drinks are not allowed. For safety reasons, glass containers should not be used for storing food or drinks.

WATER BOTTLES

We encourage all students to stay hydrated and to bring reusable water bottles to school. However, based on previous issues, we must insist that all water bottles have closed lids that will not leak. **The popular Stanley cups with straws will not be allowed at school because we have had lots of issues with them. We also remind everyone that water bottles should only have plain water in them – sugary juices, sports drinks or even water additives can attract ants to our classrooms.**

ONLINE PAYMENT FEATURES

A very helpful feature for parents is Ritta's online payment link, "Givebacks" which is available on our school website's main page. The district is encouraging all families to use this link to pay for school fees, field trips, coupon books, and almost any payment (excluding meals) to the school.

Money can be added to your student's meal account (for extra food or milk) online through www.lingconnect.com.

ELECTRONICS

All phones and other electronic equipment (including smart watches) brought to school by students must be turned off and out of sight during school hours. Please reference School Board Policy J-240 for clarification.

All students will have access to personal chrome books to utilize during the school day. Students and parents will sign a device agreement. We also encourage all families to purchase device insurance.

VISITORS

Parents, volunteers, community members, etc. are always welcome at Ritta. However, for the protection of our students and staff, all visitors must report to the school office upon entering the building to sign in and obtain a visitor's badge. Visitors, including lunch visitors, must have permission from the parent to be in contact with the student. Lunch Visitors will sit at a designated Visitors' Table with their student. **We will no longer be allowing students to bring friends to the visitor table with them.**

Regarding photographs: For the safety of all students, visitors must NOT upload student photos from school events to the internet. This includes social media networks. This does not apply to photos taken by parents in which ONLY their own child appears.

VOLUNTEERS

We gratefully acknowledge that the involvement of volunteers can be critical to our success in effectively educating every child. School volunteers can enhance student learning and achievement in a variety of ways. Our school appreciates the willingness of committed and qualified individuals to serve as volunteers. All volunteers must be scheduled with the classroom teacher prior to arriving.

Depending on the type of volunteer activity proposed, volunteers may be required to submit to a background check and/or provide information about themselves. Knox County Schools will not accept volunteers who have been convicted of a felony listed in Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) § 40-35-501(i)(2) or convicted of an offense listed in TCA § 39-17-417. Nor will volunteers be accepted if legal action is pending for any alleged activity under these statutes.

In order to volunteer in the Knox County Schools, an individual must:

- Sign a confidentiality agreement to protect the rights of students and parents. This will be given to you in the front office.
- Sign in and out each time they visit a school.
- Be punctual and prepared and notify the appropriate school contact in the event of an absence or delay.
- Appear clean, neat, and appropriately attired.
- Wear an identification tag at all times while on school grounds.
- Work with students in areas designated by school staff.
- Only provide food or drink to a student if authorized by the student's teacher or principal.

Volunteers working within the Knox County Schools are expected to adhere to the following standards of conduct:

- Volunteers shall treat all students equally regardless of gender, race, religion, or culture and refrain from any comments that can be construed as racist, sexist, or harassing.
- Disciplinary issues should immediately be referred to the student's teacher.
- Should a student disclose instances of brutality, neglect, physical or sexual abuse or intent to harm himself or herself, the volunteer must report that to the school principal or teacher immediately.
- Volunteers may not be in the possession of or under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances.

- Volunteers will respect all statutory and regulatory requirements concerning student privacy and will not share any student information to which they may be exposed in the course of their duties.

PARENT-TEACHER ORGANIZATION (PTO)

The Ritta Elementary PTO provides a vast amount of support and assistance to the school and community. We encourage you to join and to play an active role in our PTO.

WITHDRAWALS

Please notify the main office in writing if you plan to move out of the school zone. Such notice should be given a week before the student's last day and should indicate where the student will be attending. Records will be sent after a request from the new school has been received, notifying the secretary that the student has enrolled in another school. Notifying the school in a timely manner will enable teachers to complete all records prior to the student's last day. A student's records will only be forwarded to the new school when all textbooks and library books are returned, and all outstanding fees are paid.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

Children are not to bring their personal belongings without permission from their teacher. The school will not be responsible for lost or broken items such as iPads, dolls, toys, phones, etc. They will be taken up and given to the child at the end of the day. If it occurs again, the parent will be responsible for picking up the item.

