

MIDDLE COUNTRY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
North Coleman Road Elementary School
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Kim Pelan Principal

January, 2026

Dear North Coleman Road Families,

Happy New Year! As we step into 2026, I am thrilled to welcome our students back to the hallways of North Coleman Road Elementary. This time of year always brings a sense of renewal, and throughout January, we are launching an initiative that we think is very important: **The Race to Independence**.

In our rapidly changing world, one thing we can work on together, as a partnership between the home and the school, is to help teach our students to say, "I can do this myself." Whether it is a first grader zipping their own coat or a fifth grader managing a multi-step research project, independence is the foundation of self-esteem and academic success.

Our 2026 Independence Goals:

- In the Classroom: We are encouraging students to use the "Try 3 Before Me" strategy—checking their own notes, the board, and a peer before seeking teacher assistance.
- In the Hallways: We are empowering students to navigate our building and manage their own belongings (backpacks, folders, and instruments).
- At Home (Our Partnership): We invite you to join us by allowing your child to take on "big kid" responsibility—perhaps packing their own lunch and backpack or checking their own folder for school flyers.

Throughout the remainder of the school year, you will see a school-wide focus on fostering autonomy, accountability, and agency. We aren't just teaching subjects; we are teaching students how to manage their time, solve their own problems, and take pride in their daily contributions. This led us to create a challenge for all of our students throughout the month in a building wide competition that will be displayed on our front bulletin board. This competition will be laid out in the pages that follow.

We understand that it can be difficult to take a step back and watch our children struggle with a tough knot or a tricky homework problem. However, it is in that "productive struggle" that their brains truly grow. When we do for children what they can do for themselves, we inadvertently tell them we don't think they are capable. This year, let's tell them—through our actions—that we know they are!

I am so proud of our North Coleman Road community and look forward to seeing our students stand a little taller as they master new skills this year. This Race will begin on January 12th and we will reach the finish line on February 6th.

Warmly,

Kim Pelan
Principal North Coleman Road Elementary

The North Coleman Road Race to Independence Contract

"I am capable. I am responsible. I am ready."

Student's Commitment

I, _____, understand that growing up means taking care of my own responsibilities. This month, I commit to showing my independence by:

1. **Checking My Own Bag:** I will make sure my folders, homework, and water bottle are packed and ready for school.
2. **Using My "Brain Tools":** If I get stuck on a problem at home or school, I will try to solve it in three different ways before asking for help.
3. **Managing My Space:** I will be responsible for keeping my desk at school and my space at home tidy and organized.
4. **Using My Voice:** I will practice asking my teacher questions directly when I am confused.

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent's Commitment

I, _____, promise to support my child's growth by giving them the "space to try." I commit to:

1. **The 10-Second Rule:** I will wait 10 seconds before helping my child with a physical task (like a zipper or a container) to give them a chance to figure it out.
2. **Focusing on Effort:** I will praise the *process* and the *hard work* my child puts in, even if the result isn't perfect the first time.
3. **Encouraging Self-Advocacy:** I will encourage my child to talk to their teacher or coach themselves when they have a concern or a question.
4. **Celebrating "The Struggle":** I will remember that "productive struggle" is how my child's brain gets stronger.

Parent Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Quick Tips for North Coleman Road Parents

- **Don't Fix the "Bumps":** If they pack their own bag and forget a pencil, let them borrow one from the teacher. The "fix" is less important than the "lesson."
- **The "I Noticed" Language:** Instead of saying "Good job," try: *"I noticed you saw the mail on the floor and brought it in without anyone asking. That showed real initiative."*

Please keep this contract in a visible place in your home to continue to encourage these conversations!

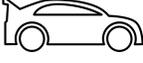
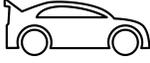
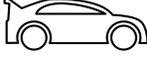
My Independence Tracker: "The Race for Independence in '26"

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

My Goal for the week: (e.g., Packing my own lunch, Starting homework at 4 PM) Write it below-

Daily "I Did It Myself" Moments for the Week of _____

Due every Monday to Mr. McCabe

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Weekend
Week						

Each day that you complete your goal or show a new independent skill (like asking a teacher for help or cleaning a mess without being told), color in a racecar!