STUDENT DRESS CODE (See Board Policy J-260)

The standards for elementary school dress reflect "common sense" and a concern for each child's comfort, safety, cleanliness, and sense of modesty. There is a strong relationship between neat, appropriate attire and a positive learning environment. Apparel or appearance which tends to draw attention to an individual rather than to a learning situation must be avoided. To help create the best learning environment for elementary students, the following standards for student dress must be observed in all Knox County Elementary Schools. Please help enforce these expectations with your students.

1. Pants must not sag below the waist and must be at a safe length.
2. Head apparel, except for religious or medical reasons, must not be worn inside the school building. (Administration can make exceptions for special events like "Hat Day.")
3. Footwear is required and must be safe and appropriate for indoor or outdoor physical activity.
4. Clothing or accessories may not create disruption or display vulgar language or images and must not advertise products which students may not legally purchase.
5. For students in Grades 3-5, "short shorts", mini-skirts, and skin-tight outer materials without proper coverage are inappropriate attire. Shirts, blouses, and dresses must completely cover the abdomen, back, and shoulders, and shirts or tops must cover the waistband of pants, shorts, or skirts with no midriff visible.

SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

The faculty of Ritta Elementary is committed to the education of the whole child. To create a positive educational environment, we expect children to follow four basic rules: 1) Be Respectful. 2) Be Responsible. 3) Be Safe. 4) Be Kind. We believe it is the role of the parents

and teachers working together to help children practice ways of being kind and considerate of others by following the school and classroom expectations.

The first step involved in correcting misbehavior is discussion between the teacher and student. Depending upon the severity, the teacher may contact the parents to further discuss the behavior. If the misbehavior continues, the teacher will complete an Office Referral and submit it to the administration for assistance with the student's behavior. Administration will meet with the student to discuss behavior and determine consequences. A copy of the referral will then be sent home. Parents are asked to discuss the referral with their child, sign it and return to the principal. Continued misbehavior will result in a parent conference with the teacher and administration. Continued behaviors may result in suspension from school. Exceptions to this progression are serious offenses that include physical aggression, drugs, weapons, etc. They may begin with suspension and may involve Knox County Security. Students may also spend time in our Restorative Learning Center (RLC) for misbehavior. Parents will be notified through the daily folder or a phone call in the event students spend time in RLC.

HARASSMENT/BULLYING

All students have the right to learn in an environment free from all discrimination and harassment on the basis of individual differences including, but not limited to, gender, religion, race, age, ethnicity, disability and physical condition. Any such harassment will not be condoned or tolerated and is a serious violation of district and school policy. Harassment can take many forms and can include "bullying." Other forms of harassment include slurs, comments, jokes, innuendoes, and/or other verbal or physical conduct relating to an individual for the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive learning environment. Any form of harassment/bullying should be immediately reported to an adult. It is important to help our students understand the difference between bullying and being mean or rude. Please review the following explanations with your student:

Bullying = Intentionally aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power.

Mean = Purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone once (or maybe twice).

Rude = Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else.

According to Knox County School Board under descriptor code J-211, "Harassment, intimidation or bullying" means any act that substantially interferes with a student's educational benefits, opportunities or performance; and:

(A) If the act takes place on school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity, on school-provided equipment or transportation or at any official school bus stop, the act has the effect of:

(i) Physically harming a student or damaging a student's property; (ii) Knowingly placing a student or students in reasonable fear of physical harm to the student or damage to the student's property; (iii) Causing emotional distress to a student or students; or (iv) Creating a hostile educational environment; or

(B) If the act takes place off school property or outside of a school-sponsored activity, it is directed specifically at a student or students and has the effect of creating a hostile educational environment or otherwise creating a substantial disruption to the education environment or learning process.

"Cyber-bullying" means bullying undertaken through the use of electronic devices.

HOW TO REPORT BULLYING

Students who feel they are being harassed, bullied or intimidated may report this concern to any teacher, school administrator or the office of the Superintendent using any means of communication with which they feel comfortable. Students may report anonymously, and these reports will be treated with the same level of urgency as all other reports.

All school employees are required to report alleged violations of this policy to the principal or the principal's designee for investigation and appropriate action. Submission of a written incident report to the principal is required by all district employees. Oral reports will also be considered official reports. Reports may be made anonymously, but formal disciplinary action may not be based solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Once a report is received, the principal or his/her designee must initiate an investigation within forty-eight (48) hours unless the need for additional time is appropriately documented. An appropriate intervention must be initiated within twenty (20) calendar days from the receipt of the report unless the need for more time is appropriately documented. Parents must be immediately informed if their student is involved in an act of harassment, intimidation, bullying or cyber-bullying. A school employee, student or volunteer who possesses reliable information that a student has electronically transmitted a credible threat to cause bodily injury or death to another student or school employee shall report such information to the Principal or other school administrator.

The Principal shall, in consultation with the appropriate district administrative personnel, make a determination regarding the disposition of the report with respect to appropriate investigations and disciplinary actions. Failure to report reliable information about an electronically transmitted credible threat to a student or employee may result in disciplinary action for the student or employee withholding the information. If a volunteer fails to report such information, the volunteer may be restricted from volunteering at any further school related activities. A school employee, student or volunteer may not engage in reprisal or retaliation against a victim of, witness to, or person with reliable information about an act of harassment, intimidation, bullying or cyber-bullying.

The following factors will be considered in determining the appropriate response to students who commit one or more acts of harassment, intimidation, bullying or cyber-bullying:

1. The developmental level and maturity levels of the parties involved;
2. The levels of harm as determined by the student's ability to be educated in a safe and orderly environment;
3. The surrounding circumstances;
4. The nature of the behavior(s);
5. Past incidences or continuing patterns of behavior;
6. The relationships between the parties involved; and
7. The context in which the alleged incidents occurred. Consequences and appropriate remedial action for students who commit acts of harassment, intimidation or bullying may range from behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion. The appropriate action will be consistent with established Board policy, case law, and federal and state statutes. Consequences for a student found to have falsely accused another as a means of harassment, intimidation or bullying range from behavioral interventions up to and including suspension or expulsion, as permitted under Board Policy J-191.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Telephone Numbers: Students' emergency cards are our link to you in case of an emergency. They are issued to the students the first day of school and should be returned the next day. **IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT WE ALWAYS HAVE CORRECT PHONE NUMBERS FOR PARENTS (CELL PHONES, WORK, ETC.)** Neighbors' or friends' numbers are also important as a contact if we are unable to reach you. Please help us by providing several numbers and keeping them current. Please know it is safe to provide us with unlisted numbers. We regard all phone numbers and addresses as private.

School Closing: Decisions to close school due to inclement weather or other emergencies are made by personnel at Central Office and not by individual schools. Please do not call the school office to find out if school is closed or dismissed early. Local television and radio stations, as well as the KCS website will broadcast the information as soon as a decision is announced.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

We are one big Ritta family, and communication is important to all of us. Parents are encouraged to utilize email or ParentSquare to contact the staff at Ritta with questions or concerns, but our staff members also have personal families and responsibilities at home. Some staff choose to silence notifications on email and ParentSquare in the evenings, so please understand that messages may not be answered right away but will be answered within 24 hours.

To keep parents up to date, teachers will send home a daily report to communicate student behavior and homework information. Parents are asked to review the report with their child, sign the report and then return it to school the following day.

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent-Teacher conferences are strongly encouraged and expected at Ritta Elementary. We will schedule two parent conference nights during the school year – one in October and one in February. If you wish to arrange additional conferences, please call the school office or utilize email/ParentSquare to contact the teacher to schedule a mutually convenient date and time. Conferences with teachers are to be held by appointment only. Teachers' priority during the school day is to educate our children. Instruction time cannot be interrupted for an unexpected conference. We find that parent-teacher conferences are most effective when both the parent and teacher are prepared and free from distraction.

APPOINTMENTS WITH ADMINISTRATORS

You are always welcome to contact us should you have questions or concerns regarding your child's academic progress. Please feel free to call the school office or utilize email to schedule an appointment for a conference. As with any professional office, appointments scheduled in advance are very much appreciated and given priority. If we are not available to speak with or see you, please leave your information and we will get back with you in a timely manner. To expedite the handling of any issues, the student's teacher should always be contacted first to discuss the situation.