End-of-Week Reflection

At the end of each week, jot down your "Proudest Independent Moment."

- Week _____:

When you fill in your stars for the week, bring the log to Mr. McCabe's desk to receive your "**North Coleman Road Independent Race**" brag tag and we will add your stats to our bulletin board. The sheet is due every Monday to Mr. McCabe. This will go from January 12th until February 9th.

Examples and suggestions that you can put in place to help foster independence at home and a school by Grade level at North Coleman Road-

Pre-K

Fostering independence in Pre-K is all about shifting from "doing for" the child to "setting up the environment" so they can do it themselves. At this age (4–5 years old), children are developmentally primed to want autonomy—the "I can do it myself!" phase.

- Hang up coat and backpage
- Brush Teeth on own
- Have child help you with laundry by making sock pairs
- Start the bottom of the coat and then have them pull the zipper up
- Clean up the toys that they play with
- Watering plants in the house
- Turn the lights off when leaving the room

PRAISE/LIFE

Independence begins with being an active participant. At home, you can support this by focusing on "micro-steps" and using visual supports.

- Unloading the Dishwasher
- Picking out clothes
- Packing up backpack (put folder inside, zip it up)
- Opening up snack/bag
- Put Dirty clothes in the hamper
- Clean up dishes after a meal or snack
- Helping to sort laundry

Grade 1

Fostering independence in a first grader is a huge milestone! At six or seven years old, they are transitioning from "doing it with help" to "doing it with supervision." The key is to provide them with the right environment and clear expectations.

- Pick out clothes the night before
- Dress yourself
- Clear plate, cup and utensils after a meal
- Fill up a pets water bowl
- Pack up your backpack (put folder inside, zip it up)
- Open snack containers and bags
- Carry your own belongings
- Put dirty clothes in hamper
- Memorize phone number and address of parents

Grade 2

As your child moves into second grade, the shift is from "following directions" to "anticipating needs." Seven and eight-year-olds are developing better logic and more refined motor skills, which means they can handle tasks that require multiple steps and a bit more physical coordination.

- Make your own lunch and snack
- Have student unpack and pack up bag
- Feed family Pet
- Get mail from Mailbox

Have students keep track of when to bring in library book back to school
Check the pantry or bathroom for items running low and create a list for shopping
Load the dishwasher

Grade 3

Third grade is often called the "transition year." Students move from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," and their independence should follow a similar shift—from following a routine to managing their own time. At eight and nine years old, they are ready for tasks that require more focus and a higher level of trust.

Pack lunch and snack for school
Fold and put away clothes from laundry
Check the weather and pick out clothes
Charge their chromebook on their own
Organize folders and backpack
Give them a task and ask them how long it will take and set a timer for it.

Grade 4

In fourth grade, the focus shifts toward executive functioning—the ability to plan, prioritize, and see a task through from start to finish. At nine or ten years old, children are starting to value their autonomy and are capable of "higher-order" responsibilities that involve more than just following a list.

Prepare a meal for themselves with multi-step directions (eggs, Quesadillas)
Create ways to study (flashcards, practice questions) for an upcoming test
Charge chromebook on own
Organize backpack and pack it up
Fold and put away clothes from laundry
Check the weather and pick out clothes
Pack their own bag for a trip or sleepover
Order for themselves at a restaurant
Begin Homework on own

Grade 5-

Fifth grade is the "capstone" year of elementary school. At ten or eleven years old, students are preparing for the significant leap to middle school. Independence now shifts from "managing tasks" to "managing systems." They should be transitioning into a role where they act as a partner in the household and a leader in the classroom.

Prepare a meal for themselves with multi-step directions (eggs, Quesadillas)
Create ways to study (flashcards, practice questions) for an upcoming test
Charge chromebook on own
Organize backpack and pack it up
Fold and put away clothes from laundry
Check the weather and pick out clothes
Pack their own bag for a trip or sleepover
Order for themselves at a restaurant
Set alarm and wake up for school on your own
Take responsibility of the Family pet- Walk, feed and add water to the bowl
Paying the cashier at a store and checking the change