PROGRESS REPORTS/REPORT CARDS

Progress Reports are issued at the end of each nine-week grading period. Interim Reports are also issued at the mid-point of each of these grading periods. Both reports should be signed by the parent/guardian and returned to the teacher as soon as possible.

EARLY RELEASE DAYS

Knox County Schools will have 4 early-release days this year: **September 17, November 19, January 28, and March 25**. Pre K will dismiss at 10:15, and K-5 will dismiss at 11:15. Breakfast will be served on these days, but not lunch. Please make a note in your calendar for these days so you have transportation worked out for your child. Buses will run on these days as well.

MEDICATION

A student needing medication during school hours must have an Administration of Medication form completed by a physician for EACH medication. Forms can be obtained from the school's office or KCS website. Over-the-counter medication follows the same procedure and must be brought to school in an unopened, original container. In addition, medication must be transported to and from school by a responsible adult. Children CANNOT transport medication.

TEXTBOOKS/LIBRARY BOOKS/CHROMEBOOKS

Textbooks are property of Knox County Schools. All students are fully responsible for the care of any textbooks that are issued to them. Loss or destruction of these textbooks will result in payment to the school system. The same policy and procedure applies to library books and Chromebooks as well. Failure to pay for lost or damaged textbooks, library books or school devices may result in a loss of end-of-year privileges.

LOST AND FOUND

We maintain a lost and found area at the school. Please make sure to have all items (lunchboxes, jackets, etc.) labeled with your child's name to assist with finding lost items. We do not keep lost items indefinitely, so please check often.

VANDALISM & PROPERTY DAMAGE

Students who destroy or vandalize school property may be required to pay for losses or damages. If students willfully destroy school property, appropriate discipline procedures will be followed. If a student accidentally damages property, it should be immediately reported to an adult.

BUS EXPECTATIONS

Bus riding is a privilege and can be revoked unless determined to be a related service. Knox County Schools has very specific consequences for students who do not follow bus expectations. Parents are urged to support any disciplinary actions taken and discuss them with their students to prevent further occurrence.

Misconduct on the bus endangers safety and may result in a loss of this privilege. Both parents and students must understand that the bus driver and assistant on the bus are in full charge of the bus and the students, and any student who is reported by the bus driver for a safety rule violation will be subject to disciplinary action. Please go over the bus rules with your children.

Knox County's School Bus Rules:

- Obey the bus driver; follow driver's first request; driver is authorized to assign seats.
- No loud, rude, abusive, or profane language.
- No eating or drinking allowed; keep the bus clean.
- Keep hands and head inside the bus; no throwing objects in or out of the bus.
- Possession and/or use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs are prohibited in any form.
- Parents will be fiscally responsible for any act of vandalism.

The school has no direct authority over the behavior of children at school bus stops, either morning or afternoon. This is an area of parental responsibility.

AFTER SCHOOL CARE

We have several providers who offer after school care for our students. Kids Place Inc. provides care in our building after school until 6:00 p.m. Other centers provide afternoon pick up to their facilities: Little People and New Fellowship. Please contact the office if you need help reaching these providers

TRANSFER OPTION FOR STUDENTS VICTIMIZED BY VIOLENT CRIME AT SCHOOL

Under the Tennessee State Board of Education's Unsafe School Choice Policy, any public school student who is the victim of a violent crime as defined under Tennessee Code Annotated 40-38-111(g), or the attempt to commit one of these offenses as defined under Tennessee Code Annotated 39-12-101, shall be provided an opportunity to transfer to another grade-level appropriate school within the district. Additional information regarding this option may be obtained by contacting Brian Hartsell at 865-594-1502.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please refer to www.knoxschools.org for further information regarding policies and procedures within The Knox County Schools System.

Please sign and return to your child's teacher that you have read and understand the 25-26 Ritta Elementary Parent and Student Handbook.

We have read, discussed and agree to follow all the policies and procedures outlined in the Ritta Elementary Parent and Student Handbook.

Student Name: _____

Teacher Name: _____

Parent Signature: _____
(after reviewing handbook with student)

Date: _